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Saved in hope

Rev. Daniel Holstege

Ebenezer:

Hitherto hath the LORD helped us

Prof. Russell Dykstra

Assurance and good works

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Watching with our children the signs of Christ's coming

Mrs. Margaret Laning

R.C. Sproul: A life

Mr. Jason Elzinga



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Meditation

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

Saved in hope

For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Romans 8:24-25

Not only they, but we ourselves groan within ourselves!

O how the creation groans and travails in pain! For God subjected it to vanity because of the fall of man into sin. Hence, from the fall until now, the whole cosmos groans in agony, shaking and quaking, erupting and burning, withering and dying. Yet in all its groanings the creature has *hope*. The creature waits in hope, yearning for the great day of the Lord Jesus, when it will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

And not only they...but we ourselves groan. We experience the sufferings of this present time and, sometimes, we squirm within ourselves in anguish of soul. Why do we who have the firstfruits of the Spirit still groan within ourselves?

For we are saved in hope. *Hope....* What a blessed gift of God, a most precious treasure received through His Word and Spirit! It is ranked with faith and love in the trio of great spiritual gifts. But what is it?

Hope is our earnest and sure expectation that God, who has already saved us through Christ, will give us the fullness of that salvation in time to come. Hope looks to *the future*, to things not yet seen. Hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man sees, why does he yet hope for? We do not hope for what we already have, what we already see. But we hope for what we do not see. In this respect hope is similar to faith. Faith that embraces only what is seen is not faith. No, we believe things not seen. Faith looks to the past and present too, and not just to the future. By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that things that are seen were not made of things that do appear. But hope looks exclusively to the future, longing and yearning for those things we have not yet seen or tasted.

There is more. The hope that God gives is a *sure*

expectation. O how often in our daily lives do we say, “I hope!” I hope the weather will be nice next week. I hope we can find a time to visit each other. Hopefully, I will get better from this sickness. What we mean is, “I desire it greatly, but I am not sure about it.” But the hope that God gives us is not like that. Rather, it is a sure expectation. Hope says, “I desire it greatly, and I am sure that it will come!” That does not mean we never struggle with doubts and fears about the future. When danger threatens, we often slip into fear. When our enemy tempts us, we sometimes worry about tomorrow. But even in our darkest moments, when we feel as if we are sinking into despair and succumbing to the sin of doubt, we who have this hope always find that under us are the everlasting arms of God and the unbudging rock of our salvation. Our hope is sure! For it rests on the promises of God. And those promises about our future flow from the heart of Him who knows the future, having determined it; from Him who controls the future, as the Almighty; from Him whose promises are all “yea and Amen” in Jesus Christ.

There is more that must be said about this hope. Indeed, the principal thing. Hope is our expectation of future *bliss*, of receiving unspeakable joy, the fullness of our salvation in paradise. Those without hope do not expect a blissful future but only death and hell. Those with hope expect a glorious future, and they reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with that glory that will be revealed in them. They expect God to guide them through this life and afterward receive them into glory. They hope to see Christ coming on the clouds of heaven in power and great glory to raise their bodies from the dead and manifest that they are the children of God. They have hope that God will not condemn them in the day of judgment but will freely and openly justify them through the righteousness of Christ. They expect to hear their Savior say, “Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” They have hope that they will be led into the new and beautiful paradise, of which the garden of Eden was but a shadow, where the holy city will rest

undisturbed from any foe, where the wolf will lie down with the lamb, where eyes will never shed tears of sorrow, where all will drink from the fountain of the water of life freely, where all who are there will see God in the face of Jesus and be drawn ever deeper into the sweet communion of His holy covenant unto all eternity.

Blessed hope!

As the apostle himself on his voyage to Rome, when all he could *see* was a raging storm, had hope through a special revelation from God that they all would arrive safe to the shore, so we, even when all we can *see* around us are storms of trouble, have hope that we too will arrive safe to the shore of eternity.

Then why do we still groan within ourselves in this present time?

For we have been *saved in hope*.

It is possible that the apostle did mean to say that we have been saved *by hope*, as our beloved Authorized Version has it. After all, he elsewhere teaches that we are saved by grace through faith, and faith is the substance of things *hoped* for. We are saved through faith that not only lays hold on the Christ who was crucified and the Christ who lives, but also on the Christ who will come again on the last day. We are saved by *hope in Christ*.

But it is more likely that the apostle meant to say, and that the Spirit means to reveal, that we have been saved *in hope*. That is, we have been saved already in the past so that we are presently saved. But we still groan within ourselves because we have been saved *in hope*, not yet *in full*. O yes, beloved, we have been saved already! God sent His Son into the world to save us from our sins. That Christ Jesus has done already by His passion and death on the cross. That He has accomplished in full when He bore our sins and suffered the curse we deserve. Salvation has been fully accomplished for us by the Son of God! Thus, God raised Him from the dead and carried Him up into heaven. Nor is that all. For God has also given His Spirit to Jesus to pour out upon us as the down payment of our salvation. That too He has done already, for the Spirit has rushed into our hearts and quickened us together with Christ. He has already called us to a living faith in Christ, by which we have experienced our free justification. He has already begun in us the good work of delivering us from sinning and moving us to walk in good works. Salvation has already been applied to us!

But we have been saved *in hope*.

God was pleased not to give us the fullness of our salvation *at once*. He is pleased to give us the riches of our salvation first *in principle* and later *in fullness*.

That is why we still sin and still groan.

The salvation that Christ has fully accomplished and that we have already received in principle is the guarantee that we will receive the rest in time to come.

We have been saved in the hope of full salvation from sinning! What comfort to know that Christ has fully paid for all my sins on the cross and made me right before God! Yet I continue to sin daily against my God. I am so weak in myself that I cannot stand for a moment. When I consider my sins and my wretched nature out of which they flow, I sigh often. I groan within myself. But I do not despair. For God has saved me in hope. I have hope that He will deliver me fully from the body of this death and bring me into the new heaven and earth where righteousness will dwell, and I will never sin again. What hope!

We have been saved too in the hope of full salvation from our enemies. What a thrill of joy to know that Christ has delivered me from all the power of the devil, the world, and my flesh at the cross and through my union with Him! Yet my ancient foe continues to seek me day by day, as a lion seeking whom he may devour, as a red dragon who is full of rage. He whispers lies and accusations to me. He entices and assaults me relentlessly! In the battle against him, I sigh and groan. But I must remember that I have been saved in hope. I have hope that God will crush the head of Satan shortly and cast that old lying serpent and his man of sin into the lake burning with fire and brimstone. Hope for ultimate victory!

Still more, we have been saved in the hope of full salvation from the sufferings of this present time. What comfort to know that Christ has fully satisfied the wrath of God on the cross, so that my present and future sufferings are not the punishment for my sins. Yet I do suffer. Disappointment, loss, sickness, heartache. Sometimes I toss and turn on my bed at night, writhing in pain. Sometimes mine eye runneth down with water, like the weeping prophet of old, because there is none to comfort me. My bowels are troubled. I groan within myself. But then, how wonderful and sweet to hear that God gives me hope that soon these troubles will be over. Soon I will depart from this valley of tears, never to return. Soon I will arrive on the shores of heaven, and my God will wipe away every tear. There will be no more death, no more crying, no more pain. There will be life with God in paradise with all my fellow saints, with all the angels, standing before the throne of God and worshiping Him forever.

