

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

February 1, 2022 • Volume 98 • No. 9

The Father's little children

Rev. Steven Key

Synods 2020/2021 and "in the way of repentance" (6)

Prof. Brian Huizinga

Conversion therapy criminalized in Canada

Rev. Martyn McGeown

The elders' work of oversight

Prof. Douglas Kuiper

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions

Rev. Richard Smit



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster

Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Reprint and online posting policy

Permission is hereby granted for the reprinting or online posting of articles in the *Standard Bearer* by other publications, provided that such reprinted articles are reproduced in full; that proper acknowledgment is made; and that a copy of the periodical or Internet location in which such reprint or posting appears is sent to the editorial office.

Editorial policy

Every editor is solely responsible for the contents of his own articles.

Letters to the editor should be limited to 600 words, be written in a brotherly fashion, and be in response only to published articles (not to published letters). More extensive exchanges on a significant topic of broad interest may be included as guest contributions at the editors' discretion. Letters and contributions will be published at the editor's discretion and may be edited for publication.

All communications relative to the contents should be sent to the editorial office.

Subscription price

\$30.00 per year in the US, \$42.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$20.00
esubscription free to current hard copy subscribers.

Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prca.org

The Reformed Free Publishing Association maintains the privacy and trust of its subscribers by not sharing with any person, organization, or church any information regarding *Standard Bearer* subscribers.

Editorial office

Prof. Barry Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business office

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Contents

Meditation

- 195 The Father's little children
Rev. Steven Key

Editorial

- 197 Synods 2020/2021 and "in the way of repentance" (6)
Prof. Brian Huizinga

All around us

- 200 Conversion therapy criminalized in Canada
Rev. Martyn McGeown

Believing and confessing

- 203 Hallowed be Thy name (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 47)
Rev. Rodney Kleyn

When thou sittest in thine house

- 205 Nurturing our preschool children (4)
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Ministering to the saints

- 208 The elders' work of oversight (5)
Prof. Douglas Kuiper

All Thy works shall praise Thee

- 210 In Thy light shall we see light (2)
Dr. Brendan Looyenga

Go ye into all the world

- 213 The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (6)
Rev. Richard Smit

- 215 Pertaining to the churches in common—
Sister churches—PRC in the Philippines



REFORMED
FREE PUBLISHING
ASSOCIATION



Meditation

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

The Father's little children

I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake.... I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.

I John 2:12, 13c.

The inspired apostle John would remind us here that at the heart of living the Christian life stands the knowledge of who we are. We must know who we are and to whom we belong—as children, as fathers, and as young men. The text calls our attention to a wonderful distinction in Christ's church—that of the various age groups in which God performs His wonder work of grace, and the privileged place that children occupy in God's family.

Their privilege

There are two parallel lines of thought in verses 12-14, with each of those two lines taking into account a threefold distinction in God's work of grace—in children, in fathers, and in young men.

John's reference in verse 13 clarifies the group to whom he writes in verse 12. For the Greek word that he uses in verse 13, although translated the same, *little children*, is different. There the term refers to young children, even infants. The apostle speaks of the church's little ones, children. "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."

God saves little children. The sins of little children, even infants, are forgiven! Bear in mind, John does not write of all little children. He addresses these little ones very particularly. They are God's children, otherwise referred to as His lambs, those whom He has chosen in Christ before they were even born. What a powerful testimony of God's saving grace, particular grace! Our children are conceived and born in sin. Still more, the apostle speaks of the little children as having *sins*, plural. They continually miss the mark—the glory of God that we are constantly to aim for and the calling to love Him perfectly. They do so even before they can consciously pervert God's commandments. They do so by their sinful natures. But for all that—terrible as is the reality of the situation—John, the inspired apostle, says, "I write

unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven." He addresses the little children as saved by God, received into the fellowship of God's own covenant life! No greater privilege is there! Even *little* children have a wonderful place, being loved by God Himself!

As an aged apostle and pastor in Christ's church, John's view of children was entirely unlike that which has become common in the churches that deny infant baptism. They hold that the children of believers are no different from the children of unbelievers. They are lost, unbelieving and unconverted. For that reason the Baptists refuse to baptize infants. Baptism, you understand, marks cleansing by the blood of Christ. It is a sign and seal of the righteousness that is ours in Christ (Rom. 4:11). For that reason it may only be administered where there is salvation. At least being consistent with their error, Baptists only baptize believers, adult believers. Where there are those in Reformed churches who view the church's children as unregenerate and unconverted, the only difference between them and the Baptists is that while the Baptists—consistent with their position—deny infant baptism, the Reformed who walk in this error sprinkle a little water on the heads of those children they consider unregenerate. They baptize while inconsistently and essentially denying the significance of baptism. They profane the sacrament of holy baptism. John's view of the little children was entirely different. He did not look at them as unconverted, unsaved. He would not pervert the gospel as it applies to little children. He says, "I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you!"

The question that must be faced, of course, is: "On what basis can he say this?" A little child—with the emphasis on *little*, even an infant—is totally dependent. That child can do nothing. He cannot exercise saving faith. He cannot enjoy the experience of true conversion. He cannot show true repentance before God. He can do nothing toward the establishment of a living relationship with God, which is life eternal. Yet the apostle writes, "your sins are forgiven you." How can that be?

The answer is found in the words of the text that

remain: “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you *for his name’s sake*.” The expression “for his name’s sake” refers to Christ! That is the only forgiveness there is! Our children are sanctified in Christ. That is why we baptize them. That is their privilege, an amazing gift of God’s grace. And this is stated as a fact. These are the Holy Spirit’s words through the inspired apostle!

There are those who teach that God promises every one of the little children salvation and extends to them His covenant grace, but attaches a condition. The actual fulfillment of God’s promise to them depends on whether or not they grow up to believe in Christ, walk in obedience to Him, and thus embrace the covenant promise. If the child does not fulfill the condition attached to that promise, he forfeits the promise, his baptism thus having no effect. But that concept is soundly rejected by what John writes here. He is writing to the church’s little children. He is not speaking to those who have grown up and who have shown themselves to be the children of God. He attaches no condition. He simply writes, “Your sins are forgiven you for his name’s sake.” Salvation is never left to depend upon the work and will of the sinner, never. If so, not one of us would be saved. Romans 9:16 sums the truth up plainly: “So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy.”

The privileged place of the church’s little children is *in Christ*. Their forgiveness of sins is for His name’s sake.

No, this privileged place is not the possession of all little children, not even all baptized children. It is the place of those who belong to the assembly of the elect, those who are chosen in Christ and, therefore, those for whom Christ died and whom He saves and preserves for His own name’s sake. John was not deluded in writing these words. He did not think nor teach here that every little child in the church is saved. He simply maintains the truth and perspective that is consistent in the teaching of our Lord and His apostles in viewing the church organically. Always our eye is upon the church as an organism, the elect organism.

We look upon Christ’s church, though often polluted with sin, as the *beloved of God*. We recognize all are not Israel that are of Israel. We deal with our children individually, too, pointing them to Christ, showing them the life of true conversion, calling them to repentance and faith. We discipline our children. And when we see hardness of heart, it grieves us. For we recognize, as the apostle will write in verse 19, that there are some who go out from us because they were not of us. But those things do not detract from the fact that we view

Christ’s church with the judgment of love. We do so also with the church’s little ones. And therefore we do not hesitate to call their attention, as did the inspired apostle, to the privileged place God has given them. So we instruct them. We teach them all that is involved in this eternal life that is ours, this life in God’s covenant. We teach them the way of repentance. We teach them the glorious truth of forgiveness. We teach them the commandments of God, the law of love. All that John writes to the church, he writes to the children as well. He does so for a reason. “I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven for his name’s sake.”

You understand how important forgiveness is for little children. Little children have an intimate bond to their loving parents. Without their parents they are lost. So it is, when they sin and must face the discipline of father or mother, they must know that the righteous anger of father or mother is a passing anger. They need to know there is forgiveness, acceptance once again. They need to know that though they face chastisement when they do wrong, yet that chastening is part of the love that father and mother have for them. Forgiveness is the most prominent blessing found in a family relationship. Where love is, there is forgiveness. So it is in God’s covenant family, for Christ’s sake. What a great God is our heavenly Father! How majestic is His glory and grace! How deep is His love for little children!

But there is more. For emphasis the apostle will repeat this glorious truth from yet another perspective. “I have written unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father.”

Their knowledge

That knowledge is life everlasting. To know the Father is to know God in Jesus Christ and, therefore, to know Him as a member of His family. Such knowledge in little children is a very rudimentary knowledge, knowledge at the very earliest stage of development. It is a knowledge of only the beginning principles of living in God’s fellowship. But while a knowledge at the earliest stage of development, this is indeed knowledge, the knowledge of faith, which is life eternal.

The nature of this knowledge of a small child is something that we cannot really comprehend. It is the work of the Holy Spirit, the nature of which is referred to in Ecclesiastes 11:5: “As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all.” Even in a baby there is a knowledge of his parents, of the bond he has to his parents, a knowledge of their love and attention. The voice of the mother is very comforting to that child.

He recognizes also the voice of father. He recognizes his parents' voices even from the womb. You see that amazing recognition in the smallest infant. He does not know much. He certainly cannot talk theology. He cannot even yet speak or sing. But he knows his father. And it is written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and preserved for the church and her children today: "I have written unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father." You know Him as the Father apart from whom you cannot live and in whose fellowship you have life!

