

# The Standard Bearer

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## The necessity of fruitful knowledge

Rev. Steven Key

## To be numbered with the God- fearing

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Precious Jewels

Mr. Joel Minderhoud

## Watch your mouth! Truth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

## News from the seminary

Prof. Ronald Cammenga



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## Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Loveland, Colorado

# The necessity of fruitful knowledge

And besides this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

II Peter 1:5-9

The gift that God has given us in Christ Jesus is absolutely astounding. Superlatives cannot even express the nature of the precious promises that are ours in Christ Jesus, by whom we have been taken into the very covenant life and fellowship of the living God Himself. Think of the wonder that everything that pertains to life and godliness God has given *us*.

The apostle points to the calling that is ours as our lives in God's covenant come to expression in our earthly sojourn. The fact that we are partakers of God's covenant life means that we have been made alive. And those who are alive are active. Spiritual life comes to expression.

The way the Holy Spirit has Peter present this is vital to a true understanding of the Christian life. What comes first? Peter does not point us to our calling until he first has emphasized what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. God must establish in us the life of Christ before you and I will display that life with the fruits that we bear by His Holy Spirit. And the knowledge that is essential to our conscious embrace of Christ and all His benefits is a knowledge that must also be seen as fruitful.

## Fruitful knowledge

The knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is neither barren nor unfruitful.

It is not uncommon to find a resistance to this calling—in the words of the inspired apostle—to *add to your faith*. But the Holy Spirit presses this calling upon

us with emphasis: “giving all diligence.” Rather than resisting this word, we must humble ourselves before it and seek to understand and be faithful to what God Himself calls us to do.

We understand there is a common error in the Christian church, which would present the Christian as one who believes in Jesus and adds all kinds of good works to that belief, the result being that he is able to attain to what is required of him to go to heaven. That often underlies the common message that puts all the emphasis on what we must do, with the promise that, having done so, there will be a place for us in heaven someday.

But it is crucial to our understanding of the text to see that the gospel, in the first place, does not ask us to do anything. It first proclaims to us what *God* has done. That is the order in which the Holy Spirit has Peter address us in this opening chapter of his second epistle. That is *crucial*. The apostle began by pointing us to Christ and the wonder of God's divine power by which He has given life. With that life He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. So the perspective in this text is not, nor ever is it in the Bible, that we can clothe ourselves with what is necessary to stand in God's presence. We may not subvert the logical order set forth here in this chapter. What we are confronted with here is the truth that the life of Christ in us must come to expression by the fruits of that life.

There are those who say, “Don't tell us that something is required of us!” They might even attempt to justify themselves by saying, “Salvation is all of Christ; and therefore to speak of any effort required of us is to depart from the gospel of salvation by grace alone. That would call us to justify ourselves by works.” But the Bible makes clear, also in this text, that when God has entrusted us with the treasures of the gospel, when He has given us the life that alone is in Christ Jesus, then there is a diligence to which we are called and which we receive not only as our calling, but our privilege. Christ, by His Holy Spirit, calls us to holiness as a way of thankful, even joyful, Christian living. And He does so by appealing to our minds, to our reason and understanding. It directly ties Christian living with

the knowledge of Him who has called us to glory and virtue. When you truly know Him, it necessarily and inevitably follows that you live a certain way.

When you have been made partaker of the divine nature, it is inevitable that your life will be marked by certain characteristics and activities. That is only reasonable. There is nothing so illogical and contradictory as one who calls himself a Christian *not* giving diligence to live a godly life. Because the power of the Christian life is the power of the indwelling Spirit of the exalted Christ.

So necessary is this fruitful knowledge, that verse 9 tells us, “But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.” There is nothing worse than spiritual blindness. That is to have no true spiritual understanding, no comprehension of the reality that surrounds us, no ability to see the end nor the way to that end that God has marked out for those to whom He has given spiritual sight. It is to live under the darkness of deception. To be blind is to be lost! Such a person cannot carry out the great calling of the Christian, cannot add to his faith virtue, and so on, because such a person has no faith.

But what does it mean that this person who is said to be blind “hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins?” It cannot mean that at one time he was in the faith, purged from sin, and thus made righteous in Christ, but that he was struck with blindness and therefore has fallen away. What the Scripture consistently sets forth cannot be contradicted with the truth of the certain preservation of the saints (John 17:12; John 10:27-28). If the one of whom Peter speaks lacked entirely the necessary fruits of spiritual knowledge, that barrenness demonstrated the sad reality that he had never been saved. Perhaps he had confessed that he had been purged from his sins. Perhaps for a time he even lived as if that were true. But that forgiveness had never been given him as a spiritual reality.

But there is something else that we must see here in light of the necessity of the knowledge of Christ being fruitful knowledge. If we are living in the blindness of self-deception, thinking that we can very well continue in our cherished sins, and claiming that “Christ’s blood will take care of me no matter how I live,” then we must be called to repentance. With urgency we must be called to repentance! Because we have forgotten that to be purged from our own sins is not merely to be forgiven, it is to be sanctified as well. To receive the life of Christ is to receive not just the legal verdict of righteousness, it is to be made a new creature, a partaker of His anointing, of His life.

## The great calling it entails

There is a great calling that follows as a necessary consequence of true union with Christ. The great calling is summed up in the word *add*. “Add to your faith.” The idea of the word is to provide the supplies necessary, or to furnish. A man might build a beautiful house, for example, but that house is not made a home until it is furnished. What the text tells us, therefore, is that the life of faith is to be adorned or furnished.

Not only that, but in all the virtues that are mentioned, we also see that the furnishing that is to take place must be balanced and complete. To return to the illustration, that house is not going to be what it is intended to be if a man fills that house with bedding and neglects to put in the stove or to give his wife supplies for the kitchen. There is to be seen in the Christian life a completeness and a balance that is in harmony with the life of Christ that we reflect.

Look for a moment at the virtues that follow. If you have knowledge but not temperance, your life is not the balanced life that it must be. If you show patience but lack godliness, you defile the name that you claim and the faith that you profess. The great calling set before us here is to live a balanced and complete Christian life.

That is to come in the way of giving all diligence. This is an exhortation that we all need. It is all too easy for us to rest on our knowledge of what God has given us. But God’s work is not only what He has done for us in Christ Jesus. He continues that work in us by the Spirit of the exalted Christ. The diligence, therefore, to which we are called is a diligence in striving to live the full balance of the Christian life to the glory of our Redeemer (v. 3). This is not something to procrastinate over—not when we understand the cost of God having given unto us such exceeding great and precious promises! Not when we see the love of Him who bought us at such great price! Not when we see what He gave us in cleansing us from our old sins! Then the thankfulness of our hearts and the joy of God’s covenant fellowship will compel us to give all diligence to our great calling.

Our faith is to be furnished with seven things, a perfect list, complete in reflecting the glorious life of Christ which comes to expression in a true faith. Read and meditate upon this list!

## The God-given incentive to such fruit-bearing

Verse 8 calls attention to the God-given incentive to such fruit-bearing. Not only would He see these fruits in us, but He would have them abound. He wants us to understand how important this is to us. This is the way



in which ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

When you are diligent in applying yourself to your spiritual growth and in furnishing your faith according to the great calling God has given you, you are going to see the visible results in your own life. Yes, we have reason every day to confess our sorrow for not having served our heavenly Father with the diligence we ought. But to be those *not* barren, to be those *fruitful* in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ is incentive to give

diligence to these things. For to be fruitful is our desire, is it not?

When unto us have been given such exceeding great and precious promises, when unto us have been given all things that pertain to life and godliness, when we have been made partakers of the divine nature—yes, it is reasonable, even the necessary consequence, that we desire to be fruitful to the praise and glory of our Redeemer.



## Editorial

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

# To be numbered with the God-fearing

*[With this editorial, we bid farewell to Rev. Koole. As he says toward the end of this article: “As I take my leave as an editor of the Standard Bearer, I can state forthrightly it is this truth, ‘The fear of the LORD,’ that has governed this magazine (and those who have written in it) as a motto since its inception.”]*

We are all familiar with the phrase “the fear of the LORD.” And well we should be. It is a phrase, along with its parallel, “the fear of God,” that runs like a thread through the Scriptures, especially the Old Testament.

The first biblical use of the phrase is found in Genesis 20:11 in reference to a place where this fear was absent. Here Abraham tells Abimelech the reason he lied about Sarah being his sister rather than his wife was that “I thought, surely the fear of God is not in this place.” The fear of God being absent, Abraham reasoned that Abimelech would not be afraid to have him murdered to take Sarah for his own.

Where there is no fear of God, lawlessness and immorality are sure to abound.

Scripture’s first application of this phrase to an individual is God’s own statement concerning Abraham following his willingness to slay Isaac, his only son, in obedience to God: “[F]or now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me” (Gen. 22:12).

It is significant that Abraham, the father of all believers, should be the first to be explicitly labeled as such.

To be sure, believers who lived prior to Abraham

were also “God-fearing,” but it is a phrase first attached to father Abraham. It is a vital characteristic that was to set all his true children, his spiritual seed, apart. Is this fellow or that maid of the seed of Abraham? Well, is there ‘family’ resemblance? Does he, does she, do you, do I, fear the LORD?