If we hope for what we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

Even as the creation patiently waits for the manifestation of the sons of God, we too can patiently wait for

that future glory. Without hope, who can wait patiently? There is only fear and anxiety. But with this hope, we can wait patiently. Patience means we bear up under the sufferings of this present time and wait until God will take them away.

A pregnant woman groans and travails with birthing

pangs. But she is able to endure and wait because of the hope that she will soon hold her baby in her arms. We too can endure and wait because we have hope that we will soon enter the new creation that will be born from the old, and we will dwell with God there forever.

We have been saved...*in hope!*



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, former editor of the *Standard Bearer*, current staff writer, and now pastor of Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church in Byron Center, Michigan

Ebenezer: Hitherto hath the LORD helped us

Please note that, although Prof. Dykstra resigned as editor, he agreed to help in a limited way to the end of the volume year. This is the last of his editorials.

Then Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called the name of it Ebenezer, saying, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

I Samuel 7:12

The church of Jesus Christ is a miracle. Her very existence is a wonder of grace. The church is part of the believer's confession of faith: "I believe an holy, catholic church." The Heidelberg Catechism explains that article of faith teaching that "the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith" (Q&A 54).

A church "chosen" already indicates it is a wonder work of God. In eternity, God decreed a church, in love chose all the members of that church and gave them to Christ. The wonder work continued in the Son taking on human flesh—the miracle of the incarnation—in order to redeem His bride. And the wonder continues all through history as the Son of God "gathers, defends, and preserves" this church by His "Spirit and word."

The believer marvels at the miracle that, yet in the year of our Lord 2021, the church continues to exist in the world. Humanly speaking, it should not exist. The church consists of members who are guilty of idolatry, adultery, stealing, blasphemy, murder, and rebellion. Truly washed by the blood and Spirit of Christ, she is cleansed, but all these sins yet abide in the heart of every

member of the church on earth and are all too evident in their lives.

Although the members are knit together by their faith in Christ and drawn together by the love of God poured into their hearts, the unity, from a human perspective, is fragile. Within the church are fighting, strife, backbiting, and slander. The church of Jesus Christ on this earth is splintered by party spirit, by heresies, and by evil men seeking their personal advantage.

That the church exists on this earth is a miracle. The only explanation for her existence is the powerful work of the Son of God defending and preserving her.

But there is more to this wonder. The church is constantly in battle, threatened by enemies. The world of the ungodly is the enemy of the church. The rich, powerful, athletic, and brilliant members of the human race are most often found among the ungodly. And the ungodly so greatly outnumber the church that the Bible calls the church but a "remnant," a "little flock," and a "hut." The world is ever seeking the destruction of the church, alternately wooing by sinful pleasures and then persecuting with the sword. And the church faces battles within her own walls—attempts to defile the truth with the lie of Satan, or self-seeking men who lead others to follow them. The church must be ready for attacks within and outside her walls.

That the church exists in the world is clearly a wonder of grace, a miracle.

God has worked that miracle in the Protestant Reformed Churches for some 96 years. The churches have had her battles for the truth. From the beginning, the churches stood for sovereign, particular grace and rejected a non-saving, common grace for all. It maintained

the biblical (Reformed) doctrine of preaching and rejected the Arminian well-meant gospel offer. The PRC were scorned and reviled for their stand. By God's grace, they stood.

Twenty-five years later came the battle for the doctrine of the covenant, through which controversy the truth of the covenant was maintained and sharpened. The churches maintained that God establishes His covenant with the elect alone; that the covenant is not mere promises, but a true relationship of friendship that God makes with believers and their seed. In the process, the churches rejected the teaching that the covenant is conditional and breakable. The churches barely survived the struggle, with over half the members and ministers departing. The battle was wearisome; and it was bitter. By a wonder of grace, the churches were preserved.

The PRC battles included a strong stand against labor unions, where the very livelihood of the members was threatened. The churches did battle in the application of the covenant to life in the struggle to establish and maintain Protestant Reformed Christian schools as well as in the insistence that marriage is for life, and remarriage is not allowed after divorce.

The churches have faced battles where there was pressure from some on the "right" of the spectrum—wanting to outlaw Sunday work for necessary labor (police, nurse, and fireman), seeking to forbid a cross in a church building, and insisting that the Christian ought not pay federal income taxes. All these positions were rejected through much study and conflict. And later, through more study and strife, the churches determined that the Reformed Church Order Article 21 did indeed require that office-bearers (under ordinary circumstances) send their children to the available Protestant Reformed school.

The latest battle has had several facets, including:

- Whether our works can be part of the way to the Father in John 14:6 ("I [Jesus] am the way..."). (Churches said, no.)
- Whether our good works obtain fellowship with God (they do not).
- Whether God blesses obedience (He does).
- Whether good works give the believer assurance of justification (they do not).

In it all, in order to clarify the doctrine of works and assurance and covenant fellowship, the PRC adopted the position that "we experience fellowship with God through faith (instrument), on the basis of what Christ has done (ground), and in the way of our obedience (way of conduct or manner of living)." Once again, the truth was maintained and sharpened.

Battles. So many battles.

With every battle, there are casualties. Some mem-

bers are left unsatisfied, unconvinced, and disgruntled. The youth in the church are particularly vulnerable. The devil works hard to foster in them doubt, disgust and, especially, distrust in the church, ministers, and elders. Families are hurt. Members leave, and some continue the path away from the truth and, in their generations, reject all the truth.

It is a miracle that the church exists because the very leaders are sinners...and they fall. The history of the PRC demonstrates that Satan strives mightily to bring ministers to ruin. Of the first twenty-three ministers in the PRC, thirteen left the PRC. From 1959 to today, eleven ministers have left; seven were deposed. Satan attacks furiously. Ministers who leave are unhappy—that is why they left. And then Satan works on their bitterness and wounded pride to incite them to attack the PRC. Few can resist Satan's evil goading.

It is a miracle that the church of Jesus Christ, also the Protestant Reformed Churches, exist.

The Protestant Reformed Churches are about 96 years old, as is also the *Standard Bearer*. Both have been attacked for 96 years—from the left, the right, and from within. God has graciously preserved both.

"Graciously" cannot be over-stressed. Every member of the church and every staff writer is by nature prone to every evil, and confesses with the apostle Paul, "I am the chief of sinners." Those who attack us as evil have no idea what darkness and evil is found in the soul of every minister, elder, deacon, school teacher, man, woman, and child in the PRC. Unless they look honestly into their own souls.

Grace alone. Unmerited, forfeited favor on a completely unworthy sinner. The sovereign power to deliver from death, corruption, and the most vile evil. Grace to preserve born-again sinners in this world and to make them "sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto" Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 1).

A wonder of grace.

Another way to express that is, "Ebenezer, Hitherto hath the LORD helped us."

Samuel set up a stone, called it "the stone of help," and made the declaration to Israel. Israel had just defeated the Philistines, obviously, only by Jehovah's power. Hitherto, that is, to this point in our history, the Lord has helped us. Without His aid we would never have survived. And looking ahead, without His aid we will not survive.