There is to be development in this knowledge, even as there is development in the physical stature of a child. Development is a sign of life. When God instills the principle of new life, we are not all of a sudden full grown and perfect. The child must increase in knowledge. And as that child develops, he will more and more consciously appropriate Christ.

That development of a child comes by God's use of means. What is true of our physical life is also true spiritually. God has given us food and drink for the nourishment of our bodies. But for our spiritual development He gives us His gospel and the preaching of that gospel. He gives parents to apply that gospel in training their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. So the life of the Father's little children is marked by blessedness.

Their blessedness

Their life is blessed because they are the children of our

heavenly Father, united to Christ by the living bond of faith. There is no other blessedness. Our children must know that. We must teach them that. We must remind them of their privileged place and of the knowledge that they already possess and that they must continue to seek. In the consciousness of God's love and fellowship, we have the joy of the Christian life. There is no peace to those who live to themselves, who know not the Father, who do not experience the forgiveness of sins. Our blessedness is living in the midst of a family, with God our heavenly Father. That is what we teach the church's children. That is why we take them to church and instruct them in catechism. That is why we show them how life in Christ comes to expression, by walking in God's commandments. We do not encourage mere outward conformity to God's law. We point them to Christ, to whom they belong. We remind them that "your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake."

So we expect of them lives of godliness. And if—may God graciously forbid—some should show themselves ungodly and live as those who know not the Father, we will humble ourselves before God's sovereign work, knowing that they are not all Israel which are of Israel. At the same time, we will continue to pray for them and labor with them, knowing as well the powerful work of God's grace in restoring some who have fallen so grievously. But do not look for the little children to fall away. We expect to see in them the fruits of God's grace. In that truth we praise God for His goodness and grace.



Editorial

Prof. Brian Huizinga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Grandville PRC

Synods 2020/2021 and "in the way of repentance" (6)

Repentance and remission: The issue

Having thoroughly explained repentance and God's sovereign grace in bringing us to repentance, we come to the heart of the issue in the disputed matter that came to the PRC synods. Is there a God-worked activity of the believer that *precedes* a certain, specific manifestation of God's mercy? In this case, the God-worked activity of the believer is *repentance*. The certain, specific

manifestation of God's mercy is *remission*. Is it permissible to teach that repentance *precedes* remission? Or, would that necessarily be false doctrine, some kind of conditional theology?

The issue is *order*, mere order.

The protests that came to Synods 2020 and 2021 made very plain that the issue is *order*, and the synods addressed that issue. Synod 2020 said about the relation between repentance and remission, "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.” The protest to Synod 2021 called this teaching “the lie.”¹ In response to this protest, Synod 2021 stated and demonstrated, “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.”² The issue is *order*, and the specifics are repentance and remission.

Remission: The idea

Let’s be clear on what we mean by remission, synonyms of which are forgiveness and pardon. When we ask God for the remission of our sins, we are not asking God to do what He did in mercy for us at the cross. What God did in the person of His crucified Son was something that was done *once* (Heb. 7-10). At the cross our Savior shed His blood as the atonement for all our sins, satisfying the justice of God and obtaining remission of sins for us. His blood “is shed for many for the remission of sins” (Matt. 26:28).

Therefore, when we ask for remission (forgiveness) as Jesus taught us to do in the model prayer (Matt. 6:12) and as He illustrated for us in the plea of the publican (Luke 18:13), we are asking God to *apply to us* what Christ *obtained for us*. We are asking God to apply to us right now, personally and subjectively, the benefits of the objective act and display of His mercy at Calvary by declaring to us, “I forgive your sins, releasing you from the obligation to pay.” We are asking God to take the blood that was shed by Jesus and to apply it to our hearts, so that we who are conscious of our sins and very troubled by them may be forgiven by hearing His blessed word of forgiveness to us. On account of our sins and sinfulness we feel guilty, ashamed, polluted, and miserable as our conscience testifies against us. Upon genuine repentance in which we believers, by the sovereign grace of God, turn from our sins unto God, crying, “God be merciful to me the sinner,” God pardons us. Over and over again we are awakened to our sin and misery, and we cry for pardon. Over and over again, God declares to us by the Spirit of Christ and through the word of the gospel preached and read, “I forgive you.” By that pardon God quiets the storm within us and gives us peace.

This remission of God, like His redeeming of us at the cross, and like His turning of us to Himself in true

repentance, is His mercy to us, and as I have explained in earlier articles, we receive this mercy of God in the forgiveness of sins by the one and only instrument of faith.

Repentance and remission: In Scripture

Scripture teaches repentance precedes remission as the way unto it. Scripture teaches that to the penitent believer who turns away from his sin in sorrow and unto God in the seeking of remission God is merciful and grants remission. Ponder that...the pure lovingkindness of it. What if the penitent sinner came to God with the plea, “My sins are more than I can count, my heart has failed for grief, be pleased O Lord to rescue me, O haste to my relief,” and God rebuffed him? What if *you* were trembling and pleading, “O God, be merciful to me! I am so sorry I have done this evil in thy sight! Forgive me!” and He rebuffed *you*? We might do that to each other, but God never does. O blessed God and gospel! How could He deny the request of the pleading sinner when He is the loving God who turned that sinner to Himself!

Scripture plainly teaches that repentance is unto remission, so that as the Westminster Confession so aptly states about repentance, “It is of such necessity to all sinners, that none may expect pardon without it” (WCF, 15.3). If any man walks in disobedience and refuses to repent, saying, “I enjoy the forgiveness of my sins whether I repent or not, because Jesus died for me and covered all my sins,” that man is a liar. In love, you should take the words of Isaiah to him and pray God uses those words: “Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon” (Is. 55:7). Or, as Jesus Himself put it: “Except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 17:3). Say this: “Repent! You are on the road to perdition and so long as you continue in that rebellion you may have no confidence that Jesus died for you, and you may not say ‘I am forgiven.’” If someone objects to your admonition and contends that you are teaching conditional forgiveness, denying the cross, emphasizing man, putting man before God, teaching that God depends upon man, etc., then they are either confused theologically or deliberately corrupting the truth with wicked theology, and they bear responsibility for making comfortable a soul on the road to everlasting hell.

Take note of only a handful or so of the many Scripture passages teaching that repentance is the way unto God’s merciful pardon.

Hezekiah commissioned a letter to be sent out to all

1 PRC Acts of Synod and Yearbook 2021, p. 120.

2 PRC Acts 2021, p. 119.

Israel and Judah, teaching them that when they return to God in repentance He will be gracious and merciful to them: “Ye children of Israel, turn again unto the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, and He will return to the remnant of you.... For if ye turn again unto the LORD, your brethren and your children shall find compassion before them that lead them captive, so that they shall come again into this land: for the LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if ye return unto him” (II Chron. 30:6, 9).

David experienced that when he confessed his sin in repentance God forgave him: “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). But so long as David refused to repent, he did not know forgiveness and peace but only misery: “When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long, For day and night thy hand was heavy on me, my moisture is turned into the drought of summer” (Ps. 32:3-4).

With a view to divine forgiveness, the apostles always called sinners to repentance: “Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19); or, “Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee” (Acts 8:22).

The apostle John taught: “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” (I John 1:8-9).

The apostle Paul taught, “godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation” (II Cor. 7:10; “to” is literally “unto” or “with a view to” or “leads to”). Make “salvation” what you will, it is certainly God’s mercy, and the apostle makes repentance something that *leads* to God’s mercy. Similarly, Peter reported, “Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life” (Acts 11:18).

Synod 2020 appealed to some of these passages, and then one of the important grounds for Synod 2021 rejecting the protest against Synod 2020 was given: “In contending that Synod 2020 taught “the lie” ____ failed to interact with synod’s scriptural grounds, which are proof of synod’s teaching.”³

Repentance and remission: Historically

Throughout our history as churches, we have taught that repentance precedes forgiveness, or more generally,

that a God-worked activity of the believer can precede a certain, specific manifestation of God’s mercy. What follows are only a few examples, and, so far as I know, these men have never been charged with teaching “the lie,” at least not publicly.

Herman Hoeksema plainly taught his seminary students that a God-worked activity of the believer (confession) precedes a manifestation of God’s mercy (forgiveness): “If we confess, then the result is that God forgives our sins.”⁴

Prof. Herman Hanko:

In the second place, repentance is important because it is the way to the conscious experience of salvation. It is not God’s purpose to save His people in such a way that they are unaware of their own salvation. God saves them so that they know their salvation. But the way to the consciousness of salvation is always the way of confession of sin...for this is the path that leads to peace with God and rest for our weary souls. When we sin, we seek forgiveness in Christ; repenting, we find peace for our hearts in the blood of the cross.⁵

Prof. David Engelsma:

Also, His salvation is in the way of Israel’s repentance. Only when Israel repents and confesses does God deliver. Repentance on Israel’s part is no meritorious work. On the contrary, repentance is God’s own gift to Israel through the chastisement that He sends and that He makes effective in her heart by the Spirit. Nevertheless, repentance is the *way* in which Israel receives deliverance (emphasis Engelsma).⁶

And John Calvin, long before these PRC ministers:

(Commenting on Ezekiel 18:23) But the manner must be noticed in which God wishes all men to be saved, namely, when they turn themselves from their ways. God thus does not so wish all men to be saved as to renounce the difference between good and evil, but repentance, as we have said, must precede pardon.... We hold, then that God wills not the death of a sinner, since he calls all equally to repentance, and promises himself prepared to receive them if they only seriously repent.⁷

(Commenting on Matt. 3:2) Repentance is not placed

4 *Chapel Talks on I John* (Grandville, MI: Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches, n.d.), 27.

