

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

August 2022 • Volume 98 • No. 19

Confessing our sins

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

Postmaster

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

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Subscription price

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

Advertising policy

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

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prca.org

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Meditation

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

Confessing our sins

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

1 John 1:9

The apostle John indicates in the preceding verses of this chapter that he was writing to the churches that they may enjoy God's fellowship and, in God's fellowship, may also have fellowship with one another. John emphasizes that this is possible only when the saints walk in the light. God is light and in Him is no darkness. From that it follows that we can enjoy the fellowship of God only as we walk in the light as He is in the light. The sad thing is that we do not always walk in the light. Sin is a daily occurrence in our lives. One of the great themes of John's epistle is that we are born of God. This new birth brings us into the light of God's perfections. But since this work of God is not yet complete in us, we struggle daily with sin.

In that context John speaks of confessing our sins. What wonderful promises God has for those who confess their sins. He will forgive their sins. He will cleanse them from all unrighteousness. The implication is that in this way they will enjoy God's wonderful fellowship. This promise of God is rooted in His faithfulness and justice.

Confession of sins

This passage speaks not only of our sins but also of all our unrighteousness. These two terms are closely connected to each other. The term "unrighteousness" speaks of actions that violate the law of God, which is the standard for all righteousness. The term "sin" views these same actions as missing the mark God has set before us to glorify Him in our lives. This passage speaks accurately of sins (plural) and all unrighteousness, suggesting sins of all different kinds. We sin often every day. We sin in thought, word, and deed. We sin in every relationship of life. Some sins are sins of commission and others of omission. Often, we are not even aware of our sins. The work of grace is not finished in us, leaving us with many sins.

The Word of God here speaks of confessing these sins. To confess sin is freely to acknowledge one's sin. The word in the original means "to say the same thing." God in His Word tells us of our sin. We are conceived and born in sin. Even our best works are tainted with sin, rendering them as filthy rags. God has a powerful way to show us our sins in His law and all of Scripture. God speaks that same word through the voice of our conscience so that we are convicted of our sin. To confess our sins means to say the same thing as God says about our sin, freely acknowledging them.

We must confess our sins both to each other and to God.

Certainly, we are to confess our sins to each other. James 5:16 tells us, "Confess your faults one to another." We must make this confession to whomever we have wronged, whether it be a spouse, a parent, a child, a brother, or a neighbor. We must do this even though they have also wronged us.

But we must above all confess our sins to God. All sin is ultimately against God. David became conscious of this in his great sin with Bathsheba. He acknowledged in Psalm 51:4, "Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight." And so it is imperative that we confess our sins to God in prayer. And let us be specific in our confession. We do not sin generally; neither may our confession be general. We commit specific sins that dishonor God and hurt the neighbor. We must also be specific in our confession.

Not all in the church freely confess their sins. This is suggested by the construction of this sentence in the original. And this is also our experience. There are some who are reluctant to own up to their sins. Others will never admit their wrongs. There are times when each one of us is reluctant to confess our sin. Sometimes this is due to pride. Other times it is due to the fear that others will think less of us. Pray for grace to confess your sins.

It is necessary that our confession of sin be a confession which arises out of faith. There are many that will acknowledge their sins but who nevertheless fail to confess their sins in the proper, biblical sense. There

are those who will acknowledge their sins without any real sorrow for sin. Others wish to flaunt their sins and boast about them. This certainly is not the confession that brings us to forgiveness and cleansing. True confession of sin is a confession that is worked by the sovereign grace of God and arises out of a true faith in Jesus Christ. True faith seeks and knows Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. A confession of sin that arises out of such a faith is a confession characterized by genuine repentance. Repentance is a change of mind or heart about one's sin. It includes godly sorrow over the fact that one's sin has dishonored God and injured the neighbor. Repentance also involves a determination to turn from sin to the living God. And there is yet one more element to true confession: The repentant sinner seeks forgiveness and reconciliation with God on the basis of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Let us daily confess our sins!

Forgiveness and cleansing

If we confess our sins, God will forgive us our sins.

That God forgives our sins means that He dismisses them as we would a bad debt. The word used in the original was applied first of all to the dismissing of financial debts. The Scriptures apply the same idea to sins. When we sin, we fall behind in our spiritual obligations of love to God. This makes us spiritual debtors to Him.