That is the point of the stone and the name.

It tells us, first, that our very existence, as well as our blessing, is all of God. Alone of God. All of grace.

Second, Ebenezer is our only hope and confidence going forward. The unchanging Jehovah is our help.

As He *has* helped, so He *will* in the future. God has preserved the PRC. One of the greatest blessings is the faithfulness of the seminary. God preserved every one of the nine professors in the seminary to this point. And the three men starting their work, by God grace, are equally committed to teaching the very same truths that the seminary taught from June of 1925 when classes began. They will teach the same truth—sovereign, particular grace and the unconditional covenant—and reject all errors repugnant thereto. If God does not preserve them, they will not stand. Hitherto hath the LORD helped us.

Third, implied is the call to stand and continue in the battles, relying on God. Battle for His truth, His cause, His church, kingdom, and covenant. Ministers stand at the forefront of the battle, called to preach Christ crucified and risen again. That must be the heart of every sermon. If that is what Paul's mission was, to know nothing among the Corinthians but Christ crucified, that must be the desire of all faithful ministers. Preach Christ. What Christ has done for us and is performing in us. Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. That preaching is the power of God unto salvation. That demands also, as the Formula of Subscription requires, rejecting all errors repugnant to that glorious truth. In so doing, they will be fighting in the battle.

Are you becoming battle weary, fellow Christians? Tired of controversy? Over all the world, God's church is experiencing division, trouble, conflict, and persecution. You are not the first believers to be discouraged. The Spirit inspired the writer to the Hebrews to admonish the believers: "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." And again, "Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees" (Heb. 12:4, 12).

Know that the Lord is preparing His church for greater conflicts. Unpleasant as it is to be reviled and castigated in blogs and social media that can be read all over the world, this is nothing compared to *being* the offscouring of whole world—when the entire world turns its attention on the true church of Jesus Christ and condemns all those who confess Jesus as the most evil people on the earth. And then kills them.

Those day are not far off. We will need the stone to remind us—Ebenezer. God will never forsake His church. But let us quote Him. "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee." And by grace, through faith we respond: "So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me" (Heb. 13:5, 6).

May God keep us faithful.



All around us

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

Bethany Christian Services change in policy The entertainment industry's attack on young children

Bethany Christian Services change in policy

Jesus is pleased to gather His elect children unto Himself by giving believing parents in the church the gift of children. It is also His will to gather His elect seed unto His bosom by working in the hearts of Christian parents the conviction legally to adopt a child or children into their family. What a beautiful picture earthly adoption is of God's saving work to adopt His children into His covenant family. Galatians 4 teaches that God sent Jesus Christ in the fullness of time that He might "redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons" (v. 5).

To adopt a child lawfully, many Christian parents have worked with and through Bethany Christian Ser-

vices. Bethany Christian Services was founded in Grand Rapids, MI in 1944. In 1951, it received its license to place children with parents and thus officially became an adoption agency. In that first year, Bethany served 25 families. Since its origin over 60 years ago, Bethany has grown to be a worldwide organization. The numbers are staggering. Despite the hindrances caused by the global pandemic, over 65,000 clients were served worldwide by Bethany in 2020. From its inception, Bethany has operated on an explicitly biblical foundation, striving "to demonstrate the love and compassion of Jesus Christ by protecting and enhancing the lives of children and families through quality social services."¹

¹ <https://bethany.org/about-us/annual-report/2020>.

It is with sadness, therefore, that I report on their recent policy change.

The policy change is to work with and place children for foster care or adoption with LGBTQ “couples.” In January of 2021, the corporate board of Bethany Christian Services adopted the following motion in a unanimous vote of 14-0. I quote it in full:

Whereas, Bethany Christian Services (Bethany) is deeply committed to its historic mission to demonstrate the love and compassion of Jesus to vulnerable children, youth, and families; and Whereas, Bethany recognizes that Christians of mutual good faith can reasonably disagree on various doctrinal issues, about which Bethany does not maintain an organizational position; and Whereas, Bethany aspires to be a diverse coalition of Christians in pursuit of its mission; Therefore, the Corporate Board of Directors hereby resolves to implement a nationwide policy of inclusivity in order to serve all families across Bethany’s core service lines.²

The policy does not explicitly refer to LGBTQ couples. However, the language of “inclusivity” has as its purpose to open the door to placing children in the homes of LGBTQ couples. The reflections of Chris Palusky, the current president of Bethany, demonstrate Bethany’s departure from the Christian foundation on which the organization was founded: “For the past 75 years, Bethany Christian Services has never wavered from our mission of demonstrating the love and compassion of Jesus to children and families. We help families stay together, we reunify families who are separated, and we help vulnerable children find safe, stable homes when they cannot remain in their own. These days, families look a lot different than they did when we started. And Bethany is committed to welcoming and serving all of them.”³

The entertainment industry’s attack on young children

It has always been the case that the entertainment industry has been a weapon in the devil’s hand to attack and attempt to destroy the church of Jesus Christ. Specifically, it is a weapon that sets its sight on the children and youth of God’s church. In many ways, the attack is overt, making available with one click of a button or one swipe of the finger the pornography, sex, profanity,

and violence of this corrupt world. In many other ways, the attack is more subtle and nuanced, sending subliminal messages through television and music to influence children’s minds, thoughts, and ideologies. A combination of the subtle and overt is found now in the programming produced for the youngest children. Of late, several well known shows have pushed the LGBTQ agenda, corrupting the youngest viewers’ minds.

One of the most well known children’s TV shows is *Sesame Street*. Since the show’s beginning in 1969, *Sesame Street* and its familiar cast of characters such as Bert, Ernie, Elmo, Cookie Monster, Big Bird, and others have entered the homes of millions of Americans. Airing right before Father’s Day and during pride month (June), *Sesame Street* ran an episode in which they showcased a family consisting of a young girl with her two fathers, Frank and Dave. The context of their appearance was a party celebrating family. This quote from the episode captures the main message: “Yeah, there’s all kinds of different families. But what makes us a family is that we love each other.”⁴

What is important to realize is the deliberate nature of those who produce this material. They understand full well how viewing this type of material influences children. For this reason, the response from those who support this liberal agenda was so very positive. The following reflections from two women in higher education make clear how well this point is understood by those who push this godless ideology. Christy Terrell-Corbin of the University of Maryland said, “One of the many wonderful things about young children is they are very accepting—it’s really when they are exposed to attitudes or context where there’s bias that they begin to develop those biases. In the introduction of Dave, Frank and Mia, there was no bias. There was no, ‘this is a different type of family than you’re used to.’ It was just, ‘this is one of many types of families.’”⁵ And Naomi A. Moland of the American University’s School of International Service, after indicating that it gave her goosebumps to think about her two-year old watching this episode, said, “I think that would come very soon where we might say, ‘Oh look that girl has two dads, just like you have two moms. It’s just a way of normalizing it.’”⁶ Reading this quote gives me goosebumps too, but for a very different reason.

At the beginning of this section, I wrote that there

2 <https://bethany.org/media/home-page/announcements/Corporate%20Board%20Motion%20-%20201-20-21.pdf>.