5 *The Mysteries of the Kingdom* (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), 216.

6 *Unfolding Covenant History*, vol. 5 (Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2005), 9-10.

7 *Commentaries on the First Twenty Chapters of the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, trans. Thomas Myers (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 247.

3 *PRC Acts 2021*, p. 119.

first, as some ignorantly suppose, as if it were the ground of the forgiveness of sins, or as if it induced God to begin to be gracious to us; but men are commanded to repent, that they may receive the reconciliation which is offered to them.... And indeed without hatred of sin and remorse for transgressions, no man will taste the grace of God.⁸

Over and over again in his commentaries Calvin teaches that repentance precedes forgiveness so that in his *Institutes*, he actually devotes a section to the question of what it means that repentance is prior to forgiveness.⁹

Repentance and remission: Expressing the relation

We express the relation between repentance and God's mercy in remitting our sins by saying that we receive and enjoy God's merciful pardon *in the way of* repentance. Classis East (January 2020) replied to an appeal by stating—and this was later adopted by Synod 2020 and defended by Synod 2021—"Rev. ____ did not militate against Synod 2018 when he preached 'in the

way of repentance we have mercy with God.'"¹⁰ Classis went on to explain, "Rev. ____ in the sermon explicitly distinguishes between what Christ has done as the basis for mercy, faith as the instrument for obtaining mercy, and repentance as the way in which mercy is received."¹¹

The PRC has always taught "remission in the way of repentance." Herman Hoeksema led the way: "Only in the way of repentance and confession can we obtain forgiveness from God."¹² Hoeksema and the PRC are only walking in the old paths of the Reformed churches, which have always taught remission and reconciliation "in the way of repentance." Article 78 of the Church Order of Dordt states, "Whenever anyone who has been excommunicated desires to become reconciled to the church in the way of repentance...." The Canons of Dordt V, Article 5 likewise teach that those guilty of enormous sins "sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until on their returning into the right way of serious repentance."

Next time I will explain this language of "in the way of repentance," and then with one more article after that, I will give a summary, concluding comments, and significance.

⁸ *Commentary on the Harmony of the Evangelists, Matthew, Mark, Luke*, vol. 1, trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 2003), 179.

⁹ See, *PRC Acts 2021*, pp. 122-23 where synod cited Calvin's *Institutes* (3.3.20).

¹⁰ *PRC Acts 2021*, pp. 86-7.

¹¹ *PRC Acts 2021*, p. 87.

¹² *Triple Knowledge*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1972), 604.



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI

Conversion therapy criminalized in Canada

The passage of C-4

Canada has just banned conversion therapy with the passage of Bill C-4, which was approved unanimously by Canada's House of Commons and Senate, and then received Royal Assent on December 8, 2021. Royal Assent means that Canada's Governor General, Mary Simon, a representative of the Crown, Queen Elizabeth II, signed it into law. The new law took effect on January 7, 2022.

Conversion therapy is defined in C-4 as follows:

a practice, treatment or service designed to

(a) change a person's sexual orientation to heterosexual;

- (b) change a person's gender identity to cisgender;
- (c) change a person's gender expression so that it conforms to the sex assigned to the person at birth;
- (d) repress or reduce non-heterosexual attraction or sexual behaviour;
- (e) repress a person's non-cisgender gender identity; or
- (f) repress or reduce a person's gender expression that does not conform to the sex assigned to the person at birth.

For greater certainty, this definition does not include a practice, treatment or service that relates to the exploration or development of an integrated personal

identity—such as a practice, treatment or service that relates to a person's gender transition—and that is not based on an assumption that a particular sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression is to be preferred over another.

With the passage of C-4 Canada has created four new criminal offenses: (1) *causing* a person to have conversion therapy; (2) *removing* a child from Canada in order to receive such therapy; (3) *profiting* from offering such therapies; and (4) *promoting or advertising* conversion therapy. The first two offenses carry a maximum of five years imprisonment, while offenses three and four carry a sentence of two years.

Rather than write a brand-new law, the Canadian legislature simply amended Canada's existing Criminal Code, Section 164(1), which concerns the making and distribution of *obscene materials*, such as child pornography, by adding the following words to the relevant paragraphs. I quote just one paragraph to prove the point (emphasis added):

If the court is satisfied, on a balance of probabilities, that the material is *child pornography* as defined in section 163., a voyeuristic recording, an intimate image, an advertisement of sexual services or an advertisement for conversion therapy, or *computer data* as defined in subsection 342.(2) that makes child pornography, the voyeuristic recording, the intimate image, the advertisement of sexual services or the advertisement for conversion therapy available, it may order the custodian of the computer system to delete the material.

Conversion therapy, such as counseling, certain kinds of prayer and preaching, or other services, is now categorized with “child pornography, voyeuristic recording, intimate images, and the advertisement of sexual services” as “obscene material.” So odious is conversion therapy in the eyes of Canadian legislators! On December 8, 2021, Justin Trudeau, Canadian prime minister, tweeted excitedly:

It's official: Our government's legislation banning the despicable and degrading practice of conversion therapy has received Royal Assent—meaning it is now law. LGBTQ2 Canadians, we'll always stand up for you and your rights.

In case you wondered, the Q2 at the end of the acronym LGBTQ2 is “Two-Spirit,” which the Canadian government recognizes as someone who “identifies as having both a masculine and feminine spirit.”

In the preamble to the Bill we read the following, which demonstrates what Canadian lawmakers as well as legislators in other Western nations think about con-

version therapy, and why, therefore, they have decided to criminalize it:

Conversion therapy causes harm to the persons who are subjected to it;

Conversion therapy causes harm to society because, among other things, it is based on and propagates myths and stereotypes about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression, including the myth that heterosexuality, cisgender gender identity, and gender expression that conforms to the sex assigned to a person at birth are to be preferred over other sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions;

In light of those harms, it is important to discourage and denounce the provision of conversion therapy in order to protect the human dignity and equality of all Canadians.

According to secular psychologists, it is harmful to homosexuals, lesbians, and transgender people, as well as to society as a whole, to attempt to change a person's sexual orientation or behavior. While it is true that *some* kinds of conversion therapy, such as electric shock treatments, medication, and the like, *are* harmful, this is a blanket ban, which prohibits *any* attempt, regardless of the method, to change someone from non-heterosexual (gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc.) to heterosexual.

Implications for the church in Canada

A ban on conversion therapy is an attack on Christianity and the church of Jesus Christ. Conversion is God's work of turning a sinner from sin to righteousness, from disobedience to holiness, so that he repents and lives a new, godly life in obedience to God's commandments. God calls sinners to conversion through the faithful preaching of His Word, which He applies graciously to His elect by the Holy Spirit. To sinners guilty of “killing the Prince of life” Peter preached, “Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out” (Acts 3:19). Repentance is necessary for all sinners, including those guilty of sexual sins, which are transgressions against the seventh commandment. Never does God permit the preacher to limit the call to repentance to certain kinds of sinners: thieves, but not murderers; adulterers, but not blasphemers; idolaters, but not those disobedient to parents.

Homosexuality/transgenderism is no exception.

On the face of it, it is now illegal in Canada to command, urge, or exhort a homosexual, a lesbian, or a transgender person to repent of his sin. Possibly, one might call him to repent of his other sins, but not of his sexual sins, because those *define what he is*. On the face of it, it is now illegal in Canada to counsel a person

who is confused or conflicted about his or her sexuality. The only counsel permissible by law is to *affirm* the person in his homosexuality, even if he does not want to be homosexual and even if he wants help in denying worldliness and ungodly lusts (Tit. 2:12). On the face of it, it is now illegal in Canada to counsel a person who is confused about his or her “gender identity” (a biological male who struggles with the desire to be a female and the urge to express himself as a female, for example) and to encourage him or her to be what they biologically are, what God created them to be (Matt. 19:4). The only counsel permissible by law is to *affirm* the person in his or her transgenderism, even if the person does not want to be transgender or to behave in a transgender manner. In fact, on the face of it, it is now illegal in Canada to offer any service designed to “repress or reduce non-heterosexual... behaviour.” One may not even counsel a man who struggles with feelings of same-sex attraction to abstain from sinful sexual behavior. His feelings and behavior must be affirmed, even celebrated as good and wholesome, despite the fact that God’s Word

condemns them as “vile affections” (Rom. 1:26), that it calls homosexuality/lesbianism “the [changing of] the natural use into that which is against nature” (v. 26), and that it describes homosexuality as “unseemly” (Greek: shameful; Rom. 1:27).

Indeed, Paul’s words to former homosexuals must be prohibited too. After naming certain kinds of people (the unrighteous) who will not inherit the kingdom of God, among whom are “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (words describing homosexuals), Paul declares the gospel: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:9, 11).

