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Jesus' farewell

Rev. James Slopsema

The PRCA and the true/false church

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Nineveh's children and cattle

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Authority

The requirement: S.H.O.P.

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Thy kingdom come

Rev. Rodney Kleyn



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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of First PRC (Grand Rapids, MI)

Jesus' farewell

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

John 19:26-27

Jesus spoke but seven times during the six hours of suffering on the cross. The first crossword was spoken after the soldiers nailed Him to the cross at 9:00 A.M.: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." The second crossword was spoken later in the morning to the penitent thief who sought salvation from Jesus: "Today thou shalt be with me in paradise."

And now we come to the third crossword that was spoken still later in the morning. Jesus' mother Mary and John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, step forward from the crowd and approached Jesus. Speaking to Mary but nodding to John, Jesus said, "Woman, behold thy son!" Speaking then to John, but nodding to Mary, Jesus said, "Behold thy mother!" And immediately John took Mary to his house.

This is a very significant crossword. Jesus was saying farewell to His mother as He faced death. What a sad moment for both Mary and Jesus. We must see that the pain of this farewell constituted part of Jesus' atoning suffering. But there is more. Jesus was also providing for the care of His mother after His death. Jesus did this not only as her son but also as her Savior. So also does the crucified Jesus provide for the care of all His people.

A sad farewell

Jesus' farewell was sad first of all for Mary. Jesus was Mary's son. It is true that Jesus is God's eternal Son. But He was also Mary's son, her firstborn, her own flesh and blood. Undoubtedly, Mary was very close to Jesus. He was the perfect son, who honored His mother with perfect love. Joseph, her husband, had evidently died, since no mention is made of him during Jesus' ministry. Mary had relied a great deal on her firstborn son, Jesus. How difficult, therefore, the events of the past several

hours must have been for Mary. Jesus' enemies had arrested Him, condemned Him to death, and crucified Him. Soon her beloved son would die and she would lose Him. And now before He dies, Jesus says farewell to His mother. How dreadfully sad.

But Jesus was more than Mary's son. He was also her Savior. Mary had understood this from the very beginning. An angel had announced His birth to her, informing her that her son would be great; He would be called the Son of the highest; God would give to Him the throne of His father David (Luke 1:35). This wonderful message of the angel had been confirmed by the miracle of the virgin birth as well as by the whole of Jesus' life, especially His short ministry of three and a half years. Consequently, Mary had followed Him, pinning all her hopes of salvation on Him, as had others. But now all her hopes and dreams were dashed. Mary, as the others, did not understand the death of Jesus. All now appeared to be lost. Their hopes and dreams were shattered as they saw Jesus crucified and about to die. What a horrible defeat this seemed to be! How sad, therefore, for Mary was this farewell of Jesus.

This farewell was also sad for Jesus.

Death is very painful. And perhaps the greatest pain in death is the fact that death severs all earthly ties. This certainly is true of those who are left behind in death. Death tears from your life someone whom you have grown to love, trust, and depend upon so that a void is left. The closer the person was to you, the deeper the hurt. But the pain is no less intense for the one who is dying. We are all of the earth earthy so that all our life here below is closely tied to this earth. But when we die, we leave it all behind. We leave behind all that we have labored for and accumulated. And, above all, we leave behind our loved ones. How painful it is to say farewell in death, even when we die in the Lord and know that heaven awaits us.

And it was no less painful for Jesus. Jesus is not only God; He is truly man. According to His human nature He was of the earth earthy, just as we are. Jesus had strong earthly ties, especially to His disciples. But closest to Him was His beloved mother. And now Jesus

was about to lose it all through death. And the greatest earthly loss was His mother Mary. This loss is reflected in the very way Jesus addressed Mary—not mother but woman. How painful this was for Jesus.

A necessary farewell

This sad farewell was necessary for Jesus, first of all, to atone for sin. Jesus came into the world to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). This required atonement for their sins. To save His people from their sins required that He take the penalty of death that His people had incurred and bear it all away. That death is the eternal death of hell

that Christ experienced on the cross. But Christ must also suffer physical death with all its pain, including the breaking of all earthly ties. That also is the punishment for our sin. The pain that Jesus suffered in this sad farewell to His mother was part of His atoning suffering for sin.

But Jesus' farewell was also necessary so that Jesus might focus on a new and better relationship He has with Mary and with all of God's people. We who belong to Jesus Christ have relationships on two different levels that we enjoy in this life. On the earthly, physical level there are the natural ties of husband and wife, parent and child, brother and sister, and more. In Christ, however, there are also higher, spiritual ties that are enjoyed only in the salvation that Jesus brings to His people. On that higher, spiritual level we are the children of God. God is our Father who has adopted us and transforms us into His image through a spiritual rebirth. We belong to the family of God in which we are all brothers and sisters of each other. And Jesus is our eldest Brother. We have and enjoy these spiritual ties only in the power of Jesus' atoning death.

Furthermore, these spiritual ties are far superior to the earthly, physical ties that we have. This is evident from the fact that our earthly ties are only temporary, whereas our spiritual ties in the family of God are everlasting. The Bible tells us that in heaven all earthly relationships will cease. In heaven, for example, there will be no marriage (Matt. 22:23-30). Neither, therefore, will there be the parent-child relationship. All these belong only to this life. However, the spiritual ties we have in Jesus Christ will remain and carry over into the Father's house of many mansions. In fact, in eternity our spiritual ties in the family of God are perfected.

We will be freed from the sin that hinders our present relationships. This will bring us closer to our heavenly Father, our eldest Brother, and to all our brothers and sisters in Christ. Nor will we miss the old relationships of this life. And so, as Jesus was about to leave this life to enter into His Father's house of many mansion, He broke His earthly ties with Mary. While on the earth,

Jesus had a twofold relationship with Mary. From an earthly point of view He was her eldest son. From a higher, spiritual point of view He was her eldest Brother.

Now that Jesus was about to leave this life to enter into His Father's house of many mansions, Jesus broke the earthly tie of being Mary's son that He may focus on His work of being Mary's eldest Brother.

A loving farewell

We see in this farewell the loving concern of Jesus for Mary, His mother. It had been Jesus' responsibility to provide for the care of His widowed mother. This was His responsibility as her firstborn son. But it was especially His duty as her Savior. And so, as Jesus was about to depart in death, His concern was directed towards Mary's care. It would have been natural for Jesus to commit her care to the hands of His brothers and sisters according to the flesh. However, they had not believed in Him as had Mary. They would not embrace Him as the Savior until after His resurrection and exaltation. And so Jesus committed the care of Mary to His beloved disciple John. Notice closely what He said. To Mary He said, "Woman, behold thy son!" And to John He said, "Behold thy mother!" The meaning is that Mary must view John as her son to provide for her. And John must view Mary as his mother to provide for her. What a loving and tender farewell!

In like manner Jesus provides for all whom the Father has given Him. On the basis of His atoning sacrifice the exalted Jesus is preparing for us a place in His Father's house of many mansions. In anticipation of taking us home Christ has sovereignly brought us into the family of God. And until the time that we are taken to our heavenly home, Jesus as our Savior and eldest Brother provides for our care, as He did with Mary. While on the earth we have many needs, both spiritual and physical. But Jesus our Savior and eldest Brother graciously provides for our every need until we are safely home.



Editorial

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

The PRCA and the true/false church

The issue

Members of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) are thinking about and discussing doctrinal truths with renewed fervency. This is one of the good fruits of the controversy through which the Lord Jesus is bringing us.

God's people have been focusing primarily on truths related to *soteriology* (the doctrine of salvation), which has been the specific realm of the doctrinal controversy. But there has also been renewed interest in *ecclesiology* (the doctrine of the church). Specifically, discussion has centered on the distinction between the true and the false church.

This distinction has garnered attention on account of statements made by those who have recently left the PRC. At first, they charged that the PRC were “apostatizing” and labeled them an “apostatizing church.” In departing, they took care not to call the denomination “apostate” or “false.” But, within a matter of only a few months, the language changed.

One leader began to claim that the PRC are in fact false, apostate churches, worthy of the labels of “whore” and “Babylon.” The PRC were explicitly likened to the Roman Catholic Church and Satanic cults. He argued that distinguishing between “apostatizing” and “apostate” is too confusing. The ministers of the PRC as a class were branded as “vipers,” “white-washed sepulchers,” and “murderers.” The leader presented this not only as his own personal estimation of the PRC, but insisted that all the members of his group “must go that far,” with the warning that “if we draw back, we become the whore.” He forbade his members from attending worship services in the PRC, for in doing so they would be “join[ing] themselves to the whore.” He was willing to admit that not all the members of the PRC are reprobate, but that some of God's elect may be there in the same way that some of God's elect may still be in Rome.