3 <https://www.hollandsentinel.com/story/news/2021/03/02/bethany-christian-services-begin-adopting-children-lgbtq-couples/6883597002>.

4 <https://www.newsmax.com/thewire/sesame-street-gay-pride-month/2021/06/21/id/1025858>.

5 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/arts-entertainment/2021/06/21/sesame-street-pride-month-episode>.

6 <https://www.washingtonpost.com>.

have been several children's productions pushing this liberal agenda. Without commentary, I list other examples to demonstrate the current trend in the children entertainment industry. In *Muppet Babies* on Disney Junior, the character Gonzo is shown cross-dressing in a princess dress.⁷ In a reboot of *Rugrats*, the two main characters' mother is a single lesbian.⁸ The children's programming network Nickelodeon will feature its first openly identified transgender 13-year-old in a program called *Danger Force*.⁹ Finally, moving away from the screen and to the page, Robin, the well-known sidekick of Batman, came out as bisexual in a recent comic.¹⁰

God's Word is clear: protect and nurture the children

7 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/muppet-babies-disney-show-features-cross-dressing-gonzo.html>.

8 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/rugrats-reboot-to-feature-betty-as-lesbian-single-mom.html>.

9 <https://www.christianpost.com/news/nickelodeon-to-feature-first-trans-identified-teen-on-kids-show.html>.

10 <https://www.nbcnews.com/nbc-out/out-pop-culture/robin-ex-plores-bisexuality-new-batman-comic-rcna1647>.

of the church of Jesus Christ. We hear the command of Jesus to Peter, and thus to leaders in the church of Christ throughout the new dispensation, in John 21:15, "Feed my lambs," which was spoken to Peter after he responded to Jesus' question, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these?" The essential point is clear: to love Jesus is to love the lambs in the church. We hear the warning that Jesus pronounces regarding offending and hurting the little ones in the church in Matthew 18:6, "But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

May the reading of these examples lead us to protect Christ's lambs, exercising vigilance in overseeing what enters their minds and hearts through their eyes and ears. Moreover, may it lead us to nurture and teach our children, even our very young children, by filling their minds and hearts with the truth of the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Last, may God be pleased to preserve unto Himself the next generation of His adopted sons and daughters in Jesus Christ.



Taking heed to the doctrine

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Assurance and good works (4)

Previous article in this series: May 15, 2021, p. 375.

True faith distinguished from wicked presumption

Although assurance is of the essence of faith, the faith of God's people is an imperfect faith. Their faith is often mixed with unbelief. Although strong at times, there are other times when faith is weak. Mingled with true faith are doubts and fears. Besides the mountain tops of faith, there are also the deep, dark valleys. In His infinite goodness, God stoops to the weakness of our faith. With a view to the assurance of faith, God in various ways and by various means is pleased to confirm our assurance. One way in which God confirms believers in their assurance of salvation is by enabling them to observe in themselves the fruits of election and faith. By observing in themselves the infallible fruits of their salvation, they may conclude that they are assuredly the children of God.

In this respect, assurance is distinct from presumption. Wicked presumption has no support in reality. There is absolutely no reason for those who are presumptuous to suppose that they are the children of God. Like the wicked scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day, who steadfastly maintained that they were the children of Abraham although they did not have the faith of their father Abraham, so the wickedly presumptuous in every age deceive themselves and others into supposing that they are the children of God. Despite the complete absence of any real evidence of the grace of God in their lives, they claim that they are children of God. But they are hypocrites, who are carnally secure. They wickedly distort the saving grace of God and live careless and profane lives. In fact, they are accursed of God and will one day be beaten with double stripes.

In distinction from those who are wickedly presumptuous

tuous, the elect children of God manifest the fruits of their election in godly lives lived in the midst of the present evil world. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches (Q&A 64), “it is impossible that those, who are implanted into Christ by a true faith, should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.”

Practical syllogism and mystical syllogism

A helpful way in which theologians have distinguished the fruits of election is by use of two syllogisms, the practical syllogism and the mystical syllogism. A syllogism is an argument, a logical argument. A syllogism ordinarily consists of two premises or presuppositions followed by a conclusion. An illustration would be:

All marsupials nourish their young in a pouch on the female.

A kangaroo nourishes its young in a pouch on the female.

Therefore, kangaroos are marsupials.

Although theologians refer to the practical and mystical *syllogisms*, we must not suppose that the assurance of salvation is simply a matter of logical argumentation. The assurance of salvation is not merely a matter of logic—proper reasoning. For one thing, the assurance of salvation is a spiritual matter and, therefore, not merely a logical conclusion. For another thing, if the assurance of salvation were merely a matter of logical argumentation, this would rob the Holy Spirit of His crucial role in working and in confirming the child of God in the assurance of his salvation. It is the Holy Spirit as the Comforter who is the Author and Preserver of the assurance of salvation in the believer. He is the One, according to the apostle in Romans 8:15-16, who causes us to cry out, “Abba, Father.” We cannot know God as our loving heavenly Father apart from the saving work of the Holy Spirit.

Nevertheless, use has been made of these syllogisms in order to call attention to the fruits of election and faith as the evidence of the saving work of God in the believer. The two syllogisms focus on two general categories of fruits of the Spirit. The practical syllogism focuses on evidence that is outward and observable, known both to the child of God and to others. The practical syllogism concerns the practical life of Christians in marriage and the family, in the church, and in the world. It concerns that which the believer and others observe of his words and actions. In distinction from the practical syllogism, the mystical syllogism focuses on that which is unseen and therefore mysterious, that which is within the child of God. The mystical syllogism focuses on that which is known only to God and to the child of God.

God’s people show forth in their lives the evidence and fruits of the Holy Spirit. They are gentle towards all men. They speak the truth to the neighbor and do not participate in backbiting or slander. They obey the laws of the land. They are honest in their business dealings. They are faithful in their church attendance. They assist those who are in need, visiting the fatherless and widows in their afflictions. They publicly confess their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and are willing to suffer persecution, if necessary even martyrdom, for the sake of the truth of Jesus Christ. From the presence of these evidences of grace in their lives, the children of God are confirmed in the assurance of salvation. These fruits of grace are not evident in the life of the ungodly. They certainly are not evident as the sacrifices of praise willingly offered up to God in gratitude for salvation. The presence of these good works in the believer’s life confirm his assurance of salvation. This is the practical syllogism.

But the evidences of grace are also present within believers, in their hearts, minds, and wills. They include those things that are wrought mysteriously by the Holy Spirit within the children of God. Chiefly, they believe the gospel and believe in Jesus Christ who is preached in the gospel. Faith is an outstanding fruit of grace. Additionally, believers love God and the neighbor as themselves—his wife or her husband, their children, the fellow church member. They want to please God and keep His commandments. They are sorry for their sins, sincerely repent of their sins, confess them, and fight against them. These are the evidences of grace within the children of God, which confirm their assurance of salvation. The Beatitudes in Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-12) are primarily concerned with these inward graces: the poor in spirit, those who mourn over their sins, the meek of heart, those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, those who are merciful, the pure in heart, and those who are peaceable. Such, Jesus teaches, may be assured that they are citizens of the kingdom of heaven. They will be reviled and persecuted by the world, but “theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10). These inward graces are the focus of the mystical syllogism.