On the face of it, it is appropriate in Canada to say that about former fornicators (who have, by God’s grace, put away their fornication), former idolaters (who have, by God’s grace, put away their idols), former adulterers (who have, by God’s grace, ended their extramarital affairs), former thieves (who have, by God’s grace, stopped stealing), formerly covetous men (who,

by God’s grace, are no longer greedy for filthy lucre), former drunkards (who, by God’s grace, have put away their wine), former revilers (whose tongues, by God’s grace, have been curbed and tamed), and former extortioners (who, by God’s grace, no longer oppress their neighbors with crippling usury); but the Canadian government draws a line under homosexuality and related matters, saying effectively, “You may not speak of former homosexuals, lesbians, or transgenders—God’s grace cannot change them; in fact, they do not need to be changed.”

A sermon that sets forth God’s Word on human sexuality, including God’s prohibition of homosexual lust and practice, is now—at least on the plain reading of this new law, which gives no religious exceptions—illegal in Canada. A prayer offered by a pastor or a Christian counselor asking God’s grace to help a counselee abstain from fleshly, homosexual lusts is now illegal in Canada. A Bible study in which homosexuality or transgenderism is condemned is now considered illegal in Canada, at least if any homosexuals are in attendance, who

could view such a Bible study as an attempt to change their sexuality or gender identity/expression. Canadian law makes no exceptions for religious activities, offers no protection to pastors or elders, but is a blanket ban on conversion therapy in all its forms. And let us not forget that it is mainly religious people who seek to help people forsake their sins and find mercy: the secular world has no interest in that. Therefore, religious people are the targets of this new law.

I write, “on the face of it,” because the law is sufficiently vague as to need testing in court, which will undoubtedly happen sooner than we think. “Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!” (Is. 5:20). “Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Rev. 2:10).

A ban on conversion therapy is an attack on Christianity and the church of Jesus Christ. Conversion is God’s work of turning a sinner from sin to righteousness, from disobedience to holiness, so that he repents and lives a new, godly life in obedience to God’s commandments. God calls sinners to conversion through the faithful preaching of His Word, which He applies graciously to His elect by the Holy Spirit.... Repentance is necessary for all sinners, including those guilty of sexual sins, which are transgressions against the seventh commandment.



Believing and confessing

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Hallowed be Thy name

Lord's Day 47

Question 122. Which is the first petition?

Answer. “Hallowed be thy name”; that is, grant us, first, rightly to know Thee, and to sanctify, glorify, and praise Thee in all Thy works, in which Thy power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and truth, are clearly displayed; and further also, that we may so order and direct our whole lives, our thoughts, words, and actions, that Thy name may never be blasphemed, but rather honored and praised on our account.

The “Lord’s Prayer” is Jesus’ answer to the request of His disciples, “Lord, teach us to pray.” It can be used as a stand-alone prayer, but it is especially a lesson in praying and a pattern or model for our prayers. And, so, each of its parts deserves careful consideration and understanding.

There are many reasons for us to pray. For example, God is always worthy of prayer and praise; we are not constantly conscious of God; we always have sins and sinfulness to confess; and daily we owe God gratitude for His goodness and provision. Those are all good reasons for us to pray; but the primary reason for prayer is that we are needy, that we are dependent on God. Jesus teaches us this by giving us six petitions to bring to God, six expressions of our need, which petitions are the bulk of the Lord’s Prayer.

In teaching us to pray with requests, Jesus teaches us that we may and must bring all our needs to God and that our heavenly Father cares for us and is ready to hear our prayers. “Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you” (1 Pet. 5:7).

God’s holy name

Each of the petitions demonstrates a need that we have. That is true even of the first three petitions, which have to do with God’s name, kingdom, and will. In the first petition, we are acknowledging that God’s name is holy, and praying that God will help us to recognize this more in all our thinking and living. We need help in seeing the holiness of God’s name.

To be holy is to be set apart in purity. It is to be separated from all that is ordinary or that is defiled, with the purpose of being used for the worship of God. Examples of this abound in the Bible. Israel was a people “holy unto the Lord.” The Levites were a tribe, separat-

ed by God, to serve Him in holy things. The Sabbath, the tabernacle, the temple, the vessels used for worship, the room where the ark was kept, indeed the city of Jerusalem, are all called holy in Scripture because, though ordinary things, they were consecrated for the worship of God. In the New Testament, God’s people are called “saints,” that is, “holy ones” and our bodies are to be kept holy because they are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

When we say that God is holy, we do not mean that He needs to be set apart from the ordinary and sinful, but that He is already distinct. The holiness of God refers not only to His being without sin, but also to the infinite distance that there is between God and all else. His holiness is the sum total of all His glorious perfections. “Who is like unto thee, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like thee, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11).

God’s name stands for all that we know about Him from His self-revelation in Scripture and in the creation. Everything that reveals the “power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and truth” of God is His name. This includes all the personal names and descriptions used for the triune God in Scripture, but also refers to the Scripture as a whole—the truth, the gospel, the promises, and all the works and ways of God. Central to the name of God is His revelation in the saving work of His Son, Jesus Christ; “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world” (John 17:6).

For us, a name is firstly a mere label to distinguish one person or thing from another. A different label does not change the essence of a thing; “A rose, by any other name, would smell as sweet.” However, a name does also refer to one’s reputation, to what you think about the character and quality of a person or thing. This is

by association, but still “a good name is to be chosen rather than great riches” (Prov. 22:1).

When we pray for the hallowing of God’s name, we are not praying that His name, which is already holy, become more holy, but rather that His reputation as the holy God be recognized and advanced in the earth by us. We are praying that we see and understand more clearly the revelation of all His glories in Scripture and in the creation. We want God to be known, honored, and praised by men for who He is.

The answer

The first divine answer to this petition comes through the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ and in sinners believing this gospel. When sinners believe the gospel of Jesus Christ and put their faith in Him as their only Savior and hope, then they are honoring the name and revelation of God, and God is answering this prayer. This, then, is a prayer for missions, that the nations and peoples of the earth might give God’s name its proper place of honor through faith in Jesus Christ. This is a prayer for the spread of the gospel, a prayer that people in every place might come to know the true God through His Son Jesus Christ. “That men may know that thou, whose name alone is Jehovah, art the most high over all the earth” (Ps. 83:18).

The answer, however, is much more personal. God answers this in my life and experience as a believer.

He does this, initially, by giving me His Holy Spirit. What stands in the way of our recognizing the holiness of God is our sin and sinfulness. In Psalm 24 David asks, “Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who shall stand in his holy place?” His answer is, “He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.” This is exactly our need: we have filthy hands and impure hearts. We are as much unholy in ourselves as God is holy in Himself. However, once we have the Holy Spirit, two things change in us. First, in the recognition of God’s holiness, we realize our own sinfulness before Him; and second, by the Holy Spirit we are made new creatures who are sanctified and separated unto God.

Second, God answers this prayer in my life and heart personally by giving me a true spiritual knowledge of His name. This petition is a prayer against spiritual ignorance. We cannot glorify God if we do not know Him. People are busy in our world learning and gaining knowledge about the names of heroes, companies, countries and so on, so that they can glorify those names. There is, however, a Name above all names, that is little known, little studied, and little pursued, and that is the name of God. In this petition we pray not only against the prevailing ignorance of God’s name in this world, but that God may be known by us. And if we are at all praying this with integrity and sincerity, we will ourselves be studying to know more of

God’s name from the Scriptures. A person who has little interest in the Bible and spends almost no time studying it is not being honest when he prays this petition, for the prayer means, “Help us to know Thee, O God.”

One more way that God answers this petition is by making us holy, as He is holy. God answers this prayer by working sanctification in us, so that we “order and direct our whole lives” that His name is honored and praised by our living. As Christians, we carry with us the name and reputation of God. What is your name? Are you identified by others as a Christian? What do you do with the name of God that He has put on you? What do others see of the holiness of God in you? This is what we are praying, that God will make us brighter lights to reflect His glory on this earth.

Our priority

Let this petition, the first, take priority in your prayers and in your daily life. “O Father, my Father, hallowed be Thy name.”

So, ask God to make you holy in your actions. Do not use the members of your body to do those things that are shameful and unholy. Instead, use your feet to spread the gospel. Use your hands in acts of kindness. Use your eyes to behold the glory of God. Use your mouth to speak His praises.

Ask God to make you holy in your words. Do not curse or use bad language that profanes the name of God. Instead use your mouth for praising God, to speak about spiritual things, to tell others of the glory of God.

Ask God to make you holy in your thoughts. Do not fill your mind with violence and impurity. Instead use your mind to think about the lovely, pure, right, true, and excellent things of the Word of God.

Ask God to make you holy in your emotions. Do not be angry and bitter, spiteful and self-pitying. But love the things of God, be gentle, meek, patient, and kind.

Ask God to make you holy in your desires. Do not long after the things of this material life, do not make earthly recognition your goal. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Pray for a holy zeal for the name of God.

In short, ask the Lord to make you holy in all the things you do, say, think, feel, love, and desire.

When we get to heaven, we will not stop praying this prayer. The rest of this model prayer will be fully answered. Then, God’s kingdom will have come perfectly. There, God’s will is going to be realized and followed flawlessly. Finally, in heaven, all our needs will be met, and all our sins overcome.

But to eternity we will still sing and pray with the angels and church triumphant for the honor of God’s holy name. That will be our eternal desire.