The phrase is also applied in a striking way to Job. God Himself commends Job (one could say “boasts” of Job) to Satan and all “the sons of God” gathered before Him by use of that phrase. “Hast thou considered my servant Job, that there is none like him in the earth; a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and esheweth evil?” (1:8)

High commendation indeed. A sinner-saint held up before the angels themselves as worthy of such high commendation, the focus of which is his being described as “one that feareth God.”

High commendation indeed. I can think of no greater “eulogy” than friends and acquaintances at the end of one’s life say, “He was a God-fearing man,” or “She was a God-fearing woman.” It makes crystal clear who and what was at the center of that sinner-saint’s life. A remarkable specimen of grace, as were Abraham, Daniel, and Ruth the Moabitess, among others.

The phrase is found scattered most widely through the Old Testament, which is not to say it is absent from the New.

It is found, for instance, in reference to Cornelius the centurion, who was described to Peter as “[A] just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among

all the nation of the Jews..." (Acts 10:22). Cornelius evidently having become a proselyte.

But the phrase is most commonly found in the Old Testament. The passages are numerous. We are all familiar with the statement, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom." This is not surprising. This is stated a number of times in Scripture. Psalm 111:10 comes to mind: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments." Proverbs 9:10 states the same truth. And there is Job 28:28 where Job himself states "And unto man he [God] said, Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding."

What is this fear of the LORD?

We commonly describe it in terms of awe and reverence. The God-fearing man holds the LORD, Jehovah God, in highest esteem. One magnifies His works and name. One is a "Calvinist." That is, God is acknowledged as the Sovereign One, sovereign in His works and ways.

Jehovah is sovereign in His creation, not only when He declared "Let there be light!" and all the creation wonders followed, thereby showing His almighty power and the splendor of His mind and understanding, but also sovereign in His determination of the purpose of that creation and of all the events of the creation through history and time. As God declared to Job, "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? ...When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted together?" (Job 38:6, 7).

The God-fearing stand in awe of His sovereignty in salvation, determining who shall be saved, and His accomplishing that in an astonishing manner. He who spared Abraham from offering up his only son, gave His Only Begotten as a sacrifice for sinners and rebels, redeeming those ordained to eternal life at greatest cost.

And that I should be numbered with them, and you? Staggering, filling the redeemed with adoration and awe, with holy reverence and fear. "Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear" (Heb. 12:28).

But there is more to being numbered with the God-fearing than awe and adoration. Often when the phrase "the fear of God" is explained, it is stated that it does not mean one is afraid of God.

Not true in every sense.

If by that one means we as believers do not and are not to stand in *terror* (dread-fear) of God, I heartily agree. The wicked better stand in dread of the LORD,

that most righteous Judge, but that is not true of the God-fearing believer.

Nonetheless, there is a reason why the translation reads "*fear* of the LORD" rather than "awe" or "reverence."

The Hebrew word translated "fear" commonly means "to be afraid of."

There is a sense in which the child of God is and should be afraid of God, namely, of His disapproval and anger, of being dealt with in His chastising anger. And do not imagine God, as a Father, cannot become angry with His children. He can and sometimes is. As Moses himself declared to Israel after smiting the rock in disobedience to God, "Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither" (Deut. 1:37). So displeased was God with Moses for losing all patience with complaining Israel and being ready to have God Himself smite them, destroying them all, that Moses was forbidden to enter the promised land.

The child of God fears this anger. He should. Why? Because he, which is to say we, love God and desire His approval and fellowship. When this anger is expressed, these are disrupted and absent.

This is parallel to the earthly relationship. A child who loves his earthly father is filled with a fear, and properly so, when his father is angry because his son has disobeyed him. The disobedient child knows his father's anger is justified, and with the anger comes a cutting off of the fellowship, of the experience of his father's love and approval. There are consequences of discipline.

And that—for a child who loves his father—is a fearful thing.

I feared my father. Not living in dread of him, but fearing to arouse his anger and disapproval due to foolish, disobedient behavior. He was of the old school. He was not one to spare for our crying if we had behaved with willful disobedience or done injury to others. Ours was a proper fear. What we learned to desire was his approval. Things were much more enjoyable around the table when it was so. And the approval of a father who loves his children is of paramount importance to a child, is it not? That is how we are created.

And so with God and us as His dear children. In that connection, read Hebrews 12:5-11.

But what must be emphasized is that "the fear of the LORD" stands in stark contrast to the "the fear of man." One who fears Jehovah God does not live in the fear of man. The God-fearing man does not fear "the faces of men." In other words, one's life and decisions are not governed by what men say and think, but by God's will and word.

Scripture points us in that direction: “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matt. 10:28).

We live in an age when churchmen in increasing number are governed by this: “What does society think of this doctrine or that, of this biblical teaching or that?” And if the current is contrary, alter one’s course, modify one’s convictions, and do and teach nothing that our increasingly anti-Christian society might find offensive. After all, what will men think of us if we should promote this truth, or rebuke and condemn that practice?

This is not the mark of the God-fearing man or woman. They fear not the faces of men. What they hold and maintain and how they live is not governed by, “What will men, what will our present society think? What will they say with what scorn, ridicule, or even outright threats?”

I was raised in a congregation governed by such men (who were also married to women of like conviction), a veritable honor role of believers whose names I will refrain from reciting, most gathered already with the “cloud of witnesses,” though a few are still with us today. But what governed their lives in raising families and in governing Christ’s church was simply, “What saith the LORD? And what, according to His holy, infallible Word, is His assessment of things, of right and wrong, of truth and error? Accordingly we will make decisions, raise our families, and live our lives. We care not what unbelieving men may say.”

They as officebearers and heads of homes were not numbered with those who trimmed their sails to the winds of the spirit of the age.

Such believers are firmly convinced of the truth of Proverbs 14:11, “The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.”

It is as one walks and lives in the fear of God, living consciously before His face, that one is blessed with that which nurtures and sustains life, spiritual life, and keeps the power of death, of evil, at bay.

What our spiritual forbearers, fathers and mothers, well understood was that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

And wisdom, according to Scripture, is the principal thing, that is, the thing of central, vital importance when it comes to a life worth living.

Wisdom has everything to do with the Word of God as it is to govern doctrine and life. To ignore the Word of God and its precepts both with respect to faith (what one is to believe and in whom) and to one’s walk of life is sheer folly. Such foolish dismissal of the wisdom of

God’s Word can only tend to injury and loss and, in the end, to death itself.

As Psalm 111:10 declares, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have all they that do his commandments.”

What is wisdom?

It can be described in many ways. In the interests of brevity, we will simply state, wisdom is the ability to make the right choice as need arises, the right decision, one that tends to life and blessing, one that has a long-range view of things. Foolishness never does. Whenever the fool comes to a fork in the road, he is bound to take the wrong path, the one that leads to loss and injury to self and to damage to relationships and others. The fool chooses that which leads to spiritual impoverishment without fail. The fool is always looking for immediate gratification. He will not “eshew” (say “no” to) that which feeds the carnal appetite, though it is bound to bring him “sad reward.” And he will not bridle his tongue of animosity.

Wisdom heeds the exhortation of Proverbs 8:13, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.

Note well, the mark of folly is, “pride, and arrogancy...and the froward mouth.” May the Lord keep us from such.

As Scripture states, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.”

Why?

Consider what being devoid of the fear of the LORD means.

It means one is not going to be governed by what pleases God and has His approval, but what brings recognition amongst men and garners society’s approval. One plays for the audience, seeking man’s applause. That true, one will not make the right choices. One will not be committed heart and soul through thick and thin to what is right and true, what is biblical and having God’s approval. That may bring reproach and scorn. In fear of men, they modify and corrupt biblical, Reformed truth and practice. Sheer folly.

But where the fear of the LORD is found, one will make choices and decisions based on God’s Word, regardless of what men may say. As we sing in Psalter #407, one will “go forth in His service, and strong in His might, to conquer all evil, and stand for the right.”

As I take my leave as an editor of the *Standard Bearer*, I can state forthrightly it is this truth, “The fear of the LORD,” that has governed this magazine (and those who have written in it) as a motto since its inception. Governed not by what men in high places of scholar-

ship and reputation think these days, and what should we maintain if we want this magazine to be recognized as contributing to “the on-going dialogue of modern scholarship and revision of sacred history.” Governed rather by what is scriptural and historically Reformed? What does God’s infallible and inerrant Word teach and require of those who would confess Jesus’ name in the New Testament age and live as His disciples, as Christians, not in name only, but in very truth?

Governed by the fear of the LORD, and not by any fear of men.

Let men say what they will. The question is, what is truth according to God’s inspired and all-wise Word? Such is to be maintained and defended and preserved.

That has been the history of this magazine and its faithful testimony.

May those who serve as new editors be as faithful as our predecessors.



## Pillar and ground of truth

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

## The Council of Ephesus (AD 431): The meeting

We saw that the error of Nestorianism made necessary the calling of the Council of Ephesus (cf. July 2021, *SB*, p. 420). Nestorius, the patriarch of Constantinople, taught that Christ had two natures because He had two persons, which two persons were joined in His incarnation. Cyril, the Bishop of Alexandria, opposed Nestorius, and Emperor Theodosius II deposed him. But division regarding the matter made the emperor realize the need for an ecumenical council to settle it.