The Reformed confessions: The Heidelberg Catechism

At this point in our consideration of the proper role of good works in the assurance of the child of God, we will examine the testimony of the Reformed confessions. The Reformed confessions teach clearly that the good works of the child of God are used by the Holy Spirit to confirm in the believer the assurance of his salvation.

Although the confessions do not explicitly speak of or distinguish the practical syllogism and the mystical syllogism, nevertheless the confessions do refer to both the outward and the inward graces of the Holy Spirit, which serve as evidences of salvation. And, therefore, the believer in whom these evidences are found may be strengthened in the assurance of salvation.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord's Day 21 establishes the close connection between assurance and the fruits of election in the life of the child of God, particularly the fruit of living membership in the church of Jesus Christ. This is especially the teaching of Q&A 54:

Q. What believest thou concerning the “holy catholic church” of Christ?

A. That the Son of God from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and forever shall remain, a living member thereof.

The blessed assurance of the Christian is “that I am and forever shall remain, a living member” of the church of Jesus Christ. Blessed assurance, indeed! Confidence for the present! Hope for the future!

This church is “*chosen* to everlasting life” and is, therefore, the company of the elect. The assurance of Lord's Day 21 includes nothing less than the assurance of election. This assurance is enjoyed, first of all, only by those who are members of the church, the instituted church of Jesus Christ in the world. None who disdain membership in the church or who forsake church membership can enjoy the assurance of election. Secondly, this assurance is enjoyed in a church that is united in “true faith.” Assurance of election is not enjoyed by those who are members of just any church, certainly not of a false church or an apostate church, nor of a sectarian group that has separated from the true church. But assurance of election is enjoyed by those who are members of a church that holds to the “true faith.” And third, the assurance of election is enjoyed by those who are “living members” of the church of Christ. Not those who are only formally members of the church whose names are inscribed on the membership roll of a church but who attend services only on Easter and Christmas enjoy the assurance of election. But assurance that they have been “chosen to everlasting life” is enjoyed by those who are faithful, living, and active church members.

Membership in the church, therefore, vital church membership, is an outstanding evidence that one is included in the number of the elect. Living membership in a true church of Jesus Christ, is used by the Holy Spirit to confirm the believer in the assurance of his personal and eternal election by God. The importance of membership in the instituted church cannot be overstated.

Commenting on Q&A 54 in his *The Triple Knowledge*, Herman Hoeksema writes,

In order, therefore, to live in the consciousness of being a member of the church of Christ, in the joyous assurance of my personal salvation, my faith must be conscious and healthy. I must not simply have the *power* of faith, but faith must be *active*.... It is, therefore, indispensable for the assurance of my personal salvation that I diligently

attend the preaching of the Word of God, and faithfully partake of the sacraments the Lord has instituted for the confirmation of our faith.¹

A bit later in the same chapter, Hoeksema adds,

The way in which we may so hear the Word of God that we are assured of our calling and election is that of

obedience to the Word, and of *sanctification*.

If we walk in ways of the world, of carnal lust and pleasure; if we do not put off the old man, and put on the new; or if there be some sin in our life which we nourish, for the which we will not repent, the Spirit does not witness with our spirit that we are the sons of God...and we will not possess the glad assurance of our personal salvation, as long as we refuse to cleanse ourselves from every defilement of the flesh and of the Spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

This connection between hearing the Word of God and a walk in true sanctification, and, therefore, between a life of obedience to the Word and our personal assurance of salvation, the Bible emphasizes frequently.²

Our personal assurance of salvation is confirmed under the hearing of the Word of God in the church and in the way of a walk in sanctification. What God has joined together, let no man put asunder!

Membership in the church, therefore, vital church membership, is an outstanding evidence that one is included in the number of the elect. Living membership in a true church of Jesus Christ, is used by the Holy Spirit to confirm the believer in the assurance of his personal and eternal election by God.

1 Herman Hoeksema, *Triple Knowledge*, 3:225. (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972).

2 Hoeksema, 3:226.



When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Margaret Laning, wife, mother, and grandmother in Hull Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa

Watching with our children the signs of Christ's coming

Long before John Deere or Case International Harvester, there was a tribulum. A tribulum was an ancient, wooden threshing board studded with sharp flint. On the threshing floor the tribulum was dragged around and around over the harvested grain. With repeated strikes and beatings the kernel and chaff would separate, leaving the precious grain ready to gather and store. Related to the word “tribulum” is the Latin verb *tribulare*, meaning “to oppress” or “afflict.” From these words we get our word “tribulation.”

Jesus said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation...” (John 16:33). We think of oppression, affliction, beating, and scourging, all used by our wise God who is making us more like Christ. Our Lord is coming back and that is the most wonderful news! Yet, the idea of tribulation, especially the *great* tribulation, can strike a different chord.

Perhaps you have heard Christian parents or grandparents say they dread the thought of their children or grandchildren living through the great tribulation. A difficult subject to contemplate. We know it will be a time of extreme persecution for the church. Our congregations, homes, jobs, bank accounts, even our lives and our children's will be on the line. What perilous times and massive testing of faith it will be! Our flesh shrinks back at the thought of such widespread suffering, cruelty, and loss of life.

Our natural inclination is to be afraid. We tend to avoid subjects that we fear. In time, we might convince ourselves that Christ's coming is too far away to contemplate. That would be a big mistake. Though we do not know the day He will return, that does not matter in how we must live. We want our children to be watchful and sober minded, not sleepy and oblivious like the foolish virgins in Matthew 25. They knew the Bridegroom was coming and yet were not ready.

Christ does not want us to be scared, He wants us to be prepared! He said, “Be ye also ready” (Matt. 24:44). We might exhort our children about forecasted stormy weather before they head out on their bike or car. “Keep an eye on the weather!” we call after them.

We want them to be watchful, alert, and ready. How much more in these last days with increasingly strong winds of false teachings, devilish temptations at every turn, and fiery trials along the way?

What are our children watching? What do they spend large amounts of time doing? Just one example is all the online videos, social media, and gaming. Surely many Christian parents are concerned. We live in a digital age that openly rejects all the commandments of God. Though the Internet can be used for good, no one can deny the dangers including non-Christian ideas, pornography, and meeting strangers. Knowing their passwords is not out of the question. It shows you care. Some studies report that children entertain themselves online an average of seven to nine hours a day.

By God's grace our believing children are watching for Christ's return. Yet, our flesh is weak, is it not? Jesus said, “Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38). Our spiritual foes continue to assault us. It is good to remind our children that we must take heed to ourselves to be ready for the increasing chaos and turmoil that sin causes. We cannot battle sins outside ourselves if we do not battle against our own. How often we sin against one another in the home, church, and Christian school. Is it ever right to be uncharitable, to bear grudges, exclude one another, slander, and backbite? If our pride is not repented of daily, how can we see our sins? How horrible when disunity in the body is caused by my own sin, my children's, or yours. What does the Lord hate? “...he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:19). Do we hate that sin enough, too?