Questions for discussion

1. How do we typically divide the six petitions of the Lord's Prayer? How do the first three petitions reflect a need that we have?
2. What is meant by the "name" of God? How often in our day-to-day living do we come into contact with the name of God?
3. Can we 'make' God's name more holy? If not, what is the basic idea that we express in this petition?
4. The Catechism teaches that God's "power, wisdom, goodness, justice, mercy, and truth are clearly displayed" in all His works. What important principle is set down here for education/learning? (cf. Ps. 8:1; 19:1; 111:10).
5. In light of the above-referenced passages, how might we hallow God's name through a study of His creation? How will the knowledge of what God has made affect our prayers?
6. Is the unbeliever able to perceive the holiness of

the name of God from His works in the creation? What is the difference between the knowledge of the natural man and the regenerate? (Cf. Rom. 1:18-21; I Cor. 2:14.)

7. Looking at the Catechism's answer, what are two basic ways that we want God's name to be hallowed?

8. Specifically, name some of the ways that we should order our lives so as to glorify God's name. Can you think of ways that you specifically need to do this better in your life?

9. The Catechism mentions that God's name can be blasphemed by our conduct. Can you think of examples of this from Scripture? Can you think of instances like this in your life?

10. Using a concordance or Bible search program, look up uses of the word "name" in the book of Psalms and write out some examples of this petition.

11. What does Revelation 4:8 teach us about this petition?



When thou sittest in thine house

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

Nurturing our preschool children (4)

Previous articles in this series: June 2021, p. 403.

The spiritual nurture of our children from the time of infancy is vital to the confidence, security, and strength they will exhibit in their future lives. Though the topic "Nurturing Preschool Children" may seem blasé and undeserving of our attention, this could not be further from the truth. The years from birth to the time our children enter school are the most formative years of their lives. Neither do we concern ourselves in these articles with the care given our little children from an earthly, material point of view, though this too will influence their lives in this world. We concern ourselves with careful attention to the *spiritual* nurture of our little children.

We are dealing with methods. In the last article we concentrated on one of three different ways we use in raising our children. As parents, we must teach our children by way of example. We cannot expect our children to live godly if we do not live godly. We cannot expect our children to be spiritually minded if we are

not. We cannot expect our children to know their sin and their need for the cross of Jesus Christ if we do not reveal such in our own lives as parents. Children learn to worship God every Sunday by faithful church attendance on the part of parents. They learn to pray and read God's Word each day by seeing their parents do so. Example is perhaps the most important way to nurture our children in the fear of God.

With this article we take a look at a second way, the way of instruction or teaching. The Bible is unequivocally clear in this matter. No parent may sidestep what is taught in Psalm 78:2-7:

I will open my mouth in a parable: I will utter dark sayings of old: Which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done. For he established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law

in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: That the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children: That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments.

These verses, first of all, define the calling of parents toward their children. They “will not hide” the testimonies of God from their children, but rather, “show” them to the generation to come. Two important truths stand out concerning this calling of parents. First, while instructing their children, fathers and mothers of God’s covenant may not busy themselves with all kinds of other instruction but place the spiritual instruction of their children on the shelf, so to speak. This is hiding the praises of God from our children. On the contrary, parents must “make known” or “declare” what God has taught them.

In the second place, parents must teach their children what they learned from their parents and grandparents (that which our fathers have told us). This needs emphasis, since every generation seems to think that what they have been taught by parents has become antiquated and is no longer useful for the new generation. Parents with infant children and toddlers ought to listen to the wisdom of their parents before following the latest advice drawn from the world’s modern methods.

These verses of Psalm 78 also set forth the *content* of that instruction, that is, *the Word of God* with all its wisdom. The Scriptures set forth “the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done.” They likewise declare to us the commandments and exhortations required of us as children of God’s covenant. From the moment our children lay in our arms, unable yet to give voice to what is in their thoughts, to the time they leave father and mother, parents must instruct their children in the praises, strength, works, and commandments of Jehovah.

Let’s exemplify these.

- *God’s praises*

Hearing a three-year-old singing at the top of her lungs (ah—I need to turn down my hearing aids!) a Psalter number or “Jesus Loves Me.” To watch in church a little child yet unable to read the Psalter she holds before her attempting to mouth the words the church is singing. To see a baby not even a year old make a noise when told to say “Amen,” simply because he knows everyone gets excited to hear him. Praises—all praises! All taught them of their parents.

- *God’s strength*

A little child explains to his grandparents, “I don’t

have to be afraid of the lightning and the thunder! When I was scared, my dad told me that God is speaking to us of how strong He is. If He can send storms, just think of how strong He is to protect us!” At times like these, parents have the opportunity to teach their children Psalm 29. “The voice of Jehovah, the God of all glory, rolls over the waters, the thunders awake; the voice of Jehovah majestic and mighty, is heard and the cedars of Lebanon break” (Psalter, #76).

- *God’s works*

A four-year-old boy rushes up to his father when he comes home from work, “Dad, did you know that God covered the whole world with water? All the wicked people got drowned, but God saved a man and his family in a big boat with all kinds of animals! Mom read me the story at lunchtime!” Little children believe and confess with childlike faith that Jesus was sent by God to save them from their sins. They learn from the mouth of their parents of the death of the Savior on the cross.

- *God’s commandments*

From infancy children learn to pray, first an Amen, then, “Lord bless this food..., and, “Now I lay me down to sleep....” They are instructed to obey their parents, go to church, not to fight with siblings, to share, and so on. It is no wonder that believing children grow up to be the best citizens in a society of lawlessness, immorality, and violence. Walking a godly, upright life is ingrained into their hearts and souls before they even reach the age that they attend school. Who says little children do not receive a proper education in the home prior to school? A teacher once explained to a mother when asked what should be done to prepare her child for school: “Make sure your child learns respect for authority and obedience. I will teach the academics.”

The examples we have cited reveal that the instruction given takes place in two interrelated and necessary ways. First of all, there is *formal instruction*. Formal points to the need for parents to follow a certain form or to use certain methods to instruct children. A formal education of our children does not begin with school. Any parent with a genuine concern for his or her child is aware of that. How many parents start teaching their preschool children their ABCs or 1-2-3s to prepare them for school? There are countless CDs (or whatever new audio/visual device available today) with ‘ditties’ that teach children to sing sounds and words that they might begin to learn the skill of reading. Well, the same is true from a spiritual point of view. There are certain formal methods parents use to teach their little children about God, sin, Jesus Christ, and salvation. These methods of instruction may not wait until the child is about ready to enter school. They should be put to use as soon as a

baby is able to understand (yes, in a very childlike way) the things of the kingdom of heaven.

When a family sits down to eat and that little one-year old is in the high chair barely able to see above the rim of the tray in front of her, Dad teaches her to pray. “Say Amen. A-a-a-a-amen. Amen.” Soon the infant is saying “Amen” (or something that sounds much like it), much to the delight of her parents. Then a few phrases are added. Soon a prayer emerges through the hard labor of parents *teaching* their child to pray. The child learns the importance of prayer as well as words to speak in prayer. The child slowly learns that she is praying to God who provides the food she is eating. Formal instruction.

Father and mother take their little child to church early on. Most of the time the baby sleeps or sits with a few cooing sounds. We all know that at a certain age most children become too loud in church, not yet able to understand that they need to be quiet. Ah yes, take them to nursery or sit in the back of the church with them. But this age soon passes and the child is old enough to know he must sit in church with mom and dad and be quiet. When a child is noisy and gives his parents a hard time, yes, dad gets up and walks out of church (sometimes with a loud wail from his son), only to come back in a little later with his teary-eyed boy to sit and listen to the minister. Formal education.

Mothers while instructing their children in the home teach them Psalter numbers and short Bible verses. They read their children Bible stories. Dad talks with them about what he reads to them at the table after eating. It is not a long drawn-out ‘sermon,’ but just short, easy-to-understand questions or comments molded to instruct children. Formal education.

So the list can go on. We cannot emphasize enough the necessity of this formal education of our children in the things of God’s kingdom. The things taught our little children will stick with them for a lifetime. These things become a part of their lives they will not forget! Parents with little children *must* be busy in the home formally instructing their children in the ways of God. Believing children do not just drop from the sky. God uses the means of godly parents who take their calling seriously to shape and mold the next generation of believers.

The second way of teaching our little children is by means of *informal instruction*. This stands in close connection with our example as parents. Let’s try to exemplify what is meant by *informal* instruction. When the nation of Israel under Joshua crossed over the Jordan River into the promised land, Joshua commanded that twelve large stones be taken out of the Jordan and carried to their camp in Gilgal. They set up these twelve

stones there as a monument. Then Joshua commanded the people in Israel with these words of Joshua 4:21-24: “When your children shall ask their fathers in time to come, saying, What mean these stones? Then ye shall let your children know, saying, Israel came over this Jordan on dry land. For the LORD your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you...that all the people of the earth might know the hand of the LORD, that it is mighty: that ye might fear the LORD your God for ever.” This is what is meant by informal instruction. As our little children grow, they are full of questions. If the right spiritual atmosphere is established in the family, they will also ask questions about the ways of God. At times questions are not asked but a parent is given an excellent opportunity to apply life lessons to a spiritual matter that arises. The point is, when conscious of it, parents are able to establish in their home an *atmosphere* that is conducive to learning the ways of God.