### A messy meeting

The Council began in May 431 with about two hundred bishops attending. Even the Bishop of Rome (later known as the “pope”) was present for the first time at an ecumenical council. The Council condemned Nestorius and his views, but the path to that condemnation was messy. The record of that meeting is not a bright spot in the history of the church.

For one thing, Cyril opened the Council before all had assembled. True, the appointed time to begin had come and passed by at least two weeks; we might also think that it was time to get started. But the Bishop of Antioch with his delegation had not yet arrived, so Nestorius refused to appear before the Council. In his absence, Cyril led the Council to decree against Nestorius. Nestorius appealed the matter to the emperor, who nullified the decree. So we have an example of a decision that took the right side of the theological issue but was challenged for being made in haste.

Furthermore, when all the bishops and Nestorius fi-

nally arrived, and when it was evident that the Council was still against Nestorius, the delegation from Antioch began their own council that condemned *Cyril* and *his* ideas! Philip Schaff writes, “Now followed a succession of mutual criminations, invectives, arts of church diplomacy and politics, intrigues, and violence, which give the saddest picture of the uncharitable and unspiritual Christianity of that time” (*History of the Christian Church*, 3:725).

Third, because one Council condemned and deposed Nestorius and the other did the same to Cyril, an appeal was in order; but to whom does an ecumenical council appeal? To none other than the emperor. He was initially sympathetic to Nestorius, but some of his advisors convinced him to support Cyril instead. In the end he maintained his support of Cyril, who insisted that the unity of the church required that Nestorius be deposed.

### A providential outcome

Nestorius was now officially a heretic. His teachings persisted and would be condemned again over a century later. To this day a Nestorian church still exists (see [www.nestorian.org](http://www.nestorian.org)).

Yet this Council preserved, and even developed, the orthodox Christian faith. It soundly rejected the idea that Christ has two persons. For this we are thankful, for if Christ has *two* persons, we do not have *one* Mediator. The Council defended the teaching that Christ is one person, in whom two natures are united; we have *one* Mediator, who is in one person both God and man,



God in the flesh! That the eternal Son of God took on our human nature demonstrates that God wills to save humans, and that through Christ God would raise elect, sinful humanity out of sin and into greatest blessedness.

Having settled the theological matter, the Council of Ephesus made several (six or seven) canons, or de-

crees, reinforcing its stand on the Nestorian issue and prescribing how to deal with any who remained sympathetic to him. A more detailed survey of these decisions is not necessary. We will proceed next time to see what paved the way for the fourth ecumenical council, in Chalcedon.



## Search the Scriptures

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

# Nineveh's repentance

**So the people of Nineveh believed God, and proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. For word came unto the king of Nineveh and he arose from his throne, and he laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. And he caused it to be proclaimed and published through Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste any thing: let them not feed, nor drink water: But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands. Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?**

**Jonah 3:5-9**

Jonah's preaching in Nineveh brought about the kind of response most preachers only dream about. The majority of the city repented and believed, including the king who took the lead in humbling himself before God, acknowledging his sin and the sin of his people and throwing himself on the mercy of God. We may be sure that not every person in Nineveh was saved. That never happens, but the repentance of Nineveh is, nevertheless, one of the great events in history and the only event that the Word of God notices. Not Nineveh's military might and victories, not her palaces and strongholds, not her magnificent kings with their unparalleled power, but her repentance in the days of Jonah is remembered by God.

There is disagreement among historians as to the

identity of the Ninevite king. Some opt for Samshi-adad V and others for Adad-nirari III, the next king after Samshi-adad. The Bible does not tell us and it does not matter. Name, wealth, position, influence matter not the least in God's sight. What matters is a broken and a contrite heart (Ps. 51:17). "Thus saith the LORD, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that ye build unto me? and where is the place of my rest? For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word" (Is. 66:1, 2). So it was in those days. So it is now.

Jonah's preaching was a mere declaration that God would destroy the city in forty days and even revealed that Jonah preached with no desire for Nineveh's repentance and salvation. His sinful attitude would become evident when he finished his task and left the city to wait for its destruction, something he dearly wanted to witness.

His message was the message that God gave him. After his ordeal in the fish's belly we may be sure that he, however bad his attitude may have been, did exactly what God told him. God had said: "Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee," and there is no reason to think that he did anything else. We must remember, however, that his presence in the city was itself a sermon.

Jesus calls Jonah a sign to the Ninevites, which means that they not only knew the story of what had happened to him, but understood through that story both God's wrath against sin and His merciful kindness



as evidenced by Jonah himself. It was that living sermon that brought them to repentance and faith in God, as well as the threat of their city's destruction.

One can imagine them saying, as Jonah made his way through the city: "There's the man who tried to run away from his God. Did you hear how the anger of God followed him and how he spent three days and nights in the belly of a fish for his disobedience? His God was merciful to him, though, and saved him from the fish's belly. Our gods are not like that. We've heard that He is the true God and have seen His hand in the creation around us. He is ever so much more merciful than the idols we serve and to which we sacrifice our children, but we had always heard that He was the God of Israel. Now His prophet has been sent here to tell us to turn from our wickedness. Why he should come here we do not know, but it is true that we have lived wickedly and need to change."

They might have dismissed Jonah's preaching as the ravings of a madman. Like Lot when he warned his children of Sodom's impending doom, he might have seemed to them as one who mocked (Gen. 19:14). They might even have killed him as a despised Israelite, but instead they believed and repented, humbling themselves before God and seeking His mercy. How amazing and almighty is the grace of God! And what an encouragement Jonah's preaching is to all who must bring the gospel without fear of men's faces or of their response.

But was the repentance of Nineveh genuine? Was it just the sorrow of the world, which works death, sorrow for the consequences of their sins and for their threatened destruction, or was it a godly sorrow (II Cor. 7:10)? One writer says: "Shall we say that the repentance of Nineveh was thoroughly spiritual and saving in the light of eternity? Alas! There is no evidence to show that thorough conversion to God was effected, at least in the city generally."<sup>1</sup>

Contrary to what this writer says, there is clear evidence that Nineveh's repentance was genuine. Most important is the testimony of Jesus in Matthew 12:41 (Luke 11:32): "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here." There is no indication in the words of Jesus that their repentance was false and every use of the word "repented" in the New Testament is of a real, spiritual repentance, worked by the Spirit of God.

Jesus in Matthew 12:41 is speaking to an "evil and adulterous generation" who refused in their self-righteousness to believe and humble themselves in repentance. They required a sign of Jesus in order to repent and believe. Jesus tells them that no sign would be given but the sign of the prophet Jonah and speaks of Nineveh's repentance as testimony against them. If Nineveh's repentance had not been genuine, then it would have been no testimony against those unbelieving Jews, but rather an example of their own folly.

Alongside the testimony of Jesus stands God's own repentance, of which we will speak further, the actions of the Ninevites in humbling themselves before God, their crying to God, and their believing God. The latter refers to their believing Jonah's preaching of judgment especially, but it is the word that Scripture uses to describe true faith, worked by God's Spirit: they heard Jonah, but they believed God! Believing God, they prayed to Him and in praying to Him humbled themselves before Him. There can be no doubt that these Ninevites were saved as a demonstration of the great truth that salvation is of the Lord (2:9). God did in Nineveh what He would not do in Israel for their hardness of heart and continued idolatry.

That this repentance lasted for only a short time, that is, for that generation, is evident. Within 100 years the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah would speak again of Nineveh's evil ways and would prophesy her destruction (Nah. 3:7; Zeph. 2:13). In 612 B.C. Nineveh would be destroyed by the Medes. Nineveh was not saved in its generations. Nineveh, in the Old Testament, was not numbered with God's covenant people and God did not continue His covenant there. That would not happen among the Gentiles until the New Testament. Nevertheless, God demonstrated the sovereignty of His mercy and foretold the New Testament salvation of the Gentiles in Nineveh's repentance.

The Ninevites, therefore, are an illustration of what the Word says in I John 1:8, 9: "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." May God grant us all repentance unto life, as He granted it to these Gentiles, and not take away this grace from us as He took it from Israel.

Nineveh's salvation demonstrates, too, the importance of repentance. We cannot be saved except from sin, and salvation from sin includes not only the justifying work of Christ, but the Spirit's work of sanctification in turning us from our sinful ways. In the justice of God we cannot be saved *in* our sins but must be saved *from* them, and so salvation includes conver-

<sup>1</sup> Hugh Martin, *Jonah* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982), 272.

sion and sanctification, a work of grace not finished until we are in heaven and our deliverance is complete and perfect.

Nor may the gospel call for repentance be set aside. It is that call which reminds us, as it did the people of Nineveh, that He is not a God who takes pleasure in sin (Ps. 5:4). God uses the call to repentance to work repentance in the hearts of His own as He did in the whole business of sending Israel's prophet to Nineveh. He would show to the remnant in Israel the importance of repenting and so would turn them from their sins and, in that way, save chosen and redeemed Israel in those terrible days of apostasy and idolatry.