The need for forgiveness is the fact that the debt of sin is too great for us to pay. The debt of sin cannot be paid with money, with promises, or great feats in the service of the Lord. The debt of sin is paid only when God's punishment for sin is fully endured, and God is presented with a perfect obedience. This no man can do. Sinful man can endure God's punishment. But no mere human can endure it all. That is why hell is forever. Nor can the fallen sinner ever present a perfect obedience to God. All he can do is increase his debt as he continues in his sin. This is disastrous. Those who are debtors to God are denied the blessedness of God's fellowship. They rather fall under the horrible wrath of God in this life and in eternity. Without divine forgiveness the sinner is hopelessly lost in his debts.

But, there is good news.

There is forgiveness with God. That God forgives means that He dismisses the debt of sin so that the sinner is debt-free before God, with nothing to be paid. Being debt-free, he enjoys the blessedness of His fellowship.

God forgives our debts only on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice. All His life but especially at the cross Jesus endured the full penalty of sin for all the elect whom God gave to Him. And He did so in perfect obedience on behalf of His people. This alone pays the debt of our sins.

If we confess our sins, God will forgive us our sins on the basis of the perfect payment of Jesus Christ. This is true no matter how great our sin is, how long we have been in sin, no matter how much damage our sin has done. God always forgives the sinner who comes to Him with a true confession of sin. This is because true confession of sin arises out of a true faith that joins us to Christ and lays hold of Christ's perfect payment for sin. In the way of that confession of faith God accounts the payment of Christ's death to be payment of our sins.

On the other hand, those who refuse to confess their sins will not be forgiven. Without a true confession of sin there is no forgiveness, not even for those who belong to the church, know the Scriptures, defend it, and do many mighty "works" for the Lord. The only way of forgiveness is our connection to the cross, which is the way of true confession.

But there is more. If we confess our sins, God will also cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This means that God will cleanse our daily lives of sin so that there is righteous obedience rather than a living in sin. This spiritual cleansing is something that God alone can do. We cannot cleanse our lives. The power of sin that resides in our sinful nature is too powerful. Without divine cleansing sin reigns in us. God alone can and does cleanse us from unrighteousness.

God cleanses us on the basis of the death of Jesus Christ. He forgives us on the basis of Christ's perfect sacrifice and He cleanses us on the same basis. This implies that He cleanses all those whom He forgives. He does not leave the forgiven sinner in the filth of his sin. No one should think that he can be forgiven by God and then be allowed to run in his sin.

This spiritual cleansing is also important to enjoy the fellowship of God and the saints. Fellowship with God requires more than forgiveness. God will not have fellowship with those who live in their sins. To enjoy fellowship with the living God and His saints requires also that we be spiritually cleansed from all our sins. That is why God cleanses those whom He forgives.

As with forgiveness, this wonderful cleansing comes only as we confess our sins. Should we in pride or because of false doctrine or for whatever reason refuse to confess our sins, we will remain in the filth of our sin, powerless to overcome it. The true confession of sin that is worked by God's sovereign grace and comes from faith is the only way to receive the cleansing of the cross of Jesus Christ.

Notice that God will cleanse us from all unrighteousness. This does not mean that God will make us perfect in this life. But it does mean that God cleanses your life in principle so that sin no longer dominates and controls

your life. He will do this with respect to all unrighteousness that you confess. None is too stubborn for him.

God is faithful and just

We are assured as confessing sinners that God will certainly forgive and cleanse us because He is faithful and just.

God is faithful. God is faithful to Himself. He has chosen a people in Christ with whom He will live in blessed fellowship in the way of forgiveness and cleansing. To that purpose God is faithful so that He will forgive and cleanse His people. God is faithful to Jesus Christ. Christ has secured our forgiveness and spiritual cleansing by His perfect payment of sin. In faithfulness to Christ, God forgives and cleanses all those who cling to Christ by faith and confess their sins. And God is also faithful to His promise. He has promised to for-

give and cleanse those who live in faith and confess their sins in faith. To that promise God is faithful.

God is also just. God is just in that He blesses the righteous and punishes only the sinner. Those who confess their sins in faith stand before Him in the perfect righteousness of Christ. Being just, God will indeed bless them with forgiveness and cleansing so that they can enjoy His fellowship.

And so we are assured by the very character of God that our sins will be forgiven and that we will be cleansed as we daily confess our sins in faith. Let us not in pride fail to confess our sins. Let us not shy away from confessing our sins, thinking they are too great or that they cannot for some reason be forgiven. Let us humble ourselves before God and man in true confession to find forgiveness and cleansing in the blood of Jesus Christ.