When such instruction is neglected, parents ought not expect their children to grow up to love and fear God. It is true, that God’s grace is powerful and works in the hearts of His people even when parents neglect their calling. But such parents ought not to *assume* God will save their children despite their efforts. As we have stated, godly children do not drop from the sky! Example and instruction are needed to nurture our preschool children. One other method also needs to be applied: discipline. We will take up that matter in another article.

Ignited by the Word

HAVE YOU SUBSCRIBED?

The third issue of *Ignited by the Word* will soon be mailed. There will be **no more** complimentary issues.

If you would still like to receive *Ignited by the Word*, please subscribe at ignitedbytheword.org





Ministering to the saints

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

The elders' work of oversight (5)

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2021, p. 14.

Overseeing the congregation's members

The work of the elders has three main components to it: oversight, instruction, and shepherding. Focusing on the first of those components, previous articles have set forth that the elders must oversee the congregation's worship in general and the preaching and administration of the sacraments in particular, must oversee the work of the officebearers, and must oversee the conduct of the officebearers.

When the elders take seriously that aspect of their work of oversight, they will be ready also to take seriously the oversight of the members of the congregation.

The nature of this oversight

The elders' oversight extends to every member of the congregation, and involves careful attention to each member. Here the work of oversight and of shepherding is combined. The good shepherd attends to every sheep of the flock, examining each sheep for parasites, ensuring each is free of disease, is contentedly enjoying healthy and sufficient food and water, is comfortable, and is free of all fear of danger.

So the elders' oversight of the congregation's members requires the elders to be alert in several ways. First, they will observe whether the lives of the individual members conform outwardly to God's law in every respect. In our relationship to fellow members, to family members (parents, children, siblings), to civil authorities, to fellow Christians, to ungodly unbelievers in society around us, do we manifest the love that God requires of us in His law?

Second, the elders will observe whether the members of the congregation speak and act according to their confession of the Christian religion. Not only in the church's worship, but also in our speech to each other and to others who are outside the church, do we profess and defend the Christian and Reformed faith? We confess the Christian and Reformed faith according to the teachings of Scripture. But does our thinking accord with that basis? What heresies and lies swirl around us

and how do they affect us? Do we think those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report? Do we rest contentedly in the work of Christ alone, and does our knowledge of Him as our Good Shepherd give us peace and rest?

We must not suppose, however, that the oversight of the elders regards only the members' outward conduct. True, the elders cannot see the hearts, motives, and inner thoughts of the church's members. However, the elders still must promote the inner, spiritual well-being of the members; they must attend, as best they can, to the members' relationship to God in their souls. After all, Hebrews 13:17 says that the elders "watch for your souls." This is a striking word: it indicates that the elders must do more than observe our outward spiritual life; they must also guard our inner spiritual life. Though unable to see our hearts, the elders can and must observe our spiritual weaknesses, and warn us against particular dangers that we face in light of these weaknesses.

Consequently, the elders will ask whether we are receiving and being nourished by the preaching of the gospel. This is a different matter than ensuring that the pastor's sermons are edifying. The elders must make that judgment too. However, it is one thing to ensure that the sermons are edifying; it is another to inquire whether the members are receiving the preaching well. A sheep that will not eat wholesome, nourishing grass is a concern to the shepherd; that sheep is likely sick. Likewise, if any member is not receiving the sound preaching of the gospel well, the elders will have a concern for that member; likely the member has some spiritual weakness.

As the elders watch for our souls, they will also observe our involvement in the life of the congregation and our relationship to other members. They will note our zeal, or apparent lack thereof, for divine worship. They will inquire into our family and personal devotional life. They will investigate whether in our vocations we are aiming to God's glory, or whether the circumstances of our vocational life are a hindrance to our spiritual

life. They will ask what we are being taught at college, or what influences we find at our jobs, and how we are responding to it. They will warn us against those specific sins that we seem prone to commit, and the spiritual dangers around us.

All these, and more, will be their concern. And when they detect spiritual problems in our lives, they will do what they can to address them. Particularly, they will point us to Christ, our all-sufficient Savior, and to God's Word. They will point us to His righteousness, as being sufficient to cover our guilt, and to His sanctifying life and power, as being sufficient to empower us to godliness. That is part of their role as shepherds.

A word to the elders, then: Take the oversight of the flock! Be visible, be present, in the lives of the members! Know your sheep!

The reasons for this oversight

That the elders have such oversight and may ask such probing questions might take us aback. We might think, "My life is my business. Why should the elders stick their nose into my life so intrusively? And, as men, they are as sinful as I am; who are they to speak to me about my sins and weaknesses?"

The questions are real. Some people leave churches that have elders who take oversight seriously, and claim that their reason for leaving is that the elders tried to be too involved in their life. Other times, some remain in the church but complain that the elders are involved in their life. So I will defend that the elders may take this oversight of the members, and not only in general but also in specific ways.

First, as the Bible teaches, God gave them authority to do so. The Holy Spirit has made them overseers (Acts 20:28), so that they must give answer to God (Heb. 13:17). Such oversight *is* the work of their office.

Acts 20:28 reads: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers...." It requires the elders to take heed (diligently attend to, including being aware of any dangers that would threaten the flock) and to oversee (watch over, superintend, and guard). This calling extends to "all the flock." The addition of the word "all" indicates that the elders are not merely to watch over the whole congregation generally, but to observe the individual members, each and every one, specifically.

Hebrews 13:17 teaches God's people that the congregation's leaders "watch for your souls, as they that must give account." This also indicates that the watchfulness of the elders extends to individual members and to every member.

Second, this is the work of a shepherd. What shepherd contents himself to watch over the flock generally, but ignores individual sheep? How can a shepherd who ignores individual sheep, so that they suffer from parasites or other dangers, claim to be watching over the whole flock?

Third, this is the work of Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, whom the elders represent and through whom He works. Do we not want Jesus Christ to notice our every need, our weaknesses, assaults, struggles, and infirmities? Do we not desire Him to assure us that He cares, is present with us, guards us, warns us, comforts us, builds us up? The child of God does desire this! And the word of Christ is that He is always with us and will not leave us nor forsake us (Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5). One way in which He fulfills that promise is through the work of godly, faithful elders in His church.

Fourth, we *need* this oversight. We are sheep; we have gone astray, are prone to go astray, and will go astray again (Ps. 119:176; Is. 53:6). This is true of every child of God, including the elders. I add this, to respond to the charge that because they are sinners, they ought leave me alone. The charge is wrong. The truth of the matter is that every elder as an individual, and every committee of elders that meets with members of the congregation, are themselves subject to the body of elders, and in need of the same oversight that every other member needs. That they are sinners is no reason to despise their oversight; rather, it is a reason to expect that their oversight will be mixed with love and compassion, for they understand our need.

A word to the congregation, then: Willingly receive your elders, and submit to their oversight! If you think they have truly wronged you, or are not compassionate and loving in their dealings with you, bring this to their attention in the loving and gracious way in which you desire to be treated. But do not refuse their oversight. To refuse the oversight of elders is one way in which apostasy, a rejection of the Christian faith and the church of Christ, manifests itself (Heb. 13:7, 17).

The manner of this oversight

The means by which the elders oversee the congregation are varied. The preaching of the gospel, family visitation, personal visits by an individual elder in a pastoral setting, personal visits by a committee of elders in a more official setting, are all part of it.

Regardless of the means they use, faithful elders will exercise this oversight in a Christ-like manner. They will manifest love, gentleness, and compassion. The manner in which faithful elders oversee the flock will reveal that they are indeed qualified for their office (Tit.

1; I Tim. 3). The elders must guard against being harsh, impatient, and lacking compassion for the sheep. Even when admonishing or rebuking, the elders must manifest patience and love.

The instruction to elders in I Peter 5:2-3 emphasizes the necessity of a right manner of taking oversight: “Taking oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God’s heritage, but being ensamples to the flock.” “Not by constraint, but willingly”—that is, the elders must not do their work just because they have to, but they must have a heart for it and undertake it with zeal toward God. “Of a ready mind”—that is, with eagerness and readiness. May God give us elders whose oversight of us is not motivated by any hope for personal gain, but in genuine love for our souls!

Strikingly, the verse also says “neither as being

lords.” While the elders are in positions of authority, and are overseers, they are not “above” the people but “below” the people. The word “being lords” refers to those who are placed over, and who have a significant measure of control over the people underneath them. Often such can become tyrants. But “ensamples,” or examples, are those who understand the people and are one with the people.

When the congregation sees our elders overseeing our lives in this way—humbly, exemplary, Christ-like—we will submit to them eagerly. Not to submit to their good instruction and correction, even if we see their sins and weaknesses, is a sin on our part. God give all of us to guard against it. But as readily as they do their work in love, so readily will God’s people receive their work in love, when we see our elders overseeing us in the right manner.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Dr. Brendan Looyenga, member of Zion Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

In Thy light shall we see light (2)

In the previous article of this series (January 15, 2022), we began a discussion of Psalm 36:9b, which contains the phrase that serves as the title for this series. This profound and enigmatic phrase points us to the first of God’s creatures—light. The prior article explained a few aspects of light from a scientific perspective, which reveals God as the Creator of energy in all of its various forms. This time we turn from the science to the theology of light.