Nineveh's fasting and sackcloth were signs of humiliation and self-denial. Self-denial is always part of repentance for, when we repent, we deny all the inclinations of our own sinful natures. Self-denial is what the Heidelberg Catechism (Q&A 89) calls the "mortification of the old man," the putting to death of our sinful natures: "What is the mortification of the old man? It is a sincere sorrow of heart, that we have provoked God by our sins; and more and more to hate and flee from them." So it was in Nineveh and so it is with us. Humiliation comes from the knowledge that we have sinned against the most high majesty and glory of God and involves complete self-abnegation.

We do not sit in ashes anymore, not literally, nor do we wear sackcloth, but what they represent are as much a part of true repentance now as they were then. We sit in ashes when all our pride and self-sufficiency are burned away and we confront the fire of God's holiness. Humiliation is ours when we say with David, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest" (Ps. 51:4).

That even the beasts were required to fast and were draped in sackcloth is simply an acknowledgment that they had been instrumental in the service of sin and violence. The beasts were not guilty before God, but had been used, as the sinner uses all things, sinfully, and so were involved in the repentance of Nineveh. Would that Israel and the church today gave heed to the example of Nineveh and walked humbly before God acknowledging such wickedness and evil-doing.

When the king of Nineveh is quoted saying, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?" Scripture does not mean that there is any possibility on God's part that He will not forgive and restore those who humble themselves. The promise of I John 1:9 is clear. Such language is rather the expression of a sorrowful heart that

has seen its own wickedness and, without doubting the mercy of God, is amazed that God's mercy and grace are so great as to cover those horrendous sins that seem to the person who has committed them, but is not repentant, far beyond mercy and forgiveness and worthy of eternal punishment.

We might notice, too, that this repentance and humiliation are referred to in Jonah as works (v. 10), as indeed they are. Repentance for sin is one of the best works a Christian does, and so is humbling oneself before the Almighty. They are good works because they are an acknowledgment of all God says about His own justice and righteousness and about man's depravity and sin. They are a confession that God is indeed God and worthy of our service and obedience. They are the Christian's way of saying that man is nothing and God is everything.

Such repentance and humiliation God blesses, not because it is worth anything in itself, but because it was purchased by the blood of God's Son (even in the Old Testament before that blood was shed) and worked by God's Spirit. He blessed the repentance of the Ninevites. He blesses true repentance today when He in His grace lifts up the repentant sinner to a knowledge of His lovingkindness and wonderful favor.

The repentant Ninevites still stand in the Word of God, therefore, as a testimony against those, especially in the church, who refuse to speak of sin, who preach a gospel that requires no turning from wickedness and violence (spoil) and that even encourages it. They stand as a testimony against those who try to adapt the gospel to the age in which we live and who preach smooth things instead of the rough word, "Repent or perish." They stand as a testimony against all those who in their own self-righteousness despise others and who are so confident in their own righteousness that they can find nothing for which to humble themselves before God. They stand as a testimony against all those who will not believe in the Son of God and who say, as the Pharisees did, "Show us a sign." Truly, "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with *this* generation, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here."

What a thought that when we stand in judgment, we will stand with those whom we have offended, to whom our behavior was a stumbling block, whose zeal and love for God is a testimony against our own carelessness and coldness and stubborn persistence in sin. Our only hope and refuge in that day will be the shed blood and sacrifice of Christ.



## All Thy works shall praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud, science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan

# Precious jewels

**Thou shalt be a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD and a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.**

**Isaiah 62:3**

In the face of conflict and strife, when many feel as if they are “forsaken” or “desolate,” we are comforted by God’s precious word that we are not “forsaken” but we are “Hephzibah”—the Lord delighteth in thee (Is. 62:4). In the lowest of lows, God mercifully teaches us that we *are* very precious in His sight—we are “a crown of glory in the hand of the LORD and a royal diadem in the hand of [our] God.”

What a beautiful truth not only to comfort us during the discouragements of life, but also to give us great encouragement as we begin a new school year. We, with our children, are royal diadems in the hand of our God! May we be mindful of the precious place our children have in His covenant as we begin another year of instruction in our good Protestant Reformed Christian schools.

In our on-going study of “minerals” we now turn our attention to the precious stones and gems that are found in God’s creation. These precious stones and gems give us a beautiful picture of who we and our children are in Christ. Let us examine this part of God’s creation, giving Him all glory for His wonderful work of making these beautiful and exquisite gems and for the beautiful spiritual picture they display.

When you think of examples of gemstones, what names come to your mind? Likely you think of diamonds, rubies, sapphires, or emeralds as examples of gems. If so, you have identified the best-known gemstones. But what makes these jewels differ from common stones? First of all, regular stones are a conglomeration of minerals, whereas gemstones are exclusively one type of mineral. Secondly, there are certain characteristics that make gems particularly unique. Ask any newly engaged couple about the “rock” the young man gave his fiancée, and likely they will be familiar with cut, clarity, color, and carat (and probably also cost). These characteristics of a diamond point to the unique

properties that distinguish a gem from a common stone, namely, the gem’s crystal structure and its purity (molecular makeup).

### Crystal structure and molecular makeup

The crystal structure and the molecular makeup of a mineral determine some key properties of the mineral, such as the mineral’s hardness, refractive index, and purity. All of the gems are distinguished from other minerals, in part due to their hardness. Diamonds are considered the hardest mineral, followed by corundum (sapphires and rubies). This means that the gems will not be scratched or marred by other substances that are in contact with it. The hardness of these gems is due to the strength of the bonds of the atoms that form the crystals and to how densely the atoms are arranged within the crystal structure. Diamonds, for example, are composed of only one kind of atom—carbon. The atoms in this instance are arranged in a rigid three-dimensional cube with very strong bonds in all three dimensions, making the diamond very strong.

Secondly, these minerals have a relatively high refractive index. When light enters into a transparent substance (window, diamond, pool of water), it slows down a bit. The degree to which it slows is related to the molecular makeup of the crystal. Within diamonds, the light slows significantly. As it slows, the light changes the direction of its path (refracts, or bends). As white light passes into a diamond, each of its component colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet) slow down at slightly different speeds, resulting in white light being spread out into a rainbow of colors. If the diamond is cut and polished with appropriate angles, the light can experience many reflections within the diamond itself before passing back out of the diamond. This explains why a diamond is so sparkly and reflects the light so brilliantly. Something similar, but not to the same degree, occurs with the other precious jewels, which makes them stand out from a common stone.

Finally, the purity of the stone contributes to its preciousness. Gems, composed exclusively of one type of

mineral, contain only one specific kind of atom or one specific group of atoms. While diamonds are composed of only carbon atoms, sapphires and rubies are made of a specific ratio of aluminum and oxygen atoms that regularly repeat within a hexagonal prism structure. When the aluminum and oxygen atoms are the only atoms present in the crystal, the gem will manifest itself as white sapphire. But when there is a small amount of impurity—the presence of a small number of titanium and iron atoms—the gem appears as blue sapphire. If there are a few atoms of chromium in the mix of aluminum and oxygen atoms, then the gem appears as a reddish/pink sapphire, which we then identify as the gem ruby. The various colors of gems, therefore, are due to small levels of impurities—other metal atoms embedded in the crystal structure. Each metal atom gives a crystal a slightly different color.

There are other imperfections, called inclusions, in a gem. Small amounts of air or water can be trapped within the crystal structure. They give the crystal a small imperfection or an entirely cloudy appearance.

Thus we see that besides the fact that gems are generally low in abundance, gems are distinguished from regular stones by their clear colors and brightness (due to their crystal structure and molecular makeup).

### Spiritual truths

Gems are precious because they are rare. Not only are gemstones rare in the sense that they are few in number, but gems are also rare in that they have an uncommon hardness, color, and clarity. And it is Isaiah 62:3 that points us to the spiritual reality. As a gem is rare, so is Christ's church—a royal diadem in the hand of thy God.

Throughout history the church has been a small, helpless portion of the human race. Isaiah refers to her as a lonely, helpless hut in a cucumber field (Is. 1:8). Elsewhere the church is called a remnant (Is. 1:9; 37:32). The elect are always few (and physically weak and helpless) in comparison to the multitude of the wicked. In this sense, the church, like gems or precious stones, is rare.

The church is also aptly called a “royal diadem” (jeweled crown). We belong to King Jesus. We are in Christ (Rom. 8:1). Christ is our elder brother (Matt 23:8; Rom. 8:29). Thus we are of a spiritual, royal lineage. And, as those who belong to Christ Jesus, we are very precious in God's sight. He loves us and will always protect us and preserve us! Not only are we precious because we belong to Christ, but we are precious because we are beautiful. We are not beautiful from the perspective of our natural state. Naturally, we are total-

ly depraved—wicked, ugly, and vile creatures. But, by a wonder of grace, we have a new man—a new man that has the beauty of Christ and has been given the victory over that wretched old man. We are beautiful because we are new creatures in Christ. Due to the blessed work of the Holy Spirit in us, we reflect the beauty of Christ Jesus. We are beautiful, precious jewels!