In a sermon on the mockery of the prophet Elisha by the children of Bethel (cf. II Kings 2), another leader described Bethel in terms of a false church: There was

rejection of the Word of God and Christ-less worship; she was dead; there was no worship of God and no true doctrine of God; she was full of unbelief, carnality, and profanity; she was full of those who hate the Lord, His truth, His sovereignty, His grace, His Son; she does not know her sin and does not desire salvation. He went on to speak of such a church in terms of her children: “The appalling iniquity of Bethel's departure from the living God, rejection of Christ, rejection of the true worship of God was revealed in the children. Bethel is no house of God at all—it's a house of wickedness. That church is a dead church, its worship is Christ-less, displeasing to God. And its children are wicked. Bethel cannot produce believing children. It cannot because the judgment of God rests on Bethel.” He traced this to God's hatred of such a church: “The Lord didn't love Bethel. That explains Bethel's children—the Lord didn't love her. That explains Bethel's curse—the Lord did not love her.” Then, he revealed that he had in view the PRC by saying: “I, as you, came out of Bethel. You came out. You were brought out because God loved you. He wouldn't have you perish.” His understanding, therefore, is that the PRC are without Christ, a dead church, without the worship of God, devoid of the Word, full of unbelief and carnality, filled with hatred for God, incapable of producing believing children, and cursed and hated by God.

These statements at the very least imply an absolute distinction between the true church and the false, imply a denial of true churches being more or less pure, and imply that one's own denomination is the only true church.

In light of these charges, it comes as no surprise that members of the PRC have a lively interest in the distinction between a true church and a false church. In the first few articles in this series I plan to set forth the proper understanding of that distinction, and then in a few other articles to see how this all applies to the PRC.

The Belgic Confession

To gain a proper understanding of the distinction

between a local, instituted church that is true and one that is false, we must begin with the Belgic Confession, where this distinction is most clearly taught in Article 29.

Article 29 begins by describing the three identifying marks of a true church of Christ: “If the pure doctrine of the gospel is preached therein; if she maintains the pure administration of the sacraments as instituted by Christ; if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin.” The article then summarizes: “In short, if all things are managed according to the pure Word of God, all things contrary thereto rejected, and Jesus Christ acknowledged as the only Head of the church.”

Then, Article 29 identifies the marks of the false church: “She ascribes more power and authority to herself and her ordinances than to the Word of God, and will not submit herself to the yoke of Christ. Neither does she administer the sacraments as appointed by Christ in His Word, but adds to and takes from them as she thinks proper; she relieth more upon men than upon Christ; and persecutes those who live holily according to the Word of God, and rebuke her for her errors, covetousness, and idolatry.”

The apparent difficulty with this article is the seemingly absolute distinction that it makes between the true church and the false church. Article 29 concludes with these words: “These two churches are easily known and distinguished from each other.” The article says nothing of purer or less pure churches. Some have taken hold of that line as proof for an absolute distinction between true and false and for charging any church that one thinks has erred with being a false church.

Is that legitimate? Is it the case that, based on this article, one can say that any church that shows any weakness in respect to any of the marks of a true church must be labeled as a false church? Is it the case that, based on this article, one can say there is only one church or denomination that is true?

There are several reasons why this cannot be the meaning or proper interpretation of Article 29.

First, consider the language of the Belgic Confession. The Confession identifies a false church not merely as one in which there are certain lacks with respect to the marks of a true church, but it identifies the false church as one in which the marks of a true church are *entirely absent*. There may be preaching in a false church, but there is no gospel whatsoever. There may be sacraments, but those sacraments are wholly polluted. There is no exercise of discipline upon the impenitent whatsoever, but rather a sheltering of hardened sinners; instead, discipline is only ever exercised against those who live holy.

Because a false church is one in which the marks are

wholly absent, the Belgic Confession can say that outside of a true church “there is no salvation” (Art. 28). A few of God’s elect may be found in a false church, but they are not saved there. They *must* (and *will*, by the grace of God) come out of the false church into a true church. But there is no salvation in a false church.

There is no salvation in a false church, because Jesus Christ the Savior is not present in a false church at all. He is not present in a false church in the preaching of the gospel, which is the power of God to salvation. Neither is He present in a false church in the sacraments or in the exercise of Christian discipline. Christ’s absence means that there is no salvation in a false church.

Based on the Confession’s identification of a false church, it is accurate to conclude that, if a church begins to depart from the marks of a true church, that church does not overnight become a false church where Christ is wholly absent with His salvation. Such a church is *apostatizing*, beginning to take on the marks of a false church, starting down the road to eventually becoming a false church, and worthy of correction and rebuke, but it is not yet a false church. No true church becomes a false church immediately; apostasy is a gradual process that takes place over many years, not months.

Second, what puts this understanding of the Belgic Confession beyond dispute is a consideration of the historical context in which it was written. The Belgic Confession was written in 1561, shortly after the beginning of the Reformation. The Reformed fathers obviously had in view the Roman Catholic Church when they described the false church. Rome was a false church and the whore of Babylon. In her Christ was not present with His salvation.

But the Reformers did not call every church that did not agree on every point with the Reformed a false church. The Reformed did not view the churches of Luther and his followers to be false churches. In spite of their serious errors regarding the Lord’s Supper and the nature of Christ after the ascension, the Reformed did not slap the label of “false church” and “whore” upon the Lutherans. The Reformed in the Netherlands did not do the same with the Church of England either.

To make an absolute distinction between the true church and the false church is simply not in keeping with the Belgic Confession.

The Scriptures

This understanding of the Belgic Confession is grounded in the Scriptures.

In the church in Corinth trouble abounded. The congregation was filled with divisions (I Cor. 1:10), some claiming to follow Paul, others Apollos, others Peter,

and others Christ (1:12). In the church was a man committing fornication with his father's wife without being disciplined (chap. 5). Members were living in open pride and jealousy toward one another with respect to special, spiritual gifts (chap. 12). Some did not confess the truth with respect to the resurrection of the dead (chap. 15). Did the inspired apostle Paul label Corinth a false church? Did he call the members to leave? Paul rebukes the church, but he never stoops to labeling her a false church. Without excusing her sins, he begins by calling her "the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints" (1:2). And his last word to them in that letter was: "My love be with you all in Christ Jesus" (16:24).

The same truth is found in Revelation 2-3 with respect to the seven churches of Asia Minor, which were actually existing churches at that time. Only two of the seven are addressed without rebuke. In the other five there were varying degrees of purity with respect to doctrine and practice, some who were close even to being dead. Yet, Christ is said to be present "in the midst of the seven candlesticks [churches]" (1:13).

It is clear from these passages that a church does not become a false church overnight. There are true churches of Christ that are less pure than others, and yet Christ is still present savingly there.

The commentators

That this is the proper view of Article 29 is confirmed by the commentators. In his well regarded commentary on the Belgic Confession, P. Y. De Jong says that "we may rightly conclude that this article does not allow us to brand as false churches all denominations other than our own." To brand in such a way is "narrow churchmanship" that "contradicts both the spirit and the letter of the Reformed faith."¹

Herman Hoeksema writes regarding Article 29 in his "Notes on the Belgic Confession," "It is true, of course, that the true church may easily be distinguished from the false church. The false church is no church, and may easily be distinguished from the true church. But we must remember that there are always various degrees of truth and falsity in the manifestation of the church. A true church does not of a sudden become the false church, though she may begin to show the marks of the false church. Hence, rather than claiming that we as Protestant Reformed Churches are the only true church in the world, while all others are false churches, we would claim that we are the purest manifestation of

the body of Christ in the world, and that it is our duty to join ourselves to it."²

David Engelsma says in his commentary on the Belgic Confession: "The Confession employs absolutist language: true church/false church. Nevertheless, the meaning is not that there is one true institute in the world and that all the others are false. Neither is it the meaning that there is only one true institute—congregation or denomination—in a certain place and that all the others in the place are false." He calls such a view "radical ecclesiology" and goes on to say that "the Reformed theologians and churches, De Bres [the author of the Confession] included, recognized the Lutheran churches of that day as true churches, despite the serious doctrinal errors of the Lutheran churches regarding the sacraments."³

Elsewhere Engelsma has written: "A church does not become a false church overnight. Departure from sound doctrine, the corruption of the sacraments, and the failure to exercise discipline will eventually result in the false church. But the development is gradual." And later he says, "This does not imply the judgment that the departing churches are already now the false church. But it does charge sin and unfaithfulness in their stubborn persistence in taking the way toward the false church...."⁴

There is no fundamental difference, therefore, between the Belgic Confession and what one reads in the Westminster Confession of Faith, 25.4-5:

This catholic Church hath been sometimes more, sometimes less visible. And particular Churches, which are members thereof, are more or less pure, according as the doctrine of the Gospel is taught and embraced, ordinances administered, and public worship performed more or less purely in them.

The purest Churches under heaven are subject both to mixture and error; and some have so degenerated as to become no Churches of Christ, but synagogues of Satan. Nevertheless, there shall be always a Church on earth to worship God according to His will.

Conclusion

It is clearly in keeping with the Scriptures and the

1 P. Y. De Jong, *The Church's Witness to the World* (St. Catharines, ON: Paideia Press, 1980), 2:270.

2 Herman Hoeksema, "Notes on the Belgic Confession," 36. This is a syllabus printed by the Protestant Reformed Theological School (Wyoming, MI).

3 David Engelsma, *The Belgic Confession: A Commentary* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019), 2:158.

4 David Engelsma, *Bound To Join: Letters on Church Membership* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2010), 140-42.

Belgic Confession to be careful not to imply that one's own church is the only true church, to be slow to label another church as false, and to distinguish between a false church and an apostatizing church.