Guest editorial*

Prof. Cory Griess, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of First PRC

Answer a fool... do not answer a fool

Answer not a fool according to his folly, lest thou also be like unto him. Answer a fool according to his folly, lest he be wise in his own conceit.

Proverbs 26:4-5

“All is fair in love and war.”

And in church battles?

But the phrase is not true. All is *not* fair in love and war. Jehovah still thunders His ninth commandment from Sinai, overcoming the whirl of the grinder’s wheel and the clanging of the swords below.¹ When a hus-

band or a wife twists his/her spouse’s words to win an argument, it is sin. When Putin lies to and manipulates his people in order to keep their support for his murderous plans, it is not justifiable.

In church fights it is the same. “Ukraine and its Jewish leader are Nazi’s out of whose hands we must deliver the people!” is *almost* as brash as, “The PRC is the great whore of Babylon, out of whose hands we must deliver the people.” Or there is the equally ridiculous notion that Prof. D. Engelsma “is using an age-old tactic to discredit and dismiss election from the equation of salvation.” No matter how offended the leaders’ pride may be, no matter how much the people dismiss the strange things their leaders say because, after all, “It’s likely for the greater good in the end,” it is not justifiable. Not for the leaders, and not for the people.

But, for the ministers in the PRC, the question has continued to arise, “Do we respond?” And, “If so, *how* do we respond, and *how much*?” There is no collective answer to these questions, but it may be good for the readers to know some of us have discussed them. Looking back: Did we say enough? Looking forward: Do

* Prof. Griess, a regular writer for the SB, submitted the following article for publication. The editors judged the article to be of ‘editorial value,’ and so publish it as a guest editorial in this issue. Our thanks to Prof. Griess.

¹ The ninth commandment as explained by the Heidelberg Catechism helps us here. Q. 112. *What is required in the ninth commandment? A. That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man’s words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly, and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.*

we need to say more? We may have differing opinions, but the principles of Scripture must nurture those opinions in wisdom.

The text above speaks of *answering*. The text then, is addressing a situation where one has been attacked with words. The attacked one now faces the question, Do I answer, or do I not answer?

The inspired guide for that situation at first seems to offer a contradiction instead of help: “Answer a fool... do not answer a fool.” Examining the text more carefully, however, we see the guidance is an exquisite example of the Holy Spirit’s precision.

The fool and his folly

To understand the text, we must first remind ourselves who the fool is according to Proverbs. Since the text puts us in the realm of the audible and written word that has attacked us, we ought to stick to the description of the fool *as Proverbs displays him in his use of the tongue/pen*.

According to the inspired preacher, the fool is one who turns his tongue into an instrument of his pride. With the weapon of his tongue he fights not falsehood, but he beats and pierces those who have offended his pride (14:3, 12:18). Like a drunk chiding his wife, he thinks that he is reinforcing his status in the minds of listeners, when in fact he only lays open his folly (13:6). Further, in the fool’s lips are lies that are an abomination to the Lord (12:22). He will not tell the full truth, but will vehemently protest that he is doing so. By his lies he has the immediate reward of convincing some, but his victory is momentary. If instead he would speak truth, his lips would be established forever (12:19).

The Hebrew dictionaries tell us the fool’s “lying tongue” (12:19) can be “the falsity of self-deceived prophets.” Others have not deceived them; instead, they have deceived themselves. Yet they cast the blanket of their self-deceit also over others (Jer. 23:26). The fool’s tongue also utters slander (10:18). Slander is a specific kind of lie about others and what they have said or done. It involves taking a person’s words and making them seem to say something that is not the intent of the speaker nor the honest reading of his words. The fool seeks to “do mischief” (10:23) with his words. He wants to create turmoil, to ignite an uproar, for then he can exploit the fearful. His words are really the expression of rage that has consumed him (14:16). With his writing and speaking he is not interested in understanding but merely wants to unleash what is pent up within him (18:2). His words are deceitful and crooked. He twists things to fit his agenda (4:24, 6:12, 19:1). With his mouth and pen he is attempting to lift himself up,

instead of letting others exalt him if it is due (27:2). His speech, therefore, is like an uncontrolled fire (16:27).

So, should we give answer when one speaks or writes this way, seemingly with no shame?