As a gemologist chisels and cuts precious stones so that the gem more and more reflects the light and appears more and more brilliant and beautiful, so God chastens us, chiseling and shaping us, so that we more and more show forth that spiritual beauty of Christ in us. While “no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby” (Heb. 12:11). When we face various trials, we need to see them as the work of King Jesus—our perfect gemologist—shaping and polishing us for our blessed place in His glorious temple. “And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels” (Mal. 3:17; cf. Eph. 2; I Pet. 2:5).

And we must not forget that, as in this creation each stone is unique, so each gem in the temple of God is necessary and has its own unique gifts and purpose. Let us, therefore, learn to rejoice in the beauty also of our fellow saints.

The crucible of fire is not God's only tool or ‘school’ to make us shine. God also uses the means of godly instruction to lead all of us, including His precious covenant children, to grow and develop spiritually. As we have begun a new school year, let us remember that God gathers His children, His royal diadems, from our children in the line of continued generations, and that He uses also our priceless Christian schools as a means to mold, shape, cut, and shine His jewels for their place in the New Jerusalem (cf. Rev. 21). This instruction of the children is “the means by which God brings the reborn covenant child to spiritual maturity so that he or she becomes a developed man or woman of God, capable of a life of good works” (Prof. D. Engelsma, *Reformed Education*, p. 6). “The goal of the glory of God is achieved *through* our rearing of the children.... God uses, really uses, our education to bring His covenant child to become the man of God, fitted to a life of good works” (Engelsma, p. 93).

God truly is shaping and polishing His jewels—His little lambs—and one of the means He uses is our good Christian schools. It is important to remember this at any time in history, but especially when our schools are being attacked. Rather than attending to the rhetoric of those who would undermine our schools, set your minds on the *true blessedness* of our schools. Appreci-



ate the schools! Diligently labor to instruct your children in the fear of God. And trust in God's promises!

"O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1). What beauty is found in the creation—precious jewels, glittering and shining with such clarity and vibrant colors. Our God intricately made all things, including these marvelous gemstones!

And thanks be to God for all His faithfulness, de-

spite all our unfaithfulness. Gracious in all His works and ways, He has ordained that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10). By the power of His grace we begin to reflect His beauty more and more. All glory to God for forming us and shaping us to be His beautiful, *precious jewels!* Gems in the Master's Hand!



## Strength of youth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Crete Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois

# Watch your mouth! (3) Truth

Previous articles in this series: March 1, 2021, p. 255; May 15, 2021, p. 378.

In an age of fake news and talk-show spin and self-serving slant, truth is a commodity in short supply. White lies, half-truths, and bold-as-brass deceits predominate. Even in the church, one hears slander and misrepresentations.

In the midst of the darkness of such dishonesty, the God of truth calls godly young men and women to shine as beacons of truth. Truth-telling is not the only principle that governs our communication, but it is the first and fundamental one.

In the past two articles on Christian communication, we have considered generally the subject of communication, addressing such things as the nature of communication and the importance of it. In this and future articles, we are going to lay out the fundamental biblical principles that govern our communication. And we begin here: speak the truth.

### Lying and the father of it

By requiring that we speak the truth, the Bible forbids lying. The ninth commandment of God's law specifically forbids using our tongues to bear false witness. In view is a courtroom scenario where a person who is called to the stand as a witness lies under oath. In Bible times eyewitnesses were everything. They did not have video recordings, fingerprint analysis, and DNA testing. Instead, a person could be condemned on the basis of two or three eyewitnesses who told the same story. Bearing false witness in such a situation was a great sin.

By forbidding that one narrow application of bearing false witness, the ninth commandment forbids broadly any use of our tongues for lying. Lying is when we say what is not true, we do so deliberately, and we do it either to gain some advantage for ourselves or to protect ourselves from painful consequences.

This is something that even very little children tend to do readily. When they do something wrong, they will lie to dad or mom to try to get out of being punished, even when they have been caught red-handed. Though we might become more sophisticated and subtle in our lies, young people and adults are prone to do the same. Much better, we think, to add sin to sin by covering up our wrong-doing with a lie than to bear the shame of being exposed in what we have done.

Obviously, we are tempted in certain circumstances to tell bold, blatant untruths, but more often we tell subtle lies. We might grumble at the spin put on the news by liberal media, but the truth is that we are all masters of spin. This may be due partly to our faulty memories, but more likely to our sinful natures. For example, while arguing with another person, we fudge on the details of what has happened in order to make the other person seem more at fault or to justify what we have done. In telling a story we leave out certain key details that make us look bad, and we embellish the parts that make us look good. We repeat what someone else has said, but we use a tone of voice that makes him seem foolish. We give our interpretation of a matter as



if it were truth. We twist someone's words, take them out of context, and put the worst possible spin on them. We exaggerate by saying things like, "You *always* do this" and "You *never* do that." Even though in all these examples we may not have told an outright lie, God still considers these exaggerations, evasions, and misrepresentations to be the bearing of false witness.

Another ugly form of lying is slander. Slander is akin to backbiting (an issue we will come back to later), but there is a distinction between them. Backbiting refers to saying some hurtful *truth* behind another person's back, while slander refers to telling a *lie* about someone behind their back. While a classmate is walking down the hallway of school, you might whisper to your group of friends some hateful lie about her. You slander that classmate for the purpose of making her look bad as well to make yourself look better in the eyes of your friends. Your slander of her might include ascribing the worst possible motives to something that she has done, or refusing to judge her with a judgment of charity but instead assuming the worst about her. How common are sins of slander today!

Sins of slander and lying are so prevalent. But, why? Part of the explanation for the prevalence of these sins is that we live in an age where there is such ease of communication. Cell phones and social media can be great tools for good, but they can also be tremendous instruments of evil. Lies and half-truths can travel from one state to another, from one country to another, in an instant. There is a lot of truth in the saying that a lie travels halfway around the world while the truth is still getting its shoes on.

But the explanation for the prevalence of lying is not ultimately in cell phones and social media. The explanation is our sinful natures. Not only do we speak lies to protect ourselves and make ourselves look better, but we secretly love to hear others say these things. Proverbs 18:8 says, "The words of a talebearer are as wounds [some translate this word as "delicious morsels"], and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly." We love to listen as others are torn to shreds and verbally dismembered. Our old man eats it up, smacks his lips, and says, "Delicious!"

The lie is a tool forged in the devil's workshop. The very word for "devil" used in the Bible means "liar, deceiver, slanderer, mudslinger." Jesus says of him, "When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (John 8:44).

The devil made use of the lie in the beginning to deceive Adam and Eve, and he continues to use the lie as his weapon of choice against the church today (cf. II Cor. 11:3). He is constantly telling the lie that obe-

dience to God is misery, and that sin is pleasurable and can be committed without consequence. He is constantly slinging mud at the church and at us individual believers. He says, "Look at all your awful sins! You can't possibly be a child of God! You can't possibly be forgiven!"

This is the horror of lying and using our tongues to hurt others. When we lie about ourselves, either to build ourselves up in pride or to cover up our sins, when we use our tongues to slander and hurt our neighbor, we might think it is not so serious. But in reality we are doing the work of the devil!

Young people, flee the lie! Do not speak it yourself, and do not be party to the lies and slander of others!

### Truth-telling and the God of truth

Also, the Word of God not only commands us not to lie, but sets before us a positive calling to speak the truth. We might think we have satisfied our calling if we can say, "Well, I never actually lied," but we must also face the question, "But did you tell the truth, the whole truth?"

Of all the principles that guide our communication, this one is first and most basic. You can speak the truth and still not communicate as you ought, but you can never communicate rightly without the truth. There are so many passages of God's Word that set forth our calling to speak the truth, that the difficulty is not finding them but choosing which ones to quote. Consider just two, one from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament: "Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight" (Prov. 12:22) and "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another" (Eph. 4:25).

Speaking the truth means, first, that we love and speak the truth of God's Word. We live in a postmodern society that claims that there is no such thing as absolute, objective truth. But there is absolute truth, and that absolute truth is the truth of God's Word. Loving that truth, we speak it to our family and friends, confess it before the world, and witness to it in our daily walk.

Speaking the truth means, second, that we say only that which is true in our dealings with others. Before we ever open our mouths, the words we intend to speak must pass through the filter of truthfulness. We ought regularly to ask ourselves, "Is this in harmony with fact and reality? Am I certain that what I am about to say to another person or about another person is, in fact, the truth? Do I have all the facts, and do I have them straight? Does this accurately portray what happened, or are the details fudged?" If it is not true or if we are

uncertain whether it is truth, then we bite our tongues and say nothing.

Speaking the truth means, third, that we speak the truth about ourselves. In other words, the calling to speak the truth requires openness and honesty. Especially in our closest relationships (for example, a husband and wife, parents and children, close friends), clamming up or bottling everything up is not proper. The ‘danger’ and the joy of a relationship is opening ourselves up to others and being known by them. This does not mean that we say everything that is on our mind, for only a fool always speaks everything on his mind (cf. Prov. 29:11), but healthy communication in a healthy relationship demands openness and honesty.