May we pray for God's grace every day to put off our old man of sin and to put on the new. Why? Because we love the Lord and our neighbor as ourselves. That is where we humbly start our battle. How important it is to listen with spiritual ears to the preaching each sabbath; for parents to model this for their children, rather than dishing out roast preacher for dinner. It is important to study the Word together in devotions and to

emphasize learning and paying attention in catechism, too. We should be diligently doing these things as those who long for Christ's return.

The disciples were desiring Christ's coming. They asked Jesus, "Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?" (Matt. 24:3). The signs have purpose. They are like His footsteps coming closer. Though varied, they have the same message: Christ is coming back! Ask your young children if they like to count down "how many sleeps" until a big event. Do we not eagerly anticipate the return of our Lord even more so? What a hope we have as we watch His footsteps.

Our believing children will benefit from age-appropriate discussions. There are many places in Scripture to study the signs. Matthew 24 is a good place to start. The younger children might like to memorize some signs in connection with Christ's footsteps, maybe make a booklet. Perhaps teens can use a journal to keep notes of their observations of current signs of the times in light of Scripture, adding verses they find comforting. The point is to talk with our children to help them be watchful.

Jesus spoke of some signs as "the beginning of sorrows." Understood as early birth pains, they are the earthquakes, wars, famines, and pestilences. We know these pains will continue and increase until the end of the world. For example, there will be a massive earthquake like none other with stars falling from heaven (Rev. 6:12-16; 16:18). There will be an immense final war called the battle of Armageddon (Rev. 16:16). All this controlled by God who dissolves the old and ushers in the new.

There are signs that indicate Christ's coming is very near. A sample of these are: a falling away from the faith (apostasy), persecution of Christians, abounding lawlessness, the coming anti-Christian kingdom and antichrist, the great tribulation, and worldwide gospel preaching. These, too, will increase with intensity. Children learn how painful labor is for mothers. The signs of Christ's coming are painful yet necessary before the birth of the new heavens and the new earth.

Jesus described the last days "as the days of Noah." Today, man is progressively like he was before the flood. He is busy eating, drinking, and marrying for his own glory, not for God's. It is a life characterized by selfishness, lawlessness, indulgence, and excess. We live in a culture that thinks this is the good life.

This is creeping into churches. Sins are being tolerated. "And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold" (Matt. 24:12). False teachings will become so deceptive they could almost deceive the

elect, if that were possible. Those who will fall away from the truth will be those who once confessed it. Among them will be fellow church members, friends, and family members.

Hatred against God and His Word will be shown by the ever-increasing persecution of the church. Though we will receive the reward of grace, being faithful will bring upon us hatred in this life. There will be much pressure to deny the truth and the infallibility of Scripture. This is a painful experience. Jesus said, "Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you..." (John 15:20).

The antichrist, the political ruler used by Satan, will unite all the nations under one government and religion. He is the first beast out of the sea, of whom we read that the dragon (Satan) "gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority" (Rev. 13:1,2). He and his anti-Christian kingdom will gain complete control over its citizens. Their enemy will be the citizens of the kingdom of heaven. During this time of the great tribulation we will know Christ's return is very soon.

Reminiscent of King Nebuchadnezzar in the book of Daniel, the antichrist will demand everyone worship him. Those who refuse will be killed (Rev. 13:15). Are we and our children ready for this? How often we pray the Lord's Prayer, "Thy kingdom come." All this must take place. In the face of persecution, temptation, and even the great tribulation may we be like Daniel and his three friends—praying for strength to trust God and remain faithful.

Of all the signs, a central one is this: "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14). Christ will not return until the number of the elect is complete. God uses means: "...how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14). May we not be afraid, but rather encourage our sons to prayerfully consider the ministry. What a high calling it is! With our daughters, may we encourage them to consider marrying a godly man aspiring to the ministry. If called to marry, what a great blessing to have a godly helpmeet and co-laborer.

How very important is the work of missions. Though a privilege to bring God's word to the nations, it comes with sacrifice. For every missionary family there are loved ones back home missing them, knowing how difficult, even treacherous the labors may be. Yet, for the sake of the gospel we are willing and thankful they can go. Showing interest in our mission work and sister-church relationships through conversations, prayers, and offerings sets a good example for our children.

Near the beginning of this article part of a verse was quoted. Jesus said much more: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Yes, we shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer! Is that not a great comfort? We live in the last days with dangerous times ahead, but be of good cheer. There are plenty of times we do not feel that way due to a sharp threshing. At such times if a mother tells her children to be of good cheer, they might not appreciate it. (Not that we do not sympathize with them and express our love and support.) Yet, there is just one reason to be of good cheer, and that reason never changes: Our Lord has overcome the world!

Trusting in Christ is a gracious gift of God; it is an antidote to fear of tribulation. Learning how to deal rightly with trials and difficulties today, our children will be better prepared for tomorrow. Our heavenly Father reassures us that He is always with us. He will never leave us nor forsake us. He hears our prayers, including our children’s. It is good to remind them of that. Unlike social media where they can be unfriended, unfollowed, or blocked, God has made an unbreakable, everlasting covenant of friendship with all His people. He loves His precious children so very much. The One who died on the cross to pay for all our sins is the very One who is coming back!

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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

R.C. Sproul: A Life, by Stephen J. Nichols. Wheaton: Crossway, 2021. 371 pages. Hardcover. \$34.99. Reviewed by Jason Elzinga.



I became acquainted with R.C. Sproul through the ministry that he founded, Ligonier Ministries. While not agreeing with him in every single area, I have come to appreciate his ability to explain many of the truths of the Reformed faith in a clear and compelling way. Sproul went to glory in 2017 at the age of 78, and this biography by Stephen J. Nichols gives the reader a clear look into R.C.'s life, ministry, and theology. Nichols was well-equipped to write this biography, having served alongside R.C. for many years at both Ligonier Ministries and Reformation Bible College. I greatly appreciated this book and the insight it provided into R.C.'s life—his formative years, his path to the Reformed faith and those God used to influence him on that path, his passion for helping people understand theology, and his responses during times of controversy.

Robert Charles Sproul was born in Pittsburgh in 1939, the second of two children. He was baptized in a Methodist church, but when he was a child his fam-

ily joined a liberal Presbyterian church that opened in his neighborhood. Church and spiritual things meant little to R.C. while he was growing up; he was much more interested in sports, where he excelled—primarily baseball, basketball, and football—and in Vesta, his classmate whom he had decided in first grade to marry someday.

R.C. adored his father, Robert Cecil Sproul, and was devastated during his high school years when his father had a severe stroke. Robert never fully recovered, and when R.C. was 17 years old, his father died while R.C. sat by his bedside. Decades later, R.C. recalled the incident:

I remember my father's final words—how can I forget them? But what haunts me are my last words to him.... What did I say that makes me curse my tongue? They were not words of rebellion or shouts of temper; they were words of denial—a refusal to accept my father's final statement. I simply said, "Don't say that, Dad."

In his final moments my father tried to leave me with a legacy to live by. He sought to overcome his own agony by encouraging me.... He said, “Son, I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.”... I had never read the Bible—I had no faith to keep, no race to finish. My father was speaking from a posture of victory. He knew who he was and where he was going. But all I could hear in those words was that he was going to die (32).