It depends. “Answer....” “Answer not....”

Answer not

We are *not* to answer this kind of folly if the consequence is that we are dragged into this kind of speaking or writing ourselves. Verse 4 tells us not to answer then, “lest thou also be like unto him.” The temptation is to answer in like manner, to hurl back what has been hurled at us. It is better not to answer. In cases like this, silence may speak the most powerfully. There is a time to allow foolishness to show itself folly. When the Rabshakeh was carrying on in his folly, calling out to the inhabitants of Jerusalem that Hezekiah was deceiving them and they ought to come out and join Assyria, Hezekiah must have felt a strong desire to mount the wall as pulpit and respond. Instead, his command was, “Answer him not” (II Kings 18:36).

In many cases, responding will spur the one spewing foolishness to continue on in his folly. His rage fuels him and answering only provides an open door for his folly to pour forth. Wisdom will not win him now. “Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words” (Prov. 23:9). He will only continue to twist your words and make baseless attacks, for his pursuit of victory leads him to set aside all other considerations. Though one wants to answer again and again to set the record straight, it only draws one into an exhaustingly endless match that does not honor the Lord and only brings one under the judgments due a fool. This may well explain the silence, at times, in recent PRCA history.

Answer

And yet....

There are occasions when an answer to folly must be risked. The inspired preacher tells us these are the occasions when the consequence of *not answering* is that the one playing the fool becomes “wise in his own conceit” (v. 5). In other words, there are occasions when the foolish one is puffed up in pride, thinking he has won the day for wisdom because no answer has been given. Others, hearing him boast, start to be overcome, ensnared by the folly and propagators of it. In other words, an answer must be given when there is a risk to God’s people that they be taken in by the folly. How astounding that this can happen! People who have thoroughly imbibed the Reformed creeds can be convinced by strong personalities that their church is heretical *for*

holding to the creeds, all the while the personalities twist the meaning of the creeds to meet their agenda!

Though it means the discomfort of stepping into the folly being spewed forth, one must answer for the sake of the erring brother and especially for the sake of the church of Jesus Christ (all the while resisting the taking on of the character of the folly). Watchmen on the walls of Zion may not fail to blast the trumpet of warning! An answer must be given. “When a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteousness which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thine hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he is warned; also thou hast delivered thy soul” (Ezek. 3:20-21).

This is not so comfortable. When Paul had to answer a fool with regard to his folly for the sake of the church, he felt foolish doing so (II Cor. 11 and 12, where Paul says he speaks foolishly but is no fool). He entered into the fray without becoming a fool himself. He did so for the sake of the church.

Once an answer has been given exposing the folly for what it is, for the safety of the church and hopefully even for that of the one wise in his own conceit, then one does not need to feel burdened to continue to engage the folly if it continues. He does not get sucked into thinking he needs to answer every twisting and rage-filled attack, lest he fuel the folly or become foolish himself. Nonetheless, an evaluation of the situation will have to be made again and again going forward.

God give wisdom!

Of course, this is not the same as hiding from genuine discussion, explanation, debate, careful defense of one’s name, and needed polemics over real theological issues. The ninth commandment calls me to “love the truth, speak it uprightly, and confess it.” The cry “folly!” may be the cry of meekness, but it must not be the cry of weakness. Yet, neither may one call for engagement of an issue while speaking and writing as a fool.

Wisdom is the right application of biblical principles to specific circumstances. It involves questions of *what* not only, but also of *how* and *when*. Let the ministers, and the members too, keep discussing the question, Are we holding the right balance? God give us wisdom! And then confidence in treading the wise way.



Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Constantinople (AD 553): Background

The Creed of Chalcedon set forth the doctrine of the person and natures of Jesus Christ as fully as any creed or council had done. Surely, one might think, that creed would put an end to all controversy regarding Christ’s person and natures. But it was not so; the controversy continued.

The controversy had to continue, in God’s providence. For one thing, Jesus promised that the Spirit would guide the church into all truth (John 16:13). By AD 451 the church had not yet been led into all truth, not even into all the truth about Christ. For another, when the church sees truth more clearly, Satan works more forcefully to push her away from confessing that truth. And, to restate the previous from the viewpoint of humanity, some men did not agree with what Chalcedon stated, but they tried to convince the church that they were orthodox. Such are the ways of heretics.