Next time, I want to look at how this understanding has been maintained throughout the history of Reformed churches.



Search the Scriptures

Rev. Ronald Hanko, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA

Nineveh's children and cattle

And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

Jonah 4:11

The book of Jonah ends in a strange way with a reference to Nineveh's cattle: "And should not I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?" The last word, then, in this marvelous book is "cattle."

The reference to the 120,000 small children in Nineveh is understandable. Jonah's lack of pity extended even to them, children born in a heathen nation who, except for the grace of God, would perish along with their parents, for they, like all of us, were born dead in trespasses and sins and were children of wrath. Their salvation along with the majority of Nineveh's citizens displayed the sovereignty and wideness of God's mercy, for they were unable to understand the preaching of Jonah or to humble themselves in repentance before God. Yet Nineveh's salvation in the days of Jonah included them, though God did not continue to save Nineveh's generations.

The reference to the cattle is more difficult to understand. Most commentators are of the opinion that it is part of a scale of values that God is establishing by way of teaching Jonah. Jonah had pity on the gourd, but not on the cattle that are of much greater value than gourds, nor on the citizens of Nineveh who are of much greater value than the cattle. Calvin says, "Oxen were certainly superior to shrubs. If Jonah was right in grieving over one withered shrub, it would surely be a harder and more cruel thing for so many innocent animals to perish" (*Commentary on the Minor Prophets*).

Others focus on passages such as Proverbs 12:10, "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast," and Matthew 10:29, "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father." They find in the reference to cattle a reference to the character of God's mercy, an explanation, we believe, that is closer to the truth.

The mention of cattle must be another way in which the book of Jonah displays the wideness and sovereignty of God's mercy. He had showed that mercy in sending Jonah to Nineveh, in saving the heathen sailors who threw Jonah overboard, in saving Jonah from his disobedience, in sending Jonah a second time to Nineveh to preach there, in making Jonah a sign to the Ninevites and saving them by that sign, and in saving Nineveh's children. Jonah acknowledged that: "For I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil" (v. 2). Now God shows the wideness and sovereignty of His mercy by mentioning Nineveh's cattle.

The mention of the cattle is in harmony with Psalm 145:8, 9: "The LORD is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works." We do not believe that these verses are a reference to a common mercy or grace or love of God that is shown to all men, but rather to a mercy of God that extends beyond the world of men and is shown even in the creation. That is clear from the reference to all God's works in verses 9 and 10 and from verses 15 and 16: "The eyes of all wait upon thee; and thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

God shows the greatness of His mercy and salvation by saving not only those whom He has chosen, but

in saving the brute creation. So we read, for example, in Romans 8:19-22: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” These verses demonstrate that the creation, which came under the curse as a result of man’s sin, for it was “made subject to vanity, not willingly,” will also participate in the “glorious liberty of the children of God.”

This does not mean that individual trees and dogs will be saved or have souls that can be saved and raised to heavenly glory; but it does mean that there will be not only a new heavens but also a new earth, redeemed and glorified, delivered from the curse and purified of all wickedness and sin, “delivered from the bondage of corruption.” It is difficult to imagine what that new earth will be like, but it will be wonderful, on the order of but much more glorious than the original paradise.

There are several reasons why God’s mercy extends to the creation. The creation is God’s handiwork and He does not forsake the work of His own hands. He who created all things did not create them to be destroyed forever, but to show His glory for all eternity. That requires the deliverance of the creation from the curse and its participation in the glory that is coming.

This deliverance of the creation from the curse is through the work of Christ. Colossians 1:20 says, “And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.” That this cannot refer to our reconciliation to God by the blood of Christ is evident, for our reconciliation is the subject of the next verses, “*And you*, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in his sight.” That reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth is necessary because all have been affected by the fall of Satan and the fall of man, the earthly creation subjected to the bondage of corruption as result of man’s sin, and subject to his sinful and destroying rule, groaning under it.

Another reason why God’s tender mercies are over all His works is the organic connection of all things. Man does not exist separately from the creation, though he was specially created, but is part of it, lives in it and by it, was created from it and returns to it at death. It

is his home, adapted to his needs and he adapted to it. Even his rule over the creation, part of his connection with the creation, did not end with his fall into sin, but continues, though now it has become the rule of an evil tyrant rather than a benevolent king. When God saves man, therefore, He does not save Him alone and out of the creation but saves him in those organic connections to the creation and to all else.

This organic connection of all things is the reason why, when God saves, He does not save randomly and individually, but saves His people to be part of a body and saves them in their generations, saves His world. This never means that He saves every person, every individual thing, or every angel; but it does mean that in the new heavens and the new earth all that He created in the beginning will have its place: “Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself: That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in him” (Eph. 1:9, 10).

It is this writer’s belief that the organic connection of all things is a reflection of the unity of the three Persons of the Godhead, the unity of God Himself in three Persons. That He created all things for His glory (Rev. 4:11) and unites them for the praise of His glory suggests this. That all things must and do glorify Him, is not just a matter of chance, but the result of His work in creation, in providence, and in salvation. Created by Him, the creation is His handiwork, displaying the skill, the wisdom, the beauty of its Creator as clearly as a painted masterpiece shows the skill and hand of the artist who created it. Thus all things, the covenant, grace, salvation, man himself as first created and now redeemed, as well as the organic unity of all things, show who and what God is.

This is, of course, only hinted at in Jonah 4:11’s reference to the cattle, but it is difficult to find any other reason for that abrupt and unique ending to the book. It fits the theme and message of the book and in its own way forces us to the conclusion we must draw from the book of Jonah: “Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth” (Rom. 9:18).

The sovereignty of God’s mercy as displayed in so many ways in the book of Jonah remains for us a reason for humility, for reverence, and for thankfulness. Those who are the objects of His mercy must be forever thankful. They must be thankful that in His sovereign mercy He has shown kindness, pity, and mercy to them while not showing it to others. They must find His mercies

“new every morning” and praise Him for His merciful kindness. And they must not carp at the sovereignty of God’s mercy when *in mercy* He does as He pleases and not as we will and when in mercy He discriminates between one and another.

They must also be humble, for His tender mercies are over all His works. That the creation is included in God’s work of redemption and mercy, through Christ, reminds us that we are not everything in the purpose of God. As did Israel, we tend to have that self-centered view of things and even tend to see ourselves as indispensable in the purpose and good pleasure of God. “And much cattle” says that we are only a part of His vast and wonderful purpose. We “and much cattle” shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty. All things “and much cattle” will be gathered in one for the glory of His name. All things in heaven and on earth “and much cattle” are reconciled to God in Christ. And

when the Rising Sun of Righteousness comes with healing in His wings, He will come as He always has, not only for our healing but also for the healing of all things. What a reason for deepest humility!

And as we wait for that last morning, we see the hope of an eternal morning written into the creation itself, for the creation—beasts and birds, cattle and creeping things, suns and sunflowers—are waiting for the hope of all God’s children—Jonah, Ninevites and ten thousand times ten thousand besides: “For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God” (Rom. 8:19). So Nineveh’s cattle teach us “that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us,” glory that will be revealed in us when, forever delivered from the belly of hell by the mercy of our great God, we will no longer be grudging and complaining but forever content and forever thankful.



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 (7)

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2022, p. 213.

A third example of the PRCA commitment to the three-self formula in foreign missions is the PRCA work in the Philippines.

After five years of developing individual contacts and groups by delegation visits, the PRCA Synod in 2001 declared the Philippines a PRCA mission field and approved the calling of a missionary to serve there. Synod appointed Doon PRC (IA) the calling church. In 2002 Doon called and sent Rev. Audred Spriensma, with his family, to begin mission labors in Manila, centering on the Berean Church of God (Reformed-BCGR) in Manila, but also to visit contacts in three other locations throughout the Philippines as time and opportunity permitted. Rev. Spriensma labored there from 2002 to 2007. Many of the contacts were former members of the Roman Catholic Church and raised in the “folk Catholicism” that characterizes the RCC in the Philippines. Others came under the labors of the missionary from the RCC by way of Baptist, Pentecostal, or evangelical churches. Within several years under the preach-

ing and instruction of Rev. Spriensma, the BCGR was instituted as the Berean Protestant Reformed Church in November 2006. Eight years later the Berean PRC federated with the First Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan (Pastor John Flores) to form the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP) in April 2014. Later, two more congregations were added by the Lord: the Maranatha Protestant Reformed Church in Valenzuela (Pastor Leovino Trinidad) in 2016 and the Provident Protestant Reformed Church in Marikina in 2019.

At the time that synod approved the initial involvement of the denomination in mission work by missionaries in the Philippines, the grounds for the calling of a missionary and his initial location of labor mentioned elements of the three-self formula. Consideration of the aspect of *self-government* is evident from references to the “leaders” in the grounds and a concern for their further instruction as officebearers and pastors in their reforming churches or future churches.

Regarding *self-support*, the grounds regarding the decision to locate the missionary in Manila initially stated that “it is the judgment of the FMC that the labors of a missionary in Manila may more quickly result in a self-supporting church.”¹ According to this ground, it appears that the goal of the mission work was that the new mission churches be self-supporting either at the very outset of their proper institution or as soon as possible thereafter.