After high school R.C. attended Westminster College on an athletic scholarship for basketball and football. During his first semester, an upperclassman football star asked R.C. to join him and another student as they studied and discussed the Bible—something entirely new to R.C. After some discussion, one of the students turned the open Bible to R.C., and R.C. read the second part of Ecclesiastes 11:3: “If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be.” Nichols describes the effect of that verse on R.C.:

It cut R.C. in two. He saw himself as that tree. He saw himself in a state of torpid paralysis, fallen, rotting, and decaying. He left the table and returned to his dorm room. When he entered, he didn’t turn on the light. He just knelt down beside his bed, praying to God, asking God to forgive his sins...now he knew that his true spiritual condition was death. He had considered himself a Christian. He went to church, after all. Now he knew what Christianity was truly about” (39).

Sixty years later, R.C. recollected his conversion with these words: “As I went to my bedroom that night and got on my knees, my experience was one of transcendent forgiveness. And I was overwhelmed by the tender mercy of God, the sweetness of His grace, and the awakening He gave me for my life” (40).

About a year later, R.C. experienced what he called a “second conversion” where the holiness and majesty of God were impressed upon him in a profound way. R.C. summarized it this way: “I had an awakening to the biblical concept of God that changed my whole life after that” (49). Thereafter, the direction of R.C.’s life changed—his former pursuits faded away and his life passion became to “do everything I can to communicate the gospel” to everyone he knew (41).

After graduating from Westminster College, R.C. enrolled in Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (PTS), where his theological convictions would change significantly. R.C. entered PTS with a disdain for the doctrines of Calvinism, especially predestination, but by the time he graduated he had come to embrace and love these doctrines. A major influence on R.C. during his time at PTS

was Dr. John Gerstner, who stood nearly alone among the faculty members at PTS as a doctrinal conservative. Like Gerstner, R.C. was a distinct minority among his peers, as only a handful of fellow students shared his conservative views. In one of Gerstner’s classes R.C. was introduced to Jonathan Edwards, and R.C. noted later that “studying Edwards led me to be a convinced Calvinist” (63). Through Gerstner’s influence he also became a classical apologist, and these views would mark the ministry and teaching of R.C. Sproul for the rest of his life.

After PTS, R.C. moved to the Netherlands to study for his doctorate under G.C. Berkouwer at the Free University of Amsterdam. Not knowing Dutch, R.C. had to teach himself a new language while reading weighty Dutch philosophy and theology books, a task that proved to be time-consuming and difficult. After moving back to the States, he was ordained into the United Presbyterian Church USA, but rather than taking up a pastorate, he taught theology at several colleges before founding the Ligonier Study Center, which eventually became Ligonier Ministries. R.C. wanted to teach the “common people” about theology, and Ligonier gave him the opportunity to do just that. Ligonier grew from a small, local study center into a worldwide teaching ministry, making use throughout the years of available technology such as cassette tapes, videos, a radio program (*Renewing Your Mind*), a website (*Ligonier.org*), and the Ligonier App. In 1974, amid controversy in his denomination over issues such as women in office, R.C. left and joined the more conservative Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), where he remained a minister in good standing until his death.

In 1997, a small group of families petitioned R.C. to be the pastor of a new church they planned to start in Orlando, FL. Although R.C. was busy with Ligonier, he accepted, and became the first pastor of Saint Andrew’s Chapel. The church grew rapidly, and R.C. remained a pastor there until his death. R.C.’s method of preaching was primarily to preach through biblical books. In R.C.’s words, “This method of preaching verse by verse through books of the Bible (rather than choosing a new topic each week) has been attested throughout church history as the one approach that ensures believers hear the full counsel of God” (229). In times of discouragement, R.C. reminded himself that “it’s not my job to convict. It’s my job to preach the Word and to trust that God will honor His Word” (230).

R.C. also had a vision for a small, intimate college that would train students in the Reformed classical tradition, and in 2011 he founded Reformation Bible College. He wanted a college to prepare students to know

the faith, defend the faith, and contend for the faith as recovered by the Reformers.

Throughout R.C.'s ministry, he was no stranger to conflict and disagreement. One such example was in the area of apologetics—R.C. was convinced the classical (traditional) view was correct, while his acquaintance, Cornelius VanTil, advocated the presuppositional view, a view that claimed certain presuppositions, such as biblical inerrancy, are necessary as a basis for rational thought. Nichols notes that “it does reflect on both R.C. and VanTil that they could be diametrically opposed and yet remain friendly, respectful, and constructive” (149).

R.C. also became involved in the ECT (Evangelicals and Catholics Together) controversy in the 1990s. Some prominent Evangelical and Catholic leaders in the United States had drafted and signed an ecumenical document to promote unity and affirm areas of agreement between the two parties. R.C.'s first reaction to hearing part of the document was this: “That’s a betrayal of the Reformation. Worse than that, that’s a betrayal of the gospel and a betrayal of Christ” (198). What made this issue more difficult, indeed the most difficult and painful time in his life, was that two people R.C. considered friends, J.I. Packer and Chuck Colson, had both signed the ECT document. The controversy would cost those two friendships, but to R.C. too much was at stake to compromise or yield. After much discussion with a broader group that included both advocates and critics of ECT, the two sides “disagreed on all these points but still regarded each other as brothers” (199). R.C. went on to write a book defending the truth of justification by faith alone, as well as being involved with writing and promoting the Cambridge Declaration, an effort to “recover the historic Christian faith” (207). Nichols points out that a fundamental question in the ECT debate was whether the doctrine of justification by faith alone could be compromised for the sake of unity. “Sometimes there is an assumption that those driven by theology are less concerned with unity. That is not true of R.C., Boice, MacArthur, and others who took a stand against ECT. It was not as though one side of ECT was for unity and one side was for division. Each side defined unity differently” (208).

Another theological controversy involving R.C. was centered around the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) and the Federal Vision (FV) movements. In 2007 the PCA was debating NPP and FV on the floor of the annual General Assembly. R.C. made a passionate speech on the floor of the Assembly in which he identified the Federal Vision as a denial of the Reformation doctrine of *Sola Fide*. The PCA would soon rule that the Feder-

al Vision and the New Perspective on Paul were out of bounds in the denomination.

R.C. spent much of his life trying to teach people the truths of Scripture in a clear, simple way. He is perhaps best known for his emphasis on teaching people about the holiness of God. His book *The Holiness of God*, written in 1985, impresses this truth upon the reader in a clear and memorable way. R.C. considered *The Holiness of God*, along with *Chosen by God*, written a year later, to be his two most important books out of the more than one hundred he authored. In addition to his work as an author, R.C. also spent much time speaking and lecturing, and Ligonier recorded and made available much of R.C.'s teaching in audio and video form. Nichols sums up R.C.'s ambitions and work with these words: “He believed theology is ultimately doxology. To know God is to worship God. He believed God is holy. We are sinful. Jesus Christ is our perfect sacrifice, who clothes us with his righteous robe.... R.C. was passionate about all of the above” (291). A fellow pastor observed: “This was R.C.'s goal: a heart that is stunned and humbled and captivated by the transcendent greatness and purity of God” (293).