The reason God demands that we speak the truth is that He is the God of truth. The devil is the father of the lie, but God is truth. Deuteronomy 32:4 says, “He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

God is the God of truth. As the God of truth, God never speaks the lie. He opposes the lie and condemns all falsehood. And God Himself always lives and speaks the truth.

Because God hates and opposes the lie, you and I are called not to lie or use our tongues to tear down others. Because God always lives and speaks the truth, we are called also to live and speak that truth, to use our tongues to build up and defend the honor and good character of our neighbor.

As those who belong to Jesus Christ, we have been delivered from the ruling power of the devil and lies through the work of Him who is “the way, *the truth*, and the life” (John 14:6). As the Truth, Jesus was willing to endure the lies that were spoken against. He was falsely accused of being a troublemaker and of blaspheming the name of God. By His death on the cross, He delivered us from the power of the devil and from the wrath which we deserved for our lies. He has also given to us His Holy Spirit who works in us and sanctifies us to be men and women of truth.

Covenant youth, you have been delivered from the power of the devil and the lie! Therefore, hate the lie and put to death every sinful use of the tongue!

And you have been delivered unto covenant fellowship with the God of truth and with Jesus Christ the truth! Therefore, in grateful love, speak the truth in love!



## Pertaining to the churches in common— PR Theological Seminary

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

## News from the seminary

### Installation of a new professor

September 15, 2021 was an historic evening in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches and in the history of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary. On that evening, at a public worship service, the Reverend Cory J. Griess was installed as the newest professor in our denomination’s seminary. He had accepted the appointment by Synod 2021 to this position. Prof. Barrett Gritters led the service, which was held at the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church, located just north of the seminary building on Ivanrest Avenue in Grandville, MI. The church was very full, both the lower level and the balcony. It was a joyous occasion!

Prof. Gritters took as his sermon text the words of the apostle Paul to his spiritual son Timothy in II Timothy 2:1-2, “Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.” He emphasized the calling of the seminary professor to “commit” by means of teaching the things of the gospel of grace to the next generation of preachers



in the church of Christ. He called special attention to Paul's injunction that this calling be carried out with respect to "faithful men"—men who are not first of all intellectually gifted, but spiritually faithful. We trust that God will use the sermon for the profit of all who heard, and especially for the encouragement of Prof. Griess as he departs the pastorate in order to take up this new endeavor as professor in the seminary.

Prof. Griess will gradually be phasing into Prof. Gritters' position as Professor of Practical (Pastoral) Theology. The process, as adopted by our synod a number of years ago, is a five-year one. During the first couple of years, the new professor works on securing his advanced degree. During the last three years, he gradually takes over the courses of the retiring professor. The process provides for the mentoring of the new professor by the man whom he is replacing.

As Prof. Gritters pointed out, this is a new era in the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches. Within four years, three new faculty members have been appointed to replace men who labored together for nearly twenty years. With the new generation of faculty members, God in His goodness is making provision for the training of men for ministry in our churches, our sister churches, and other churches with whom we have close relations, for the foreseeable future. It is our fervent prayer that they may stay the course that has been followed since the founding of our seminary nearly one hundred years ago. May God bless your labors, Prof. Griess.

We do not only welcome a new professor to our seminary community, but the new professor's family. They all attended the installation and at the conclusion of the worship service were introduced to the audience. Prof. Griess' wife is Lael, a devoted pastor's wife and joyful mother of the Griess' seven children. From oldest to youngest they are Simeon and JohnOwen (twins), Salem, Lena, Charissa, Matthias, and Jason.



After the installation, everyone was invited for refreshments. The seminary building was opened for all who were interested in touring the facility, especially the renovations that have been done in the last couple

of years. An open house was slated last year but had to be canceled due to COVID restrictions. With the restrictions lifted, it was possible to open the building up for inspection. A large crowd went through the building, many of whom had never set foot in the seminary prior to that evening. The renovated entrance, classrooms, assembly room, library, and faculty offices were open for all to see. Beside the renovations, guests were also able to inspect the newest addition to the seminary, consisting of two new faculty offices and a state-of-the-art archives room.



The Lord has given us a wonderful facility. But a well-equipped and finely crafted facility mean nothing if the instruction that takes place within its walls is not according to the standard of the truth of God's Word and the Reformed confessions. A competent and gifted faculty mean nothing if they do not provide instruction that is in harmony with the infallible Scripture and the historic Reformed faith.

Pray for the continued faithfulness of our seminary. Pray for the continued commitment of the professors. Pray that the seminary will continue to provide competent, trained men of God to preach the gospel and to shepherd God's people.

### Student body and faculty

Classes are well underway for 2021-2022 school year. We are happy to report that last year's graduate, Mr. Josiah Tan, is now the serving pastor in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. We pray the Lord's richest blessing on his ministry and his family as he labors in our sister church in southeast Asia.

This year is a bit of a milestone for the seminary. Prof. Dykstra is transitioning back into the pastoral ministry, having accepted the call to the Byron Center PRC. He is fulfilling his commitment, however, to complete the last year of transition for Prof. Kuiper by teaching two classes in each semester. We are deeply grateful for Prof. Dykstra's faithful labors in the seminary spanning a twenty-five-year teaching career. We pray that God will use him for the upbuilding of the congregation in Byron Center, MI. This is also the first





year in which Prof. Huizinga is beginning to teach. He plans to teach one course in each of the two semesters. He is also working on writing his thesis for completion of his Master of Theology degree.

At present, five men are receiving instruction in the four years of seminary training. Sadly, one of our previous students withdrew just before the start of the new school year. Our small class size makes for a good professor-student ratio, though somewhat larger classes would be our desire. Thankful as we are to the Lord for the students He has provided, we urge everyone to pray earnestly that God will raise up more students—many more. The need in our churches is great and is only projected to become greater in the next few years.

We need students! We need students more than ever! Lord God of the harvest, send forth laborers!

Pray earnestly that God will put the call to the ministry in the hearts of faithful young men. At the same time, we trust that the Lord knows our need and will continue to provide for our churches in the years to come. We urge any of our young men who feel the call of God to the ministry, or who wonder if God may be calling them to the ministry, to stop by the seminary and talk to one of the professors or to our registrar, Mr. Charles Terpstra.

Mr. Marcus Wee is in his fourth and last year of seminary. Mr. Wee, his wife Tze Yan, and their three young sons are members of our sister church in Singapore. While attending seminary, the Wee family are attending Zion PRC in Jenison, MI. At present, Mr. Wee is fulfilling his six-month internship at Faith PRC, also in Jenison, under the supervision of Rev. Clayton Spronk. In January 2022, the brother will return to the seminary to complete his final semester of classes. He anticipates oral examination before the Protestant Reformed Synod 2022, just as his fellow Singaporean, Mr. Josiah Tan was examined by Synod 2021. He then also hopes to labor in our sister church on the island of Singapore.

We have two third-year students. The first is Mr. Isaac Peters. He and his wife Rebekah, as well as their four children, are members of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Australia. The Peters family is attending the Grace PRC in Walker, MI while he completes his training in our seminary. Over the course of many years, our seminary has trained several students from the EPCA. As a faculty, we count it a privilege to be able to train faithful preachers of the gospel for our brothers and sisters “down under.” It is our prayer that the instruction the students from the EPCA receive in our seminary fits them to be faithful preachers of the gospel in a denomination with whom we have had a longstanding and close relationship.



Mr. Matthew Koerner is our other third-year student. He is a member of our Southeast PRC in Wyoming, MI. At the end of the second semester of the 2020-2021 school year, the faculty licensed Mr. Koerner to “speak a word of edification” in the churches. The brother was kept very busy this summer filling in for pastors who were on vacation, as well as supplying our vacant congregations. Many of you have likely heard a sermon or two from Mr. Koerner. In addition to filling pulpits—mostly in the Grand Rapids area now that school has once again begun—he is also teaching catechism. All this “hands on” training is invaluable, which brings up the six-month internship that every fourth-year student must complete. Invariably in the first few weeks of the new school year, every third-year student inquires when they might be informed of their internship assignment. Is it going to be in the Grand Rapids area or in one of our western churches? True to past experience, we were not very far into the new school year when brother Koerner asked if the faculty had determined where he would be fulfilling his internship. I had to inform him that we had not yet discussed his



internship, but that we would very likely inform him in January 2022. He would have to be patient for three or four months yet. All our readers, therefore, should wait to ask the brother about his internship assignment until after the new year.

We have one second-year student, Mr. Arend Haveman. Mr. Haveman is a member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Although the only member of his class, he shares many of his classes with the third-year students. A new experience to which he is surely looking forward eagerly is his first Practice Preaching sermons before the entire student body and faculty. In their first year, students receive instruction in hermeneutics or biblical exposition and in homiletics, which deals with sermon construction. Beginning in the second year, what they have learned in these courses, as well as what they have gleaned while sitting in the various sessions of Practice Preaching with the more advanced students, they now must put into practice. From this point forward, students make two new sermons each semester for Practice Preaching on texts assigned by the faculty, except during the internship when they make 10-12 new sermons. Welcome, brother Haveman, to the real world!