Regarding *self-propagation*, the grounds also indicate a desire for the self-propagation of new churches in the work. Reference is made in the grounds to the instruction of existing pastors or leaders in groups that had the gifts and to the inner spiritual desire to serve as properly ordained pastors in a properly instituted church.

The concern that new churches, or the reforming churches with whom the FMC had contact, be characterized by the three-self formula was clearly on the mind of the FMC in its recommendation to the synod that denominational mission work begin in the Philippines. In its report to Synod 2001 about its work in the Philippines and in the section of its evaluation of the four areas of potential labor in the Philippines, the FMC gave its assessment of the potential of each area with specific reference to the elements of the three-self formula: self-government, self-support, and self-propagation.

This was not only on the minds of the FMC but also on the minds of one of the congregations that requested the PRCA to come over and help them. The Berean Church of God (Reformed), as it was called at the time, requested that the PRCA send a missionary in order to assist them in “establishing our own local church.” According to that statement, it is clear that from the outset of our missionary help, with what is now the Berean PRC, the brethren desired to be developed into a self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting church.² The BCGR in a second letter to the 2001 Synod expressed the same desire for help in becoming officially organized and for guidance in proper church government. In addition to that, the congregation also desired help to be established in its work of proclaiming the Word of God. From the start of the work there in 2001, the congregation was also involved in the self-support of their operations with the giving of their resources to the weekly worship services, Bible study, other congregational activities, and the hosting of visiting FMC delegations around that time.

The first missionary was also committed to the three-self formula in his mission labors. This is evident from his missionary reports, in which it is clearly stated that he did not desire to function as the “boss” or a pope in the mission group but, rather, that he patiently guide the leaders of the mission group in their development of becoming self-governing. His commitment to that approach of the three-self formula became evident in a specific statement in a report to Synod 2006. The statement appeared in a section that discussed whether a second missionary should be sent to the Philippines to start more work there beyond what had already been started initially by the PRCA on the island of Negros. The missionary wrote that

...at this time there is no definite work planned, and we would be better served to let the Berean Protestant Reformed Church, after they are organized, explore various areas, and if they need and request assistance, to evaluate the request. Perhaps this will be the opening for another of our ministers to come over to do mission work. This places the work squarely in the lap of the indigenous church.

That reference to “the indigenous church” was pertinent. Once the Berean PRC was instituted, any new mission work on the island of Luzon, or maybe somewhere else in the Philippines, besides what had been developed by the PRCA on the island of Negros already at that time, was to be considered *their* work according to the principle of the three-self formula. If help were needed in fulfilling *their* work, then the PRCA was encouraged to assist where possible.

A clear understanding of the three-self formula was evident in the grounds that synod adopted for its concurrence with the Doon PRC Council approval that the missionary proceed with organization of the BCGR as a PRC congregation in 2006. The pertinent grounds were:

- a. The BCGR has grown to sufficient size to exist as a viable congregation (thirteen families and two individuals).
- b. The FMC is convinced that there is a deepening understanding of Reformed doctrine and practice and a conviction on the part of the members concerning the particular doctrines and practices of the PRCA.
- c. There is the presence of qualified men to serve in the offices of elder and deacon. This includes enough men for the rotation of officebearers.
- d. The BCGR has determined to be organized on the basis of Scripture, the Three Forms of Unity, the Reformed Liturgical Forms, and the Church Order of

¹ *PRCA Acts of Synod 2001*, Art. 47, B, 4, ground d (p. 41).

² “Letter from BCGR,” *PRCA Acts of Synod 2001*, Supplement 12 (p. 232).

Dordrecht; and it has expressed agreement with the Declaration of Principles of the PRCA.

e. They are blessed with the ability and willingness to finance the local work of the church, although they are unable at this time to pay the salary and living cost of their own pastor.³

In that decision, one can see that all of the elements of the three-self formula are covered: self-propagation (a and b), self-government (c and d), and self-support (e).

It should also be noted that these grounds were not imposed on the mission church by the missionary. Rather, the Steering Committee of the BCGR was blessed with a similar commitment to the three-self formula and testified of that commitment through its correspondence to Synod 2006. The BCGR wrote that it wished to be organized by the missionary as a local, autonomous church of Jesus Christ.

Their actions supported that testimony. This is particularly true in regards to being self-propagating. The church was engaged from the outset of her institution in a mission work of its own in Gabaldon, Nueva Ecija, through the work of Pastor Vernon Ibe, who, after training in the PRCA Seminary, was ordained and in-

stalled as pastor of the Berean PRC in November 2012. The PRCP federation has continued in that commitment with mission work in Albueria, Leyte, and in 2019 with its own seminary for the training of PRCP pastors.

This work of the PRCA in the Philippines is another example of the goal of foreign missions: a local, autonomous, Christian church or federation of Christian churches, subscribing to the Reformed confessions. Such an institute is faithful in the exercise of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, in the maintenance of the marks of a true church, and in its self-government, self-propagation, and self-support.

How the PRCA in its foreign missions has implemented each of the three aspects of the three-self formula in its denominational mission in the past 60 years could be examined further with profit. However, for the purpose of this series of articles, it has been shown sufficiently from various sources that at present our PRCA has embraced the three-self formula: submitting goals, approaches, strategies, and methods of foreign mission work to what should be respected as a fundamental principle of foreign missions.

Having completed our look at the three-self formula through the lens of various historical examples, the next article will provide a description of the three-self formula.

3 PRCA Acts of Synod 2006, Art. 28, B, 5 (p. 27).



Strength of youth

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of Heritage Protestant Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

Authority (3)

The requirement: S.H.O.P.

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2021, p. 139.

We have been exploring the topic of authority. We have learned that authority is the right to rule. We explained that God has all authority, has conferred authority upon Jesus Christ according to His human nature, and through Christ has bestowed upon certain people the right to rule. Those people on earth to whom God has given authority include parents in the home, and the husband as head of his wife; teachers who stand in the place of parents; officebearers in the church; government officials on the national, state, and local level; employers in the workplace; and the gray head.

We have also answered this question: What sin does God forbid for those who are under the rule of oth-

ers (negative prohibition)? We took the time to unpack what sin against authority is, how it reaches back to the beginning and continues into the present day, and how serious it is.

In this final article of our brief series, we intend to answer this question: What attitude and behavior does God require for those who are under the rule of others (positive requirement)? There are multiple words we could use to fill out what God positively requires of us in the fifth commandment, but we will use four words under the acronym “S-H-O-P”: Submission, Honor, Obedience, and Patience. You might remember that these four words are used in the Heidelberg Catechism’s

explanation of the fifth commandment, although in a slightly different order: “That I show all *honor*, love, and fidelity to my father and mother and all in authority over me, and *submit* myself to their good instruction and correction with due *obedience*; and also *patiently* bear with their weaknesses and infirmities, since it pleases God to govern us by their hand” (Lord’s Day 39, emphasis added).

First, the “S”: Submission

Submission is an attitude of consciously placing yourself under those in authority. Submission is to have or hold those in authority *above* you or *over* you. You will find an example of submission, for instance, in the well known chapter on the government, Romans 13: “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God” (v. 1). Those in authority occupy a position above you, in the sense that God has given them the right to rule over you. Submission is an attitude that recognizes this place that the magistrate, parents, teachers, or other authority figures have.

Importantly, submission is an attitude. It is something inside you. Your parents are not first of all concerned with what you are saying and how you are acting, but with your *heart*. Notice that we did not start in this article with how you must *outwardly behave* in obedience to the fifth commandment—although such behavior is not unimportant. But we begin with your attitude, because your behavior will flow out of that attitude. Later we will address the calling to obey authority, but obedience that does not proceed *from the heart* is no obedience at all.

Young people, we do well to ask ourselves if we are submissive. In that intense discussion I had with dad and mom the other day, was I seeing them as above me? When my parents brought that stinging rebuke, did I submit to that correction? When I was huddled with my friends at school and we were talking about the teacher, was that talk issuing from a heart that recognized the God-given position of that teacher? What is happening in my *heart*?

Second, the “H”: Honor

Honor is an attitude of respect, as the word “honor” itself indicates: the biblical word means heavy, weighty. After all, those in authority are appointed by God to the place they have above you. Honor is something inward, a matter of the heart—in that respect, like submission. Honor exists alongside of submission. The fifth commandment uses the word “honor”: “Honour thy father and thy mother...” (Ex. 20:12).

Envision yourself entering a courtroom. As you walk in, there is the judge robed in black, distinguished, with gavel in hand. You know that he will decide your case. The atmosphere is solemn. How is it that you address the judge? “Your *honor*”—a term of respect, a verbalizing of the fact that he is *weighty*. And that is how you ought to view those whom God has set over you: as weighty in their God-given position, someone to be respected.

Here, too, we ought to do some heart-searching. In the home, where honoring authority must first be learned, am I viewing my parents as an annoyance, two people to be “waved away” like a pesky insect? Is my attitude toward my father and mother rather dismissive, so that I hardly look them in the eye, respond with some mumbling when they talk to me, and usually just ignore their instructions and admonitions? Broadening out from the foundational sphere of the home, is there a respect for teachers, for officebearers, and for the boss at the part-time high school or college job? Again, what is happening in my *heart*?