The wide variety of scriptural uses for the word “light,” which occurs over 250 times in the King James Version, mirrors the marvelous complexity of light from a scientific perspective.¹ A careful study of these references in Scripture indicates that *light represents all that which is revealed by God through His spoken word and in the person of Christ, especially His favor, truth, and righteousness*. The components of this definition can

be demonstrated by a host of representative passages, to which we now turn.

Revelation

Significant purpose is implied by God’s wisdom in setting forth light as His first creature. While God’s last works of creation, His image-bearing friends Adam and Eve, were certainly the pinnacle of His handiwork from the point of view of redemptive history, the very first thing that He made also demonstrates God’s grand purpose for creation. That purpose is to reveal Himself in all His glory and majesty, specifically in the person of His Son (Col. 1:15-17).

Most of the texts that refer to light in a literal sense point back to God’s creative act in the beginning, emphasizing that He is the source of all that we can see and know. A good example of this is Psalm 104:2, which clearly references the first and second days of creation in its ode to the unsurpassed greatness of God. Several other passages are even more overt in connecting light to the concept of revelation, using phrases such as “He revealeth” or “will make manifest” as a parallel to the concept of light (see Dan. 2:22; I Cor. 4:5; Eph. 5:13-

¹ It should be noted that the KJV uses the word “light” in ways other than in reference to the form of energy created on the first day, which is why the word is more common in this translation than most others. Among these other uses the most common is in reference to that which lacks weight or significance (for example, see I Sam. 18:23, II Kings 3:18).

14). So clear is this relation that we continue to use it as a common idiom in the English language. We readily understand that when something is “brought to light,” it will be a new revelation to us (Job 28:11).²

The mode of revelation

Additional concepts associated with light in Scripture build upon the central theme of revelation by providing further insight into both its *mode* and *content*. The primary mode by which God has chosen to reveal His counsel is through His spoken word, which is why Scripture is often referred to as a “lamp” or a “light” on the pathway of life (Ps. 119:105 and 130; Prov. 6:23). The Old Testament *shekinah* (pillar of cloud/fire) is also typological in this sense. God’s will concerning Israel’s wanderings through the wilderness was revealed by a pillar of illuminating fire that constantly showed them the way to go. Having been given the full revelation of God’s Word in the canon of Scripture, which Peter refers to as “a more sure word of prophecy,” we too have a “light that shineth in a dark place” to which we do well to take heed (II Pet. 1:19).

While the entirety of God’s inspired Word is the revelation of Himself and His counsel concerning the purpose of creation, it is in the person of Jesus Christ that God is most fully revealed in all His glory. The first chapter of the book of John establishes a direct relation between the revelatory power of words and the person of Christ when it refers to Jesus as both the “Word made flesh” and “true Light” by which we behold the glory of God “full of grace and truth.”

There can be little doubt that John’s reference to Jesus by these names was intended to remind his audience of the great messianic passages from the book of Isaiah that prophesied of a coming Light who would illuminate the dark state of Israel (see Is. 9:2; 10:17; 60:1).

Biblical references to Jesus Christ as “the Light” are

² This passage is one of the curious parallels to Psalm 36:9, which contains the twin concepts of great waters and light. It is possible that what both Job and the psalmist are referencing is the great creative act of God in the first day of creation when He brought forth light upon the chaotic waters of the creation.

further confirmed by His own repeated claims to be “the light of the world” (John 8:12, 9:5; 12:35; 12:46). Jesus’ Jewish audience, who were undoubtedly familiar with the prophecies of Isaiah, could not have possibly missed the significance of these words by which Jesus claimed to be the Messiah. The very fact that Jesus had to depart and hide Himself after making this direct claim (12:36) makes clear that those who hated and rejected Him knew exactly what He meant. The implications of such a claim are unmistakable, as Paul notes in Colossians 2:9: “for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.” One who is the “light of the world” must be very God!

The content of revelation

Light is revelation and light often refers to the twofold mode of revelation, namely God’s Word and the person of His Son. But light in Scripture also frequently refers to the *content* of what God reveals. Three specific aspects of God’s revelation are intimately connected to the concept of light: favor, truth, and righteousness.

When we speak of God’s *favor* in connection with light, we must understand it to represent the particular grace of God toward His elect people in Christ (Ps. 112:4). The most notable representation of this concept can be found in the phrase “the light of thy countenance,” which occurs repeatedly throughout the Psalms (see Ps. 4:6; 44:3; 89:15; 90:8). This, too, is the context in which Psalm 36:9 is found. The surrounding verses (vv. 7, 10) speak of God’s “lovingkindness” demonstrated through His protection

and provision for His children. The light of God is a display of His favor toward the “children of men.”

The converse of this idea, that God turns His face away in anger at the sins of His children, is represented by the antithesis of light, which is darkness (Lam. 3:2). The contrast between light and darkness finds its parallel in the contrast between life and death, which similarly reflect the contrast between God’s favor and anger throughout Scripture (Ps. 56:13). This is the typical usage in the book of Job, wherein Job connects darkness to the grave as he laments his dire circumstances at the hand of God. This is also the symbolic importance of

the plague of darkness in Egypt and the three hours of darkness that occurred when Christ was on the cross. Both point to death as being the time when “the light of God’s countenance” was removed from the creation or its inhabitants.

Another aspect of light in Scripture is its connection to the concept of *truth*. All that is revealed by God in His Word is truth. Apart from this Word, and the eyes of faith to behold it, natural man is left in the darkness and ignorance of his sin without even comprehending the misery of this condition (Job 24:13). This is why the *knowledge* of salvation is closely related to truth and light. Several passages throughout both testaments of Scripture make this connection, indicating that the revelation of God’s gracious salvation brings light and happiness to those who receive it through the gift of faith (Ps. 43:3; Isa. 50:10; Act 26:18).

It is significant that some of Christ’s most noted miracles during His earthly ministry involved restoration of sight to the blind. Darkness and blindness are synonymous with ignorance of the truth. Restoration of vision, therefore, represents the opening of one’s eyes of faith. One of these instances, found in John 9, is particularly helpful in demonstrating this relation. In this text, a man who was blind from birth was healed by Jesus and simultaneously brought to faith in Jesus as the Christ. Both his physical eyes and his spiritual eyes were opened at once to the fact that Jesus was indeed “the light of the world” (9:5). This event and others like it are the fulfillment of Isaiah 42:16, where God declares, “And I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not; I will lead them in paths that they have not known: I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight. These things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.”

The third metaphorical use of light in Scripture is in reference to *righteousness*. One of the most frequent ways that this relation is expressed is once again through the contrast between light and darkness, which is often used to illustrate the difference between good and evil or righteousness and wickedness (II Cor. 6:14). This is the most common use of light in both the book of Isaiah (see 5:20; 59:9) and in the writings of John. John 3:19-21 is worth quoting here because it brings together several of the concepts that have been noted thus far:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God.

Note especially how righteousness is characterized as “doing truth,” which is very similar to the idea of “walking in the light” that the apostle uses in I John 1:7.

The connection between righteousness and light is also used in Scripture to represent the character of God in all His perfections (I John 1:5; Rev. 21:23-24; 22:5). Like the person of Christ, Jehovah is Himself sometimes personified as light. The psalmist declares “the LORD is my light and salvation” (Ps. 27:1) and Isaiah promises that “the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory” (Is. 60:19-20). In His very essence God is light because He is the standard of righteousness. This standard is codified in the law, which is the clearest revelation of God’s righteous character in Scripture. It is no wonder then that the law is also referred to as light in several passages of His Word (Prov. 6:23; Is. 51:4; Hos. 6:5b).

Those who know the righteous LORD by a true faith and have been sanctified by Christ will seek to follow His will by obeying the commandments of Scripture. This is why the daily walk of God’s children is also referred to as “light” in Scripture. Just as the moon reflects the light of the sun, the walk of believers reflects the righteous character of God (Prov. 4:18; Is. 2:5).

This imagery is repeatedly presented throughout Scripture as a *definitive* truth declared by God when members of the church are referred to as a “light unto the Gentiles” (Is. 42:6; 49:6; 60:3; Luke 2:32; Acts 13:47) or as “light of the world” (Matt. 5:14-16). At the same time, however, it is also frequently presented in the *imperative* form of a command (Luke 11:35-36; Eph. 5:8; I John 2:8-10). This is perhaps most striking in Romans 13:8-14, where Paul follows his vigorous defense of the free gospel of justification by faith alone with the command to obey the law as an expression of love: “The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light” (v. 12). The children of God are light. And they are commanded to walk in that light. Both are equally important metaphorical uses of the word in reference to God’s wonderwork of sanctification.

Certainly, more could be said about the manifold uses of light in Scripture because it is such a common metaphor. What we have described above, however, should provide sufficient insight for us to return to Psalm 36:9 in our next article. In that final installment of this series, we will explore the potential meaning—or perhaps better, meanings—of the phrase, “In thy light shall we see light.”



Go ye into all the world

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

The three-self formula and PRCA foreign missions (6)

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2022, p. 185.

A third example of the PRCA's commitment to the three-self formula in foreign missions is her work in Ghana, West Africa.