We are thankful that the Lord has provided one new student this year. Our first-year student is Mr. Aaron Van Dyke. Mr. Van Dyke and his wife Sarah are members of our Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Mr. Van Dyke is making all of the adjustments necessary to the rigors of seminary training: the long hours of memorizing Hebrew vocabulary and paradigms, memorizing

Dogmatics definitions and proof texts, translating and identifying forms in portions of the Greek New Testament, memorization of names and dates for Church History, as well as all of the reading that is assigned. Our students spend many hours each day in preparation for their next day's classes, all of which stands them in good stead when, according to God's will, they are called to the busier and more demanding work of the pastorate.

One very nice feature of this school year is that once again, after a two-year hiatus, we are able to host auditors (sitters) in a number of our classes. This adds a very nice dimension to these courses, provokes added discussion and questions, and fosters among our people confidence in the orthodoxy of the seminary. If you are a retiree or find yourself with a flexible schedule, consider sitting in one of the seminary classes in the future.

May the Lord richly bless the seminary throughout the 2021-2022 school year. Pray for our students and professors. Pray for more students to begin training for the gospel ministry. Pray that the seminary remains faithful for many years to come, especially as the torch is passed to the next generation of professors.

Cordially in Christ,  
Professor Ronald Cammenga, Rector





## I believe

Prof. Cory Griess, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary

# The instrumental cause of our salvation (6)

### Purpose of this series

Since it has been some time since I have written an article for this series, it is worthwhile to remember the main point of these articles. (If you want to catch up or remember more thoroughly, the series may be found in these issues of the *SB*: November 15, 2020, p. 93; December 15, 2020, p. 132; February 15, 2021, p. 236; April 1, 2021, p. 302; June 2021, p. 400.) The main point of these articles has been to show God's graciousness to us in His good use of our synods in recent years. God has used the synod to steer us clear of two ditches. God used Synod 2018 to keep us from walking in a ditch that would make works part of the instrument of salvation along with faith. When faith is functioning as an instrument, "faith is therefore not a work, but a relinquishment of all work, an unqualified trust in God who gives life to the dead..."<sup>1</sup> This faith "constitutes a contrast to the works of the law...in the fact that the latter [works of the law] can neither be the material nor the instrumental cause of justification."<sup>2</sup> In judging the case before her, Synod 2018 said works were being made part of the *cause* of our salvation along with faith. This error the PRC is committed to avoiding.

God used Synod 2019, 2020 (and now 2021) to keep us from falling into another ditch. This ditch denies the order of sequence (Calvin) in which God applies the benefits of Christ to us. It also denies any proper use of "in the way of." There were those who argued that if a minister preaches that there is a God-worked activity of a believer prior to the experience of a particular blessing from God, then that minister *necessarily* makes that activity the *ground* or *instrument* of that blessing. In other words, if, in reference to David in Psalm 32:5, one says that David experienced renewed forgiveness after he confessed his sin with Bathsheba, this makes

forgiveness conditional upon David's confession and represents salvation by man. Synod 2019/2020 and now 2021 rejected this notion. To quote Synod 2020, "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."<sup>3</sup> And Synod 2021: "The fundamental error that underlies the protest is that \_\_\_\_\_ denies that any God-worked activity of the believer can be prior to the experience of a particular blessing from God."<sup>4</sup> The PRC rejects this error also.

### Recent revelations

In recent months it has become clear that Andy Lanning is teaching this second error that has come to synod now three years in a row. In the "Malachi 3:7 edition" of *Sword and Shield*, Lanning clearly states a position in conflict with Synod 2020 and 2021. Lanning expresses this in the opening words of this edition of the magazine when he states what he believes is the issue between him and the PRC: "This special edition of *Sword and Shield* takes the field to fight in the present-day controversy over whether man's activity of drawing near to God precedes God's activity of drawing near to man in man's conscious experience of covenant fellowship with God" (Aug. 15, p. 3). Later in the magazine Lanning makes clear that he denies that there is *any sense* in which a God-worked activity of ours precedes an activity of God in our experience of salvation. "It is wrong to say that 'there is a vitally important sense in which, in our salvation, our drawing nigh to God precedes God's drawing nigh to us'" (29).<sup>5</sup>

1 Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: Volume 4: Holy Spirit, Church, and New Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2008), 211.

2 Bavinck, *Dogmatics*, Vol. 4, 222.

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

4 *Acts of Synod 2021*, 119.

5 The quotation within the quotation that Lanning judges to be wrong is from Prof. D. Engelsma.

But what does Lanning mean by “man’s activity of drawing nigh to God” in the first quotation above? And what does he mean by “our drawing nigh to God” in the second quotation above? Does he mean man’s activity apart from God’s working that activity in the man? Does he mean man’s activity, the presence or absence of which has a certain power over God to allow or deny Him His continued work of salvation? If that is what Lanning means, then there is no disagreement between him and the PRC on this point. And, if this is what he means by “man’s activity,” he is setting up a straw man. The PRC’s teaching is that this activity of man is God-worked through and through. That activity is a necessary part of God’s own unchangeable order of application of Christ’s benefits to His people, and will come to pass according to His decree and powerful working. Yet God works that activity in a man so that he performs that activity consciously and willingly.

The fact is, though, that Lanning does not mean by “man’s activity of drawing near to God” an activity man performs in his own strength, or an activity of man the presence or absence of which has a certain power over God. Lanning’s issue is with the order of application. Lanning means to say that *no* God-worked activity of man may occur in our experience of salvation temporally prior to any experience of God’s activity, regardless of how one speaks of man’s God-worked activity. We know this because of what he writes as his explanation of James 4:8. James 4:8 says, “Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.” Lanning’s explanation of this is that “The believer who draws nigh to God experiences that God has *already* drawn nigh to him. The believer’s drawing nigh to God *in no way* (AL’s words, emphasis mine CG) precedes God’s drawing nigh to him, but follows God’s drawing nigh to him in the Word of the gospel.” And again, “The believer who turns to God experiences that God has *already* come to the believer” (29).

So, there is *no way* in which we experience God’s forgiving grace after we draw nigh in faith. There is *no sense* in which the believer experiences the light of God’s countenance shining upon him *after* he confesses his sins and lays hold on Christ. Rather, the child of God only realizes that God has already come to Him and pardoned him before he confessed. And the child

of God only realizes that God has already given him the light of His countenance before he confessed. Once more, in the words of Lanning, “The believer’s drawing nigh to God in no way precedes God’s drawing nigh to him, but follows God’s drawing nigh to him in the Word of the gospel.” And, “The believer who turns to God experiences that God has *already* come to the believer” (29).

### David’s experience

David was a believer. David was a believer who turned to God after his sin with Bathsheba. After turning in faith, David experienced more than that God had already come to him in the past in the mouth of Nathan the prophet. God *did* come back to David in the mouth of Nathan the prophet. What grace to David that God came to him to confront him with the reality of the sin he had been so long excusing! What fatherly love to take the word like a hammer to stone and break David’s hardened heart! There was a sense in which

God powerfully came to David in his experience in the mouth of Nathan the prophet. In fact, there was a sense in which God never left David in David’s experience. God was with David in David’s unrepentant state with His heavy hand: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is

turned into the drought of summer” (Ps 32:3-4). That heavy hand was unpleasant, but it was God with David.

However, there was an altogether other, unique, and real sense in which God truly drew nigh to David in David’s experience *after* God worked David’s repentance. David himself says so, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; *and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin*” (Ps. 32:5 emphasis added). David says this not as a misguided fanatic who is incapable of reading his own experience properly. He writes as one inspired by the Holy Spirit to describe His God-given experience with flawless accuracy. With reference to David’s experience of sin and repentance in Psalms 32 and 51, and to the experience of Peter, the Canons of Dordt interpret David’s words forthrightly,

**However, there was an altogether other, unique, and real sense in which God truly drew nigh to David in David’s experience after God worked David’s repentance. David himself says so, “I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin” (Ps. 32:5 emphasis added).**

“By such enormous sins, however, they very highly offend God, incur a deadly guilt, grieve the Holy Spirit, interrupt the exercise of faith, very grievously wound their consciences, and sometimes lose the sense of God’s favor for a time, until, on their returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God’s fatherly countenance again shines upon them.”<sup>6</sup> Though David was in a legal state of justification throughout the whole process, there was a real and fresh application of that justification by faith<sup>7</sup> to David’s conscience in regard to this particular sin after he repented.<sup>8</sup> This was a distinct act of God to declare David forgiven upon his confession. This forgiveness was accompanied with the light of God’s countenance upon David. Before this, David experienced terrible guilt for his sin even though in the coming Messiah that sin was legally gone. After David’s confession and embracing of Christ, he no longer felt the heavy hand of God upon him.

Lanning’s teaching is that upon confession David experienced no salvation of God actually drawing near to Him. If there was, this would mean that David’s experience was conditioned upon his drawing nigh to God. It would mean man is first in salvation. Instead, after returning to God in faith, David *only* experienced the realization that God had already forgiven him in the past.