Third, the “O”: Obedience

Obedience is to hear what those ruling over you say, and then actually to do what they say. Submission and honor are on the inside, in the heart, having to do with your attitude. Obedience is on the outside, what flows from your heart, having to do with your behavior. Submission and honor are the roots underground, and obedience is the beautiful flower that springs up from those roots. Colossians 3:20 says, “Children, obey your parents in all things: for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.” True obedience is immediate: doing what one is told quickly, without delay, and without having to be told two, three, or four times. Genuine obedience is cheerful: not accomplishing a commanded task with a huff and a puff, but with a willingness and gladness that spring out of a heart of genuine submission and honor. Are you hearing your parents and your teachers? Actually *hearing* them? That’s where it starts. And then, are you doing what they say, right away and happily?

One exception to this is that you may and must disobey when someone in authority asks you to do something sinful. In that case, you must obey God rather than men, as is the principle of Scripture. It may be that a dad, a mom, a minister, an elder, or a teacher asks you to do something wrong, perhaps something even very evil: you may and must not do what they say. If it is serious enough, you should report it to another adult that you trust. But even when there is such disobedience, there must *always* be submission—that is, even when

you may not do what someone tells you to do, you still may not exalt yourself against them in rebellion.

Fourth, the “P”: Patience

The reality is that those by whose hand God is pleased to govern us are *sinners*. There is no question, young people, that your parents (and others in authority) have weaknesses and infirmities. Do your parents shout at you? Do they have an unrighteous anger that occasionally flares up? Are they at times inconsistent, so that what they say to one sibling is different than what they say to you? Do their lives sometimes not match the lives they tell you to live? Does mom have that annoying thing about her, and dad that other thing that aggravates you? Surely, you can answer “yes” to all those questions.

My point is not to make light of these sins—parents and others in authority must repent of their sins. But, rather, my point is to remind us that we must be patient with our parents, our teachers, and others. You are a sinner, are you not? Then you can understand that those by whom God is pleased to govern you are also sinners. Do not become irritated with them, speak disrespectfully to them, or give them the eye-roll. Bear patiently with them! Even when they rule in a manner that is marked by weaknesses and sins, this does not relieve you of the submission, honor, and obedience to which you are called. And when that exasperated sigh is about to leave your mouth or your tongue is ready with its fiery words, you might just consider *praying* for your

parents!

S-H-O-P: Submission, Honor, Obedience, and Patience—a high calling, one that we fall short of daily! Run, every day, to that tree where the Savior was suspended. The Savior, whose entire life was wholly in line with the positive requirement of the fifth commandment. The Savior, who suffered inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies for our failures to submit, honor, obey, and be patient. Weighed down with the guilt of our sins against God, we pray, “Forgive us, Father, for all the times we have not done what Thou hast required. Graciously pardon, for Jesus’ sake!”

S-H-O-P: Submission, Honor, Obedience, and Patience—a high calling, for which we need the grace of God daily. Pray for that! We need this grace of God, for Satan hurls his temptations at us: temptations to think and behave exactly opposite of the positive calling in the fifth commandment. We need this grace of God, for we live in a world that shouts another message, the opposite of S-H-O-P: not submission, but rebellion; not honor, but dishonor; not obedience, but disobedience; not patience, but impatience. We need this grace of God, for we have that in-house enemy, our sinful nature, which is anti-authority. It is only by the sovereign, powerful grace of God that we can have a beginning in submitting to, honoring, obeying, and bearing patiently with our parents and all who are over us. By the grace of God that flows from the cross, and in thankfulness for that cross, we seek to obey the positive requirement of the fifth commandment.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan

Tower

For us the word *tower* brings different things to mind than it did for God’s people in ages past. There are towers today. Radio towers dot the landscape spreading cellphone coverage over the country. The cityscape is dominated by skyscrapers housing offices and businesses. Go to one of today’s major cities, and you can likely visit a special tower erected as a monument to some important event or person. Few towers today serve the purpose they had in the past.

The first mention of a tower in the Bible is not a favorable mention. This tower came to be called “Babel.” It started as the project of man’s pride; the icon of man’s first unified effort to build the antichristian kingdom. Its builders refused to obey God’s command to spread out over the earth. They congregated on the plains of Shinar to build a city “and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name” (Gen. 11:4). God “came down” to see

man's puny tower (Gen. 11:5). God sovereignly overthrew their rebellion. With the miraculous confusing of tongues, the Lord dispersed the people, and dealt the beast a deadly wound that shall not be healed till the very last days. The first tower thus became an enduring icon of Antichrist's sure defeat and the church's sure salvation.

Hereafter in the Bible, *tower* represents a *place of refuge and safety*. A tower is a strong stone fortification jutting upward from the walls of a city or stronghold. The tower's purpose was to provide protection from enemy attacks. From its high vantage point watchmen could alert the city of approaching threats, as the guard on the tower of Jezreel did when he spied the company of Jehu, driving furiously, to execute the Lord's judgment on Ahab's house (II Kings 9:17, 20). Sheltered behind its stone walls, a city's defenders were kept out of

reach of enemy swords and shielded from enemy arrows. From their tower, defenders could fend off enemies stronger and more numerous. In times of dire need, the city's tower was a last resort for a besieged people. It was in a strong tower that the people of Thebez took refuge, when Abimelech, Gideon's renegade son, invaded their city (Judges 9:50). At the foot of that tower Abimelech met his end, stricken by a millstone a townswoman cast from the parapet.

Yet, for all its strength, no man-made tower can ever provide certain protection or a perfect refuge. Judah learned this when Jerusalem's mighty walls and many towers fell before the Babylonians (Is. 30:25).

Therefore, God's people must not put their trust in princes, or horses, or towers, but only in the name of their God! Jehovah alone is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46:1). The Bible often calls God *the tower* of His people. The tower is a comforting picture of our covenant God and His care for us. David, in his song of thanksgiving recorded in II Samuel 22, sings of the Lord, "my rock...my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence" (II Sam. 22:3). The song ends: "He is the tower of salvation for his king" (II Sam. 22:51). Jehovah is our "high tower" that lifts us

above our foes and keeps us safe (Ps. 18:2). When we are overwhelmed, the "rock that is higher than I" is our refuge; the rock who is "a shelter for me" and "a strong tower from the enemy" (Ps. 61:2-3); "My goodness, and my fortress; my high tower, and my deliverer; my shield, and he in whom I trust" (Ps. 144:2).

This is our God! Before the mountains were brought forth, from everlasting to everlasting Jehovah is God. His everlasting arms are beneath us. His glorious attributes are like solid stones making up the strong high tower in which we have eternal refuge, safety, and salvation. He has founded His church upon Christ the chief Cornerstone. He has given her the spiritual bulwark of His Word. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her: tell the towers thereof" (Ps. 48:12). The gates of hell cannot prevail against the church whose strong tower is the Lord.

Therefore, God's people must not put their trust in princes, or horses, or towers, but only in the name of their God! Jehovah alone is our refuge and strength (Ps. 46:1). The Bible often calls God *the tower* of His people. The tower is a comforting picture of our covenant God and His care for us.

So beautifully, then, does the inspired writer put it in Proverbs 18:10: "The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." The name of the LORD. The name Jehovah.

Ultimately, the name *Jesus*, Jehovah's salvation, is our strong tower, our tower of salvation. The name of Jesus is the one name under heaven given among

men whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12). Through His atoning death and His perfect obedience Jesus has become the tower that shelters us from the holy wrath of God against sin. Jesus is the tower that delivers us from eternal death and preserves us unto eternal life.

Dear believer, the name of Jesus is your strong tower. There is safety and salvation nowhere else. Look nowhere else. Forsake all—human help, your works, everything—and by faith run to Him and find your refuge in Him alone. Run to Him every day. Run to Him in all your trials and tribulations. Run to Him in your battle with sin. Run to Him for the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation. Jesus Christ is your tower. In Him you are safe!



Believing and confessing

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

Thy kingdom come

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 48

Question 123. Which is the second petition?

Answer. *Thy kingdom come*; that is, rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee; preserve and increase Thy church; destroy the works of the devil and all violence which would exalt itself against Thee; and also, all wicked counsels devised against Thy holy Word; till the full perfection of Thy kingdom take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all.

In this second petition, which has to do with God's kingdom, our request concerns both God and ourselves. It is a prayer for the advance of God's kingdom and a prayer for our submission to God's rule. That makes this petition very comprehensive, as God's rule is comprehensive, as well as very practical and personal.

The kingdom

To understand the meaning of this petition, we must first understand what is meant by the words, "Thy kingdom."

So, what is God's kingdom? That question raises much controversy today, not only between dispensational and covenantal Christianity, but also among those who are Presbyterian and Reformed. The general misconception of the kingdom is that it is future and earthly. Generally speaking, this is both the view of the premillennialists, who expect Christ to come and establish His rule over all the earth from a throne in Jerusalem, and of the postmillennialists, who expect a future golden age of worldwide revival and Christian dominion.