After many years of contact with individuals in Accra, Kumasi, and some other places in Ghana and according to the reports of several emissaries that visited these contacts in Ghana in the early 1990s, in June 1996 synod approved opening Ghana as a PRCA foreign mission field and the sending of foreign missionaries to Accra, Ghana. Synod appointed Hull (Iowa) PRC as the calling church. Hull PRC called and sent three missionaries to labor in Ghana. The first missionary was Rev. Richard Moore, who with his wife, Mrs. Jannet Moore, served in the work from 1999 to 2002. Rev. and Mrs. Wayne Bekkering served on the field from 2001 to 2005. Rev. and Mrs. Rodney Miersma served in Ghana from 2003 until the field was closed in 2006. Several missionary assistants were sent to help the missionaries in their day-to-day life in that developing country. The mission work was carried out in a sharply cross-cultural and cross-economic setting amongst a population with a religious diversity of 45% traditionally animistic, 43% Christian, and 12% Muslim.

According to *Standard Bearer* articles on the subject in 1995, the mission work in Ghana was different than the PRCA's work in Jamaica or in Singapore in its method of entry into the field of labor. What made the method of entry into the Ghanaian field unique, and a first for the PRCA, was that it began with no particular group of believers. When Ghana was approved as a field of labor for PRCA foreign missions, synod was not responding to a Macedonian call to "come over and help us" from a previous existing, core group. Instead, synod approved that the mission work would begin in Accra, Ghana, "with a few committed believers to whom we can preach and give instruction."¹ The intention of synod was that the mission work would be independent of a previously established and un-instituted gathering of believers and their seed, and it would seek

the establishment of a church in the city of Accra from whomever would eventually gather under the preaching of the Word. According to the missionary's reports from Ghana, that was the method implemented at the beginning of the work.

Although the method of entry into Ghana was something new for the PRCA, its stated goal expressed a continuing commitment to the three-self formula. In the decisions of synod to begin their mission work in the capital city of Accra, one of the grounds included a description and an application of the three-self formula to the proposed work in Accra, Ghana. It stated that

[there] is also another principle consideration to be kept in mind. When establishing indigenous churches in a third-world country, the goal that needs to be met is to make these churches self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. (Cf. the book by John L. Nevius entitled *Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*.) If we begin a work in a remote village, these three important requirements of an indigenous church will be long in coming. To be self-governing requires men with an education and an ability to read and study the Bible. To be self-supporting requires men who are beyond mere subsistence living. They must have jobs which earn for them enough money to support the church. To be self-propagating there must be a proper family structure in order that the covenant might be continued in the generations of believers, and they must have finances for mission work. This will be able to be achieved more rapidly if a work is begun in the city with families that have an education and employment and children. Most of the contacts we have in the city are educated and self-supporting. To begin our work among these people would place us a step ahead of the work we performed in Jamaica.²

Apparently, the FMC had studied the demographics of those among whom the PRCA labored in Jamaica and of the middle-class people among whom the FMC

¹ PRCA Acts of Synod 1996, Art. 70, p. 3.

² PRCA Acts 1996, Art. 70, p. 2.

proposed to labor in the city of Accra. Synod adopted the FMC's conclusion that the goal of the establishment of a self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating church institute looked optimistic within the city of Accra in comparison to the PRCA's past mission experience in the hills of the Jamaican field.

When starting a mission work in the fashion the PRCA did in Ghana, one would not expect much discussion about the three-self formula in the work. In fact, references to the three-self formula in the records do not appear until a few years after 1999, when the first missionary began laboring. This absence of specific references was not because the goal had been forgotten, but rather because the first few years of labor involved the gathering and development of contacts and a stable gathering of people in the weekly worship, catechism, and Bible study activities of the mission station.

As far as we can tell, it was not until January 2001 that the missionary in an article in the *Standard Bearer* mentioned something related to the self-propagating principle. He described the results of the preaching of the Word among members in the mission station in the town of Ashaley Botwe, which is located on the outer fringes of Accra. The missionary reported that "...as God's children come under the preaching they speak of the Word that they have heard to others, and bring others to come and hear."³ The periodic newsletters from the field around that time indicate that same activity of the mission members inviting others to the mission station's Sunday worship services and weekly Bible study.

In February 2002, the missionary reported the need for the training of men for the work of the elders and deacons, and also specific training for the office of the ministry of the Word. In regards to the latter, the missionary reported one particular man, who regularly translated sermons and lectures in the TWI language, that appeared to be suitable for training and the work of the ministry of the Word.

However, two years later in regards to any progress in the development of the mission station towards the goal of an indigenous church, the FMC reported to synod that

there continues to be at this time a lack of men capable to serve in the church offices of a future congregation there. That does not mean there is no potential whatsoever. The missionaries do see potential in the young people and young adults. However, at this time there are only a few who might be ready to be trained to serve as officebearers.⁴

This information indicated that there was a conscientious desire to monitor the work, to measure the progress of the work, and to labor in the work according to the goal and principle of the three-self formula.

This continuing commitment was evident when, after a year of investigation, the FMC and calling church came to the difficult but realistic conclusion that the mission work needed to be brought to a closure. The conclusion of the FMC's comprehensive assessment in 2005 was that

the grounds for beginning the labor in the city of Accra...namely, that of establishing a self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating congregation, cannot be fulfilled in the present location of our work.⁵

In support of that analysis, the FMC noted some errors and factors on the mission field that hindered progress in the mission labors. In regards to the self-support principle, there were errors with the handling of money. In regards to the other two aspects of the three-self formula, the evidence showed that

(1) In the past year there has been a marked decline in the number of those faithfully attending the worship services and Bible studies.

(2) After several years of labor, we are left at present without any men who have shown themselves capable of serving as officebearers.⁶

Synod agreed with the analysis that there appeared to be no prospect of a self-supporting, self-propagating, and self-governing congregation from our mission labors, and approved the closure of the field.

This example illustrates a conscientious commitment to the three-self formula, even though the Lord led the work toward a painful and disappointing closure for various reasons that He brought to light. This historical example shows an exemplary willingness to self-examine ongoing mission work so that mission work is not being done just for the sake of doing mission work, but rather in faithfulness to the Lord of the harvest. Such self-examination can be undoubtedly painful, especially when errors may come to light. Yet, such examination, in a spirit of transparency before the Lord and a willingness to learn and, if necessary, to reform, is necessary for an ongoing commitment to the three-self formula in obedience to the Lord of the harvest.

In the next article, we will look at one more example of the three-self formula in the involvement of the PRCA—its mission work in the Philippines.

3 R. Moore, "From the Mission House in Ghana," *Standard Bearer* (Vol. 77), 159.

4 PRCA Acts of Synod 2004, Suppl. 22, I, A, 4, p. 169.

5 PRCA Acts of Synod 2005, Art. 45, pp. 44-46.

6 PRCA Acts 2005, Art. 45, c, (2), p. 45.

Pertaining to the churches in common— Sister churches—PRC in the Philippines



You will recall that Rev. Vernon Ibe, in the January 1 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, provided an informative and helpful update regarding the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. As a follow up, we include here some recent pictures of the two congregations in the PRCP, namely the Berean PRC (30 families—top photo), and Provident PRC (15 families—bottom photo). The photos were taken at the time of Rev. Dan and

Leah Holstege's farewell in November 2021. Unfortunately, not all the members of the congregations were available when the pictures were taken, but we trust the pictures will nevertheless give you an idea of the make-up of each church and will serve us well in getting to know better and being more mindful of our dear sister in the Philippines. Let us continue to keep them in our thoughts and prayers.



Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Dave Kamps and his sons Tyler and Jordan in the death their father and grandfather, **Leon Kamps**, who died at the age of 81. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (II Corinthians 5:1).

Rev. D. Noorman, President
Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Cornerstone PRC extend our Christian sympathies to Anna Mae Nymeyer and her family in the death of her husband, **Cornelius W.H. “Case” Nymeyer**, who went to be with his Lord on December 1, 2021. “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them” (Revelation 14:13).

Rev Audred Spriensma, President
Paul DeYoung, Clerk

Announcements continued

Resolution of sympathy

The Adult Fellowship Society of Redlands, CA would like to express their sincere sympathy to our members, Duane and Esther Huisken, their sons Colin and Kim Huisken, Henry and Melissa Huisken, and their mother Donna Huisken in the sudden passing away of a beloved sister, aunt, and daughter, **Leah Huisken**. “Let, I pray thee, thy merciful kindness be for my comfort according to thy word unto thy servant” (Psalm 119:76).

Rev. Matt Kortus, President

Laurie Jabaay, Secretary

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to Jeff and Sara Potjer in the death Jeff’s father, **Carl Potjer**, who died at the age of 84. “I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. D. Noorman, President

Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC express our Christian sympathy to George and Michelle Bodbyl in the death Michelle’s father, **Terry Sall**, who died at the age of 77. “And Lord haste the day when my faith shall be sight.... Even so, it is well with my soul.” (“It is Well With My Soul”—Horatio Spafford).

Rev. D. Noorman, President

Tom VanderWoude, Clerk

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Redlands, CA on Wednesday, March 2, 2022, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Redlands’ Consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. W. Bruinsma

February 6—By Faith Israel Departs Egypt
Hebrews 11:28, 29

February 13—The Utter Destruction of Jericho
Hebrews 11:30

February 20—By Faith Rahab Received the Spies
Hebrews 11:31

February 27—Faith That Endures
Hebrews 11:32-38

Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2022-2023 academic year should make application at the March 17, 2022 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student’s Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor’s degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the seminary’s website (prcts.org).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 17 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the
Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
Joel Minderhoud, Secretary

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.