Lanning will not allow David to have the experience David by inspiration tells us he had. And the sole reason Lanning will not allow David this experience as a real distinct act of God upon David’s life is that Lanning denies the order of the application of salvation. He believes that if this order is maintained, then automatically the activity of man is a prerequisite and condition that makes

salvation dependent upon man. There can be no other reason. It is not because David explains his returning as the ground for his experience. It is not because David explains his returning as works of the law, which works function as the ground for or instrument through which God’s favor comes upon David. It is not because David makes his faith by which he laid hold of Christ in returning a work. It is solely because Lanning believes that “the believer’s drawing nigh to God in no way precedes God’s drawing nigh to him” (29). In *no way* precedes.

## Implications

There are many implications of such a novel view.<sup>9</sup> I am going to highlight only one. Imagine you tell your child to go clean up his room. The child does not do it, but instead goes outside to play with his friends. You confront your child, and he feels the weight of the guilt of his sin. He confesses that sin, repents of it under your direction, and asks you to forgive him. What do you tell this child? Apparently, you may only tell this child, “You were already forgiven. There is no sense

in which you are forgiven after confessing your sin. And if I would tell you you are forgiven now, then it would make the forgiveness conditioned on your repentance because your repentance came first. Because my discipline of you is to be in line with God’s discipline of us (Deut 8:5; Heb 12:6, 7), I must teach you that, in our relationship to God, God’s activity never

follows man’s activity; so I will not tell you that you are forgiven right now by me and by God, but only that you were forgiven in the past.”

Perhaps you do not take the position to its logical conclusion and instead you tell the child, “I forgive you, child, right now, and God forgives you right now, too,” as you ought to do. The child comes in for a hug; what do you do? You must push the child away and say, “No.” After all, the child has drawn nigh to you and to hug him now would be you drawing nigh to him *after* he confessed. In order to teach the child that there is no sense in which our returning to God precedes God’s re-

**...this does not deny that there is a real, unique, actual act of God’s love, and therefore of parents, drawing nigh to us after we return by faith and in the way of repentance. Anything else guts the covenant of its essence: a relationship of fellowship and friendship with God. And anything else, if taken to its logical conclusion, guts our parenting of its essence: a relationship of fellowship and friendship in the Spirit of God.**

<sup>6</sup> Fifth Head, Article 5. The end of the previous article references the sins of David and Peter as the biblical proof of “such enormous falls” that some of God’s people experience.

<sup>7</sup> Even in repenting, which is wrapped up with faith in returning, it is only the faith that is laying hold of Christ.

<sup>8</sup> It does not matter whether one holds the position that the *act* of justification is repeated throughout one’s lifetime, or the position that the one-time act of justification is *applied* repeatedly throughout one’s lifetime. “I deny that the difference between the two doctrinal positions is fundamental” (Prof. D. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification*, 240). The issue here is whether or not the declaration is repeated or applied really and truly *after* God works a return.

<sup>9</sup> In your own mind draw out the implications for elder work, church discipline, and preaching to name but a few.



turning to us, you must say instead, “I will not hug you child. The closeness you desire was there already when I confronted you about your sin and told you I loved you before you confessed.”

There is no doubt that the love of God, the forgiving grace of God in the gospel, *leads us* to repentance as much as the heavy hand of God does. “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions” (Ps. 51:1). So too, the love of our earthly father *leads us* to confess as much as does his fatherly displeasure. And this too must be preached. But this does not deny that there is a real, unique, actual act of God’s love, and therefore of parents, drawing nigh to us *after* we return by faith and in the way of repentance. Anything else guts the covenant of its essence: a *relationship* of fellowship and friendship with

God. And anything else, if taken to its logical conclusion, guts our parenting of its essence: a relationship of fellowship and friendship in the Spirit of God.

## Conclusion

Someone once said that the God-given presence of eyes to examine food, fingertips with sensation to touch it, the nose to first smell it, and taste on our tongue to judge it before it goes down the throat, is God’s commendation of watchful criticism. More important is the injunction, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God.” For those who are under the influence, be warned of the errors contained in Lanning’s teaching. Examine, and do not swallow! And for all, let us read carefully the decisions of Synod 2019, 2020, and 2021 as well as the vital decision of Synod 2018. And for all of it, give thanks to God.



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question:

How many Protestant Reformed Christian Schools (not counting the pre-schools) are there?

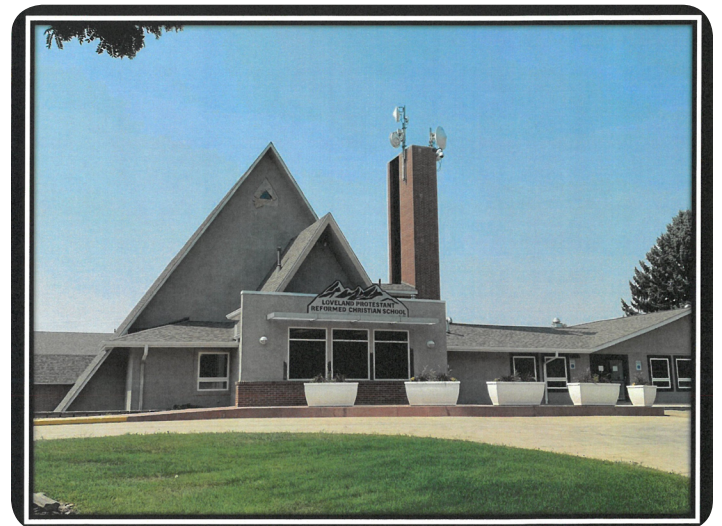
### Minister call updates

- Rev. R. Barnhill received the call from Covenant of Grace PRC on September 12.
- From a trio of Revs. N. Decker, E. Guichelaar, and C. Spronk, Rev. Guichelaar received the call from Doon PRC on September 19.
- From Hudsonville PRC’s new trio of Revs. E. Guichelaar, C. Haak, and D. Lee, Rev. Guichelaar received the call on September 19.

### PR Christian school news

- **Hope PR Christian School:** We happily share this good news concerning Hope PRCS: “With thankfulness to God, Hope PRC School of Grand Rapids will be celebrating 75 years of Christian education on January 21, 2022. A program and an open house to see the school renovation are being planned.” You will want to mark your calendars for that date!

- **Loveland PR Christian School:** This school has some exciting news to share surrounding the dedication of her new facility on August 20, 2021 (see photo). Perhaps it is best to quote from her September newsletter: “Greetings from the Loveland School Society! We are excited to bring you the latest updates on our Christian school and new building in Loveland, Colorado. We’ve been busy this past spring and summer leaving our old



building and preparing the new building for this school year. Now, we are happy to share that we are in our new home! Many days were spent planning, painting, replacing the roof, installing IT networks, installing a new gym floor, cleaning and moving! We are thankful to the many volunteers for making it happen! Many new emotions hit us as we saw the transition over the past few months from where it was when we purchased it, to where it is now. It's amazing to see God's blessing for us as just a little while ago there were only plans, and now many of these plans are completed projects. Our children are now walking the new hallways and learning their subjects taught to them by our teachers through a Reformed and Christ-centered perspective."

- **Redeemer Christian School (Zeeland, MI):** This new Christian school endeavor in West Michigan is busy making plans and preparing for a 2022-23 start-up. In her September 2021 newsletter the board gave this summary in its opening paragraph: "September is upon us and we are excited to share what we have been working on over the past few weeks. Fundraising has officially started. The Education Committee is busy working on curriculum development and will begin the search for an Administrator and teachers very soon. Additionally, the Building Committee is actively searching for a building in which to begin the 2022-2023 school year. While we've experienced some setbacks, there has also been a lot of positive progress!"

- **Sioux Falls (SD) PR Christian School:** After several years of planning and preparing, the SFPRCS is finally off the ground! The Board has this update in her summer 2021 newsletter: "As announced in our previous newsletter, the Sioux Falls School Board is pleased to announce that we were able to sign two experienced

teachers for the 2021-2022 school year, fulfilling our staffing needs to start a grade school (starting K-5th) this August, Lord willing. With that in mind, we have been working diligently to start the school, including getting playground equipment installed, setting up policies and a handbook, completing maintenance to the lower level of Heritage PRC, and establishing a school calendar. We are also assessing options for the school to assist with transportation needs for offsite school activities and potential busing of students." And in Heritage PRC's bulletin recently was this note as well: "Please save this Friday night [Sept. 24] for the annual Sioux Falls School Association lecture where Rev. Jonathan Langerak will be speaking on 'Learning Pleasant Words.' The lecture will begin at 7 p.m. with refreshments, fellowship, and an open house for the new Sioux Falls PRCS to follow." We rejoice with the society and board in the fulfillment of their godly desire for their own PRCS!

- **Wingham, ON:** Sadly, due to the schism in the Wingham PRC, the Christian school there could not open its doors this Fall. They are hopeful for a fresh start next year and covet your prayers as they face this difficult year. May we not forget them and their needs.

- **Finally, the PR Teacher's Institute** will hold its annual "Teachers' Convention" October 21-22 at Covenant Christian HS in Grand Rapids, MI. May the Lord use this special time for the continued enrichment, edification, and encouragement of our PRCS educators. We pray for you all!

#### **Trivia answer:**

There are currently 18 PR Christian schools, elementary and secondary.

## **Announcements**

### **Bound volumes**

The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 97. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of October. For additional orders, contact Marco at (616) 457-5970.