Here we do not have the time and space to enter into these views of the kingdom, except to say two things: 1) this was the same misconception of the kingdom that the Jews and disciples had during Jesus' earthly ministry (John 6:15; Acts 1:6); and 2) the Heidelberg Catechism obviously has a different understanding of the kingdom than it being "future" and "earthly."

This is evident from the very first line of the Catechism's answer: "'Thy kingdom come'; that is, rule us

so by Thy Word and Spirit," and "preserve and increase Thy church." This speaks of a "present" and "spiritual" rule that has to do with *hearts* and the *church*, rather than a future kingdom of earthly, international dominion. Further, in the last line of the answer, the "full perfection" of this kingdom is not something that will be realized here on earth, but is a reference to the heavenly kingdom in which all things will be made new and in which righteousness will dwell (Rev. 21:5; II Pet. 3:13). There and then, God will be "all in all" (I Cor. 15:28).

Biblically, these are the characteristics of the kingdom of God, which is also called in Scripture "the kingdom of Christ" and "the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 13:44; Col. 1:13).

First, the kingdom is *spiritual* in nature. Jesus said it was not earthly but spiritual (Luke 17:20, 21; John 18:36). "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (I Cor 15:20). Its citizens are brought into the kingdom by a work of the Spirit (John 3:3, 5; Col. 1:13; Phil. 3:20). Its enemies are spiritual (I Cor. 15:26; Eph. 6:12). Its weapons and warfare are spiritual (II Cor. 10:4-5; Eph. 6:13-18). Its exploits and victories are spiritual in the conquering of sin (II Cor. 2:14; 10:5; Heb. 12:4). The rule of the King is by grace in the hearts of the citizens (Rom. 6:14; Heb. 12:28). What this kingdom produces is spiritual (Rom. 14:17).

Second, the kingdom is a *present* reality. It has already come. It came when Jesus was born as King (Luke 1:31-32). It came when John the Baptist and Jesus began to preach the gospel (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; 12:28).

It was established by the cross where the “prince of this world” was defeated (John 12:31). It exists today in Christ’s rule and authority over all things in heaven and on earth from His exalted heavenly throne (I Cor. 15:25; Eph. 1:20-22). It is manifest on earth in the church and her work of preaching the gospel (Matt. 13:47; I Pet. 2:9).

Third, the kingdom is *progressive*, that is, it is advancing toward its full perfection in the life to come. This does not mean that Christ is not King at present, nor that He will have a different kind of kingdom (an earthly one) in the future. Instead, with the gospel He rides “forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:2; 19:11-16). “He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (I Cor. 15:25). This progress and advancement of the kingdom happens in two important ways: first, by the “increase” or growth of the church as the gospel is preached to the ends of the earth (Matt. 24:14; Acts 28:31); and second, in the spiritual growth of the individual citizens of this kingdom (Matt. 6:33; Rom. 14:17). There is an *already* and a *not yet*. Already Christ has begun a good work in us (Phil. 1:6), but it will not be complete until the day when, seeing Christ, we shall be perfected (I John 3:3).

Praying for the kingdom

We pray for the “coming” of the kingdom. That is a prayer for the advancement of the spiritual rule of Jesus Christ in the present, as well as a prayer for the full perfection of His kingdom in the new heavens and new earth in the future.

The Catechism identifies four different ways that we make this petition. The first is personal, that God would rule in my heart by His Word and Spirit so that I, more and more, submit myself to Him. “More and more” refers to progress in personal sanctification. It is a prayer for a greater recognition of my own sin and rebellion, as well as a prayer for a greater understanding of how God’s Word should be applied to my personal life. The true clash of the kingdom of darkness with the kingdom of God takes place in my own heart, in my personal struggle with sin. The enemy is within—in envy, pride, bitterness, discontent, lust, hatred, anger, love for money and pleasure, unbelief, and more. Victory over sin begins with God’s Word and Spirit breaking these strongholds. The answer to this prayer is my advancement in holiness of heart and life. “The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost” (Rom. 14:17).

How much do you pray for holiness in your own heart, and in your life and relationships? Oftentimes we think of the first three petitions as having to do with

God, His name, His will and His kingdom; but His kingdom and my holiness are together in this petition. Is your desire for the coming of Christ’s kingdom reflected in a desire for godliness and a fight against your own sin?

The second important way that we make this petition is in our prayers for the church. Think of all the different ways that we pray for both the preservation and the increase of the church. We pray for missions and for men to be gospel preachers. We pray for unity among believers and faithfulness to God’s Word. We pray for persecuted Christians and for all of God’s people in their trials. We pray for our officebearers as well as for the activities of our local church. We pray that God will add to the church through our evangelism and witness. All of these are included in our prayer for the coming of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. Included in this would also be our prayers for those who are not yet believers but who have heard the gospel or seen our witness. As we pray for the salvation of wandering sheep or of our own covenant children, we are praying for the coming of the kingdom of Christ.

Third, we pray for the advancement of the kingdom of Jesus Christ when we pray against all opposition to Christ. These are the imprecatory prayers of the book of Psalms (Ps. 69 and 109, as well as Ps. 5, 6, 11, 12, 35, 37, 40, 52, 54, 56, 57, 58, 59, 79, 83, 94, 137, 139 and 143). These are prayers against those outside the kingdom (Satan and the wicked world), as well as prayers against evil within the church. Satan uses many means to attack Christ and His people, including persecution, false doctrine, enmity between believers, temptations to worldliness, pride, and much more. We pray that God would curb the power of these attacks in the present and that He would, in the end, deliver us from them completely in our future perfection. Our prayer for the coming of the kingdom assumes that there is opposition to its advancement and, again, that opposition is first resident in our own hearts. Pray that God would help you to see and put to death the deeds of the flesh in your own life (I John 3:8).

Finally, this prayer looks forward to and expresses a longing for the “full perfection” of the kingdom in which God will be all in all. This will take place when Christ shall “appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:28). Then, all the works of darkness will be destroyed. Then, our own remaining sin will be completely eradicated. Then, the righteous and the wicked will be separated. Then, we will be made perfect in our obedience.

And then, God will be all in all. Then, all our thoughts, which now often wander, will be focused on

Him forever. Then, all our actions, which are now so self-serving, will be to His service and glory perfectly. Then, all our words, which often now are wasted, will be words of praise to Him who is worthy of all praise. Then, we will see that all the events of history, which perhaps now seem disconnected and aimless,

have served the coming and perfection of His kingdom. And then, as He reigns over all as King of kings, we shall also reign with Him.

“He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus” (Rev. 22:20).

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the kingdom of God?
2. How is the common view of a future earthly kingdom contradicted by Paul in II Corinthians 15:24-25?
3. How are we to understand the Old Testament prophecies concerning the universal rule of Jesus Christ (for example, Psalm 72:7-17)?
4. Why is a proper view of eschatology (the end times) important for understanding this petition?
5. When we speak of the church as the kingdom of God, are we referring to the visible church on earth, or to the invisible and universal body of Christ?
6. As Christians, are we to look for the improvement of culture, for mass conversions, and for Christian principles to pervade the institutions of our society? Why/why not?
7. What does Jesus mean in Luke 17:20-21 when He says that “the kingdom is within you”? How does this relate to Romans 14:17?
8. List some ways that you can personally pray for God to “rule you by His Word and Spirit” so that you “more and more” submit to Him.
9. How can we better pray for the “increase” of God’s kingdom?
10. What is an “imprecatory” psalm and how are we to pray them? How does this fit with Jesus’ instruction in Matthew 5:44 to love and pray for our enemies?
11. Describe the future “full perfection” of God’s kingdom. Find Bible passages that describe this.



God’s wondrous works

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

Submission within the Trinity? (2)

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2022, p. 181.

An error regarding the Trinity is being taught today in a number of books on practical matters. A person might pick up what is considered a conservative book on marriage and find instruction about the triune God that is fundamentally wrong.

The specific error we have been considering is sometimes called EFS (Eternal Functional Subordination). It is the teaching that within the Trinity the second Person is submissive to the first, and the third Person is submissive to both the first and the second Persons. In the previous article I gave a brief overview and critique of this doctrine. In this concluding article on the subject

we consider a few verses that have been said to support EFS.

At the beginning of the previous article it was mentioned that doctrinal errors are used by God to get us to look more closely at what He has taught us in Scripture. With that in mind we look at these passages not just to point out what they do not teach, but also to consider the important instruction our Lord gives us in these verses.

The two wills

In an effort to prove that the Son within the Trinity

eternally submits to the Father, those holding to EFS seek to find places in Scripture where the divine will of the Son is distinguished from the divine will of the Father. What they find are statements that indicate that Christ's *human* will is distinct from the will of the triune God.

John 6:38, for example, is sometimes quoted. Here the Son says that He came to do His Father's will: "For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."

The claim is that this verse speaks of the Son obeying the Father before He had a human nature:

Again, Jesus said, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me" (John 6:38). Again we see that Jesus' obedience to the Father occurred prior to his incarnation, and this prior obedience accounts for the very incarnation itself.¹

This verse, they say, speaks of the Son obeying the Father before He had a human will. So, they argue, it must be referring to His divine will.

Yet Ware is mistaken when he says that this verse speaks of the Son submitting before He had a human nature. Our Lord came down from heaven. He took upon Himself human flesh, so that as a man He could offer the perfect sacrifice for sins in submission to the Father.