Sprinkled throughout the book are several of R.C.'s well known phrases—phrases that, although short, communicate a truth of Scripture in a memorable way. “Right Now Counts Forever” points out that what you and I do now has eternal significance (156). “If God is not sovereign, then God is not God,” and “There is no maverick molecule” stress the importance of maintaining God's sovereignty over all things (180, 281). “Sin is cosmic treason” points out the seriousness of sin in the sight of a holy God (281).

The book contains seven appendices. Appendix 1 comprises R.C.'s last two sermons, preached at St. Andrew's just a month before his death. His final sermon, from Hebrews 2:1-4, is entitled “A Great Salvation.” The final words of that sermon are a fitting summary of what R.C. had proclaimed throughout his ministry: “I pray with all my heart that God will awaken each one of us today to the sweetness, the loveliness, the glory of the gospel declared by Christ” (323).

It is apparent throughout the book that Nichols did not want to criticize R.C.—something that is to be expected from a biography written by a friend and colleague. The discerning reader will recognize that even a gifted teacher like R.C. Sproul had feet of clay, and that he had struggles and weaknesses in various areas throughout his life. Nevertheless, the book is highly recommended, and gives the reader a clear insight into the life of a man who is now experiencing the reality of the holiness and glory of the God he served.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Will there be more trivia questions? Answer later in this column.

Sister-church activities

From the bulletin of the CERC in Singapore:

It has been three years and almost eight months to be exact, that our congregation has been without a minister of the Word of our own. Come tomorrow afternoon, we will meet to vote to extend a call to candidate Josiah Tan to be our own minister, DV. 9 Aug. is not just the country's National Day, but it is also a day of significance in the history of CERC. ...we covet your prayers that God be pleased to give us a minister of His choosing soon.

From the bulletin of Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland:

Pastor and Mary Stewart fly to the U.S. tomorrow (July 26), returning on Tuesday, 17 August. May the Lord watch over and keep all of you while we are apart. The farewell lunch for Rev. and Larisa McGeown is planned for this Saturday, 31 July, at noon at Antrim's Lough Shore Park. Due to COVID restrictions, people should bring their own pack lunches. Rev. McGeown will preach at both services next Lord's Day, 1 August, with a presentation to Rev. and Larisa after the evening service.

From the bulletin of the Berean PRC in the Philippines: PRCP Seminary Instruction:

A new semester of seminary instruction began recently on August 10 for our seminary student, Bro. Ace Flores. However, because of ECQ [Enhanced Community Quarantine] in Metro Manila from August 6 to 20, and possibly longer, the original plan for this semester has been reorganized into two parts by Committee 1. In the first part of the semester from August 10 to October 1, Bro. Ace is taking two courses with Rev. Holstege via Zoom, and fulfilling some take-home assignments and review work with Rev. Kleyn and Rev. Smit. Then, in the second part of the semester from October 12 until December 3, Bro. Ace will continue his two courses with Rev. Holstege via Zoom and will also receive three

courses from Rev. Kleyn and Rev. Smit in-person at the seminary library in Antipolo. Although the plan for this semester has been disrupted and revised, may the Lord bless the instruction that we can still give to Bro. Ace in the next several months for his preparation to serve in the ministry of the Word and Sacraments in the PRCP, if the Lord so wills. Please remember our student and instructors in fervent prayer before the Lord for His indispensable blessing upon them.

Young People's activities

On August 8 the Young Calvinists hosted a singspiration at Zion PRC for all young people and young adults. It promised to be a great evening of singing, and they hoped to fill the sanctuary, with all encouraged to bring their friends. On August 25 the Young Calvinists hosted an outdoor bonfire/singing night with all young people and young adults encouraged to come for capture the flag, s'mores, singing, and meditations on Scripture.

The Midwest YP's Retreat was scheduled for August 9-11 at Inspiration Hills. The area churches looked forward to welcoming the young people for a few days of fun and fellowship! A pre-singspiration took place on Sunday evening, August 8, at Hull PRC at 7:45 P.M. making use of our theme: "Walking Worthy" based on Ephesians 4:1-3. The singspiration was livestreamed from the Hull PRC website.

School activities

The 9th Annual Hope Foundation Clay Shooting Event will be Saturday, September 18, at Kent County Conservation League (Ada, MI). Contact Matt DeBoer at matthewjdeboer@gmail.com. Sounds like fun to this pheasant hunter! I sure hope someone enters a 16-gauge side-by-side, my gun of choice.

Minister activities

Doon PRC formed a trio, from which to call a pastor, of Rev. Barnhill (Peace PRC), Rev. Guichelaar (Randolph PRC) and Rev. Spronk (Faith PRC). On August 15 the congregation at Doon voted to call Rev. Barnhill.

Hudsonville PRC called Rev. R. Kleyn (Covenant of Grace PRC) to be her next pastor.

First PRC (Grand Rapids) also called Rev. R. Kleyn to be her next pastor. On August 22 he accepted First's call and declined Hudsonville's.

Kalamazoo PRC called Rev. Matt De Boer (Edgerton PRC) to be her next pastor. May God give clear indications of His will in all these instances.

Evangelism activities

Advance Notice: The Crete Evangelism Committee is planning the annual Reformation Day lecture for October 29, 2021 at 7:00 P.M. CT. Mr. Dan VanUffelen, teacher of church history at Covenant Christian High School, will speak on "*Post Tenebras Lux: The Vocation Reformation.*" All are welcome to attend and the lecture will also be streamed on YouTube (<http://www.creteprc.org> and click on YouTube link.)

The five Siouxland area churches of the Midwest are again sponsoring a Bible study at Dordt College entitled

"The Young Reformers' Bible Study." At the time of this writing students were just moving into college and details regarding the day and time of this activity were not yet finalized. All Dordt students were encouraged to attend and bring friends. Others in the local area are welcomed too.

Trivia answer

The truth is...we don't know about future trivia questions. But we do know that this will be the last from news editor Perry Van Egdom. After seven quick years I believe it time to pass off the reins to another worthy candidate. A new perspective would benefit our readers. Thanks for your kind comments regarding the news.

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

Announcements

RFPA Annual Meeting

September 23, 7:30 P.M., in Trinity PRC is the time and place for the annual meeting of the RFPA. Come and hear Prof. B. Huizinga speak on "2021 in the PRC: Whom the Lord Loveth, He Chasteneth." The purpose of this speech is to provide a scriptural understanding of and response to recent significant events that have unfolded in the PRC.

Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness for our heavenly Father's abiding faithfulness, we commemorated our 45th wedding anniversary on September 4, 2021. Our text was Luke 19:5b, Jesus words, "For today I must abide at thy house." Willem and Rita (Attema) Reinink

BOOK SALE!

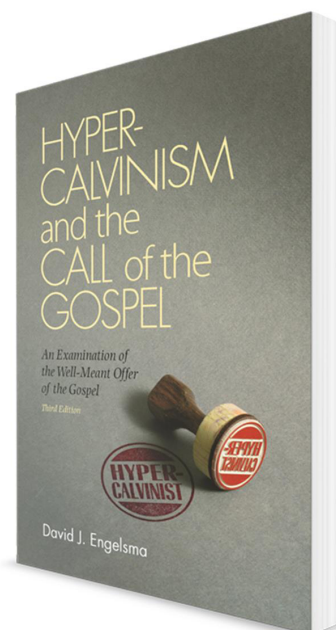
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