Jesus was speaking of what He would do *after* He took upon Himself our flesh, not before. This is evident also from another passage in which our Lord explains why He is come: "Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Christ came "to give his life a ransom for many." Certainly this took place *after* He had taken upon Himself the human nature. His act of "giving His life" is something He did according to the flesh. He took upon Himself the human nature that He might lay down His life for His brethren.

The Father sending the Son

Those holding to EFS sometimes quote passages such as John 8:42, which speaks of the Father sending the Son: "Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me." Regarding this verse, Wayne Grudem writes,

The same argument can be made from John 8:42.... The Father willed to send the Son, and the Son willed to be sent. These are not the same, because the Son

did not will to send the Father, and the Father did not will to be sent. There are several other verses like this, especially in John's gospel.²

In his commentary on this verse, Calvin rightly says that Christ "is not speaking of His essence but of His office."

In other words, in this passage and other similar ones Jesus speaks of Himself as the Christ, the Son of God in human flesh. Christ means "anointed one" and refers to Jesus as the one ordained of God the Father and anointed with the Spirit to be our chief Prophet and Teacher, our only High Priest, and our eternal King (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 12).

Here again Christ speaks of Himself as a man. The unbelieving Jews accused Him of being a pretender who came of Himself without being sent by God. Over against that false accusation Christ declares, "I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me."

Jesus often referred to Himself as a man. For sure, He also made statements that made quite clear that He was God. He confessed, for example, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Yet He was and still is a real man. When speaking to others while on this earth, He frequently referred to Himself as the Son of man who is always submissive to the Father.

Imitating our Lord

Let us take a look at a couple more of the verses that are sometimes cited by those holding to EFS, considering now the important instruction our Lord gives us in these passages.

Our Lord said, "I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30).

Jesus' judgment is just because He seeks not His own will. In other words, if we seek our own will, our judgment will not be just. In times of disagreement and controversy men often seek their own will, and thus make unjust judgments.

This is something against which we all must be on our guard. We know that sinful anger, envy, and desire for revenge are causes of murder. When we think we have been wronged, we must beware lest we fall into these sins. If we give in to them, our judgments will not be just. They will be unjust, because we will be seeking our own will, rather than the will of our heavenly Father.

1 Bruce A. Ware, *Father, Son, and Holy Spirit: Relationships, Roles, and Relevance* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005), 78.

2 Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 307.

Jesus did not do this. He always took heed to what the Father said and did according to His will. When He was reviled, He reviled not again. When He suffered, “he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously” (I Pet. 2:23).

We, then, are called to imitate Him. The Son of God who died for us also leads us by His example. We are to look at the Son of God in human flesh, see what He did, and do the same.

Consider also the instruction our Lord gives in John 7 verses 16 and following. Speaking to some opposing Jews, our Lord said, “My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me. If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself. He that speaketh of himself seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him” (John 7:16a-18).

Jesus here is talking about whether His doctrine “be of God, or whether I speak of myself.” This serves to make very evident that again He is referring to Himself as a man.

Let us take note of the instruction our Lord gives us in this passage. He tells us that those who truly seek God’s glory, rather than their own, will speak not their own ideas but the doctrine that is of God.

That is what Christ did. Seeking God’s glory, He faithfully taught what God says.

We, then, are to follow His example. If we are seeking the glory of God, we will not be trying to impress people with our own ideas. Rather, we will be looking

to God’s Word, requesting grace to understand what He taught, that we might then faithfully confess what we have learned from Him.

Our chief Prophet and Teacher has told us that those who desire to do the will of God will be guided to understand what the truth is. Those who pray from the heart “Hallowed be Thy name” are expressing a desire to know God rightly and to glorify His name (LD 47). Our Father in heaven will certainly grant our request when we pray this from the heart. He will guide us to grow in our understanding of the truth, that we might teach what He taught and confess before men that the doctrine our Lord has taught us is indeed the truth of the Word of God.

The passages we have briefly considered give us instruction concerning Christ, the Servant of Jehovah, who is the example of godly submission. Him we are always to follow. We are to seek not our own will, not our own glory, but the glory and will of our Father in heaven. When that is what we seek, when His glory is our goal, then our teaching will be what God has said and our judgments will be just.

May our merciful and faithful Father grant us the grace to do that. May we be diligent in all our work to follow the example our Lord has given us. May we humbly search the Scriptures and joyfully labor in His service, submitting to the will of the holy and triune God.

Bring the books...



Preparing for Dating and Marriage: A 31-Day Family Devotional, by Cory Griess (Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020), 112 pp. Softcover. \$9.95.

[Reviewed by Rev. Grant VanLeuven, pastor of Puritan Reformed Presbyterian Church in San Diego, CA.] Used with permission by the Alliance of Confessing Evangelicals. This review was first published online at reformation21.org.

When my eldest daughter entered her senior year of high school last Fall, we had a daddy-daughter brunch date to plan her future. We enjoyed navigating through ideas toward her ideal major, place of study, and vocation. But I surprised her when I brought up the importance

of looking for a husband. I reminded her (per Jeremiah 29:6 and Genesis 24) that it is my covenant duty to help her find a husband and that she should not be left alone on her own to do so.

In God’s wonderful providence, I was shortly thereafter introduced to Rev. Cory Griess’ book, *Preparing for Dating and Marriage: A 31-Day Family Devotional*. It was perfect timing. Not only would I be helping my daughter (and all my children) find a spouse, but I would have something to prepare us all for the process.

The book nicely covers a wide selection of important topics with a rich range of Scriptures in a concise and extremely manageable format for today’s busy household. Days 1-2 cover “What Marriage Is”; Days 3-7 review “The Goals of Dating and Marriage”; Days 8-16

consider “Whom to Look for and Who to Be”; Days 17-22 address “Principles to Undergird Your Search”; Days 23-26 alert to “Beware of Dangers”; Day 27 marvels over “A Mysterious Joy” and “The Way of a Man with a Maid” (though short and sweet, this might be one of its most special studies); and Days 28-31 close with “An Example to Emulate” studying Boaz and Ruth with one of each of her chapters.

A husband, father, and pastor in the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, Rev. Griess was looking for something to help himself, his wife, and other Christian parents especially within his church and denomination to prepare their covenant children for equally yoked marriages serving Christ’s church. The book developed from a concern for Christian parents to be more proactively involved in preparing their children to date and marry. In the book’s preface, he notes, “Training about dating and marriage belongs chiefly to the sphere of the home. And it is the responsibility of the home to teach on this point before the children start dating” (2). Citing the example of Abraham sending his servant to find Rebekah for Isaac, he later advises in Day 21, “A Parent’s Responsibility,” that “Abraham, as head of the home, knew God gave him a certain responsibility regarding whom his child married.... Every father must take the responsibility up, even as Abraham did” (65).

Pastor Griess thus provides fathers and mothers this very useful family devotional to make it easy for them to begin walking their children down the aisle of early adulthood toward giving them away one day in meaningful matrimony. And he did so because he also recognized a dearth of resources to equip parents to so personally guide their children. In fact, he points out in his preface that the book is not intended to be given to the children to read on their own and discuss later, but for parents to lead them through with very useful questions at the end of each chapter that foster further engagement. This book nicely helps parents raise the subject of dating and marriage to talk about comfortably, deliberately, cheerfully, and efficiently through the Scriptures in an orderly way with an emphasis on practical preparation and application.

The devotional gives father and mother ample (and memorable) advice. This is a thorough book, both in the subjects covered and the Scripture passages cited and applied. Yet it is also a succinct book; parents can simply read through each daily chapter and its assigned Bible references and follow-up questions of only a few pages in ten to fifteen minutes.

Even apart from the discussion, dads and moms will have done an amazing job letting Pastor Griess into their

homes to be their guiding voice on such an important matter of family discipleship.

The book is well written and engaging, holding everyone’s interest and drawing out questions and comments from children and parents alike. It is carefully crafted and organized, yet it feels informal and fun. Our family indeed experienced the “fellowship” Pastor Griess said he hoped it would encourage through the training and teaching. And it led to a special time of praying together over each of our sons and daughters by name and for their future spouses.

This fellowship experience is one of the book’s special strengths. The devotional is relational. It is ready-made for the whole family to be devoted to one another’s future families as it develops an excitable, purposeful, palpable sense that “We’re all in this together!” For example, on Day 21, Rev. Griess points out that Rebekah’s brothers were likewise involved in her courting. I found it a catalyst to asking great questions and eliciting conversation from all family members. It felt safe and very satisfying to share. And a sense of how important this is to be doing together kept growing at each gathering. In fact, while Pastor Griess advises that this devotional is intended for children grades seven and above, I used it for our family worship to maximize time with the limited attention span of our toddler (and ours with our infant), and yet I never felt I was shortchanging my family or our Lord. Our teenage daughters (15 and 17) and our preteen sons (7 and 12) were animated and refreshingly engaged by being given an environment to ask about topics we sometimes would not have even thought to inquire of them (nor did the devotional always directly address)—often simple things: sometimes serious, sometimes silly, but all important issues we might have neglected or overlooked.

Beyond all this, I found the book to be one of the most scripturally engaging and spiritually uplifting devotionals I have used in private or family worship. I kept finding myself saying, “I never would have thought of that Scripture or subject, but it’s perfect and wonderful.” As well, Pastor Griess has a way of saying things with a profound simplicity in earthy and vivid connections and wise and memorable applications that reminds one of the Bible’s Proverbs. For instance, as he compares and contrasts the kind of men and women for our sons and daughters to both search for and become in their respective wedded roles, Griess shares:

“Do you see how God made the marriage relationship to fit together? A woman needs love and security, and when her husband gives it, she has a strong respect for him. Likewise, when a woman has a strong respect

for her husband, he is spurred on to love and protect her physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Picture it like a bicycle. You push down on one pedal and the other comes up—push on the other and the previous one comes up. God’s design is wonderful!” (25).

This book is pastoral, polemical, and appropriately practical. It will be required reading for my future premarital counseling in ministry. And because of its balance of depth, reach, and conciseness, I even plan to have it replace the various other premarital counseling books I have used before. I expect this devotional to better serve all in one place, comfortably and beneficially to return to after the honeymoon and into anniversaries of silver and gold. It will also be something we will

revisit several times throughout the years in our home as our younger children come of age.

I heartily call upon all Christian parents to take advantage of this unique approach to preparing our children for marriage that provides an incubator for a proper outlook on life and seeking first Christ’s kingdom through one of the main ways He both builds and grows His church. And let us be sure to do so while we can. For, as Pastor Griess says in his opening preface,

...parenting is a lot like putting drywall mud on a wall. You have a little bit of time to mold and manipulate the material and then when the time is up that opportunity is over, never to return.... Remember, the drywall is setting! (1, 3).



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Which PRC minister owned a “PRC-50” ‘vanity’ license plate at the time of the PRC’s 50th anniversary in 1975?

PRC news (denominational)

Classis West met at Hope PRC in Redlands, CA on March 2 for her regular meeting. An officebearers’ conference was held the Tuesday before on the subject of “The Church of Christ: Her Government and Her Sinfulness.” Four ministers from Classis West gave speeches, with two in the afternoon and two in the evening. The speeches were also livestreamed through Hope PRC’s website for the benefit of those not present. Let us hope they also are published at some point for the benefit of all of us.

Minister calls and activities

On February 16 Grace PRC extended a call to Rev. C. Spronk (Faith PRC).

On February 20 Rev. M. Kortus declined the call from Doon PRC.

On February 20 Hudsonville PRC’s Council formed a trio of Revs. D. Kleyn, J. Laning, and J. Marcus.

On February 27 First PRC-Edmonton called Rev. ?

PRC news (congregational)

Annual Prayer Day services were held in the congregations recently, some in February and some in March. In Faith PRC we heard a wonderful message from pastor C. Spronk on the familiar words of Psalm 23:1: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.” Simple, child-like faith in our loving and caring Shepherd is what we need to practice in this uncertain, tumultuous world.

Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN): The choir is planning to sing an Easter Cantata and invited members from the area PRCs (“New voices are always welcome!”) to join them for practices after the morning services from February 27 to April 17. The area churches are also invited to attend the performance of the cantata commemorating the suffering, resurrection, and triumph of our Savior at Cornerstone on Easter Sunday, April 17, at 7:00 P.M.

Doon PRC (IA): The Jr. Adult Bible Society is inviting all those in the congregation post-high and older to join them for a Progressive Supper on Friday, April 1.

Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD): The Activities Committee is planning a game night for March 25—with a special purpose. They want it to be “a fun night to meet

the Barnhill family and get to know them more.” Let’s hope that this mission is accomplished for the congregation with regard to their new pastor and his family!

Hope PRC (Walker, MI): In a recent bulletin the Council reported on some significant matters, two of which we include here. First, their church archivist, Vance Grasman, reported that he delivered various historic items from the church to the denominational archives. Now, allow me to pause here a moment and make this an open and unashamed “push” for all of our congregations to do the same! Appoint a historian/archivist. Have him/her collect materials of significance from the church. And then give them for safe-keeping to the PRC archives at seminary. I’ll be looking for your items. Second, “the Myanmar Committee reported that although there is still much civil unrest in Myanmar, Rev. Titus’ health is improving, he preaches every other week with most of his congregation in attendance, and his family is well.” For that news we give the Lord thanks. And we pray for this brother-pastor and his dear family in their trying circumstances.

Young people activities

The **Hull (IA) PRC** Young People’s Ice Skating Activity was held Saturday, February 12 at the All-Seasons Center. The young people of the area PRCs were also invited.

The **Immanuel PRC** (Lacombe, AB) young people invited the congregation to a family skating and sledding day on February 21 at Cranna Lake from 10 A.M.-2 P.M. That included a hot dog roast—outdoors, of course!

I love to see winter enjoyed in these ways! Have you entered into the “treasures of the snow” this winter (Job 38:22)?

The **Unity PRC** Young People sponsored a Chili Cook-Off Dinner and Silent Auction on February 26 at Zion Christian School. A dinner of chili, hot dogs, and an ice cream bar was served from 5-7 P.M. They also sold homemade baked goods and held a silent auction “with a large variety of wonderful items for the whole family.”

And this one you can still attend if you are in the West Michigan area: “Join the **SW PRC** Young People’s Society for their pancake breakfast on Saturday, March 19. Breakfast will be served at the church from 8 A.M.-10 A.M. Gluten free pancakes will be available during breakfast and cinnamon rolls to purchase on your way out.” Proceeds will benefit the 2022 PRYP convention!

PRC Sister-church news

CERC in Singapore: Back in February Pastor J. Tan’s

“pastoral note” to his congregation included this comment about a significant development in light of the pandemic in their country: “This is the first Lord’s Day in a long while where we can come together to worship God for both services. Praise God from whom all blessings flow. May the time whereby we cannot gather in such a manner be always etched in our minds and hearts. How once we took for granted the freedom and privilege of worshiping God twice the Lord’s Day together. How we long to ascend mount Zion with the saints to worship our Creator, our Rock, our Redeemer!”

PRC in the Philippines: Classis of the PRCP met Friday February 25 at Provident PRC in Provident Village, Marikina City.

PR Christian school activities

The **Northwest Iowa PR School** (Doon, IA) held its all-school program on Friday, March 4, in Doon PRC. All supporters were invited to the school after the program for refreshments.

On February 25 **Hull PR Christian School** held its all-school program in Hull PRC with the theme “Covenant Faithfulness.” The school’s supporters were called to “come and hear the students play instruments, recite, and sing praises to our covenant God.”

And at the PR Christian high school in Hull, the freshmen and sophomore classes at **Trinity CHS** organized a lasagna supper and volleyball tournament for Friday evening, March 11. All were invited to enjoy lasagna and ice cream, watch volleyball, and enjoy good fellowship.

The Ladies Circle of the **Free Christian School** in Edgerton, MN gathered on a recent Saturday morning to make and sell pigs-in-the-blanket to raise money for the school. Do we appreciate all that the ladies do for our PR schools? Thank you from the bottom of our hearts—and stomachs!

Trivia answer

Rev. Dale Kuiper was the PRC pastor with the “PRC-50” vanity plate in 1975 according to former church news editor Don Doezema. Which makes one wonder: Which PRC pastor (or member) will grab a “PRC-100” plate in 2025?

Food for thought

“Behind and above the hateful world and the power of darkness stands the Lord of his church. He is the great shepherd of His flock, and He employs the devil and all His servants as His dogs. They are mere instruments in His hands and nothing more. If it were not so, the

sufferings and tribulations of the church could never be trials. The devil does not intend to try, but to destroy, the people of God. But God's thoughts are higher and His counsel shall stand. The devil's persecutions are

God's trials. Ultimately, the church is not a victim of the enemy, but even in suffering is the beloved of the Lord."

Herman Hoeksema, *Peace for the Troubled Heart*
(found in Lynden PRC's bulletin)

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathies to Russ and Lisa Potjer and their children in the death of their father and grandfather, **Carl Potjer**. It is our prayer that they may receive comfort from the words of Christ our Savior in Revelation 3:21: "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Kevin Timmerman, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Consistory and the congregation of Edgerton PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to the Brands family of our congregation, following the passing of their sister and aunt, **Mrs. Henrietta Gritters**. May they find comfort in God's Word (Psalm 116:10), "Precious I the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Matt DeBoer, President
Chester Hunter, Clerk

Resolutions of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sympathies to Joyce Pastoor, Rev. Carl and Mary Haak, Mark and Bethany Feenstra, Chad and Melanie Noorman, and many great grandchildren in the death of their husband, father, grandfather, and great grandfather, **Neal Pastoor**. It is our prayer that they may receive comfort from the words of Christ our Savior in John 10:27-28: "My sheep hear my voice and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Kevin Timmerman, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Consistory and congregation of Edgerton PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to the Bleyenbergh family of our congregation, following the passing of their brother, brother-in-law, and uncle, **Mr. Gary Bleyenbergh**. May they find comfort in God's Word (Psalm 23:6), "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Rev. Matt DeBoer, President
Chester Hunter, Clerk

PRC Synod 2022

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2022, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Mr. Doug Mingerink
(doughi@mingerink.com)