The doctrinal background: Monophysitism

Chalcedon had established that Jesus Christ was one person (divine) in whom was united two natures (divine and human). After Chalcedon the Monophysites developed their position that because Christ was one person, He possessed one nature. “Monophysitism” means “one nature.”

The Monophysites started with the same premise as had the Nestorians before them: one person means one nature. However, the Nestorians had concluded that because Christ has two natures He must be two persons. The Monophysites came to the opposite conclusion: If Christ is one person, it follows that He has one nature.

But before the Council of Chalcedon, the Eutychians had said almost the same thing! They had said that

Christ has one nature, a divine nature, and that His human nature was absorbed into the divine. To answer this error, the Council of Chalcedon was called and the great creed written! By arguing essentially the same things as the Eutychians, the Monophysites showed that they did not agree with Chalcedon.

So they argued their case a little differently than did the Eutychians. The Monophysites acknowledged that you could see in Christ both divine and human characteristics, but that did not mean Christ had two natures. Some of them expressed their view this way: “God has been crucified” (and died, and was buried).

The Monophysites promoted their view for one hundred years after Chalcedon and divided the empire. Several reasons can be given why they were so successful; most of them need not concern us now.

The political background: Monophysite emperors

One reason that *does* concern us now is that several emperors in the century following Chalcedon favored Monophysitism. Emperor Anastasius I staunchly defended this heresy, and permitted theologians to promote it. That he reigned many years (AD 491-518) helped. Emperor Justin I succeeded Anastasius. Justin was orthodox, but reigned only nine years. Next came Justinian II, who reigned for thirty-eight.

Historians are not united in how to present Emperor Justinian II's view of Monophysitism. Clearly, he did not promote it and, clearly, he actively defended the

Creed of Chalcedon. Some suggest that he strongly opposed the Monophysites; others that he was soft toward them and tried to use diplomacy to convince them. It is true that he tried to bring unity to his empire by getting them to agree with Chalcedon—something that did not work.

One factor that worked against him was that his own wife, Theodora, was both a Monophysite sympathizer and a shrewd woman. Another is that at one point during his reign some who held high church offices were Monophysites. Anthimus, appointed the Patriarch of Constantinople in AD 535, certainly was. And Vigilius, appointed pope in AD 537, resisted some of Justinian's attempts to curb Monophysitism.

The three chapters

Matters came to a head when, in AD 543, Justinian condemned the position of three Eastern theologians, expressed in “The Three Chapters” or “Heads.” For our brief historical survey we need not enter into the content and history of these points. Justinian was trying to persuade the Monophysites to conform to Chalcedonian orthodoxy. However, the result was that people on both sides of the issue became more entrenched in their position. The pope vacillated between agreeing with Justinian's decision and not agreeing with it. Unity was not accomplished but further threatened. And Justinian decided to call the Fifth Ecumenical Council.



God's wondrous works

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

Christ (1) The door

Christ was speaking to some Jewish leaders who were convinced that they could see. They thought that they understood the Word of God and that they had no need for Christ to teach them.

Christ came that those who see not might see, and that those who see might be made blind (John 9:39). These Jews were among those who said they “saw.” One reason Christ came was that they might be made blind.

In contrast to those who think they see, there are

others who humbly confess that they see not. They are the ones in whom the Spirit has worked, so that they come to Christ, who is the Light, desiring that He might make them see.

Christ is the Light of the world. He is also the Door. In John 9 we read of Christ as the Light, and in John 10 we read of Him as the Door.

Clearly there is a relation between these two. Although it may have been a different time, the beginning of John 10 has no reference to it being so. It reads as

though the conversation between Christ and these unbelieving Jews continues right into chapter 10.

Also, the subject is similar though the symbolism changes. The Jewish leaders in John 9 are the ones who say they see. In John 10, Jesus refers to these same people as thieves and robbers. In John 9, the believers are referred to as those who confess that they “see not.” In John 10 these same believers are said to be sheep who enter in by the Door and go in and out and find pasture.

Also, in John 10 there is a reference back to John 9. Some Jews accused Jesus of having a devil. In John 10:21 we read that others responded and said: “These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?” So in John 10:21 we have a reference back to the healing of the blind man spoken of in John 9.

Thus there is an important connection between what Jesus says about Himself as the Door and what He says about Himself as the Light. We will come back to that connection later.

With this subject of Christ as the Door we begin this next section on Christ and His saving work. Christ, the Door, is the Mediator by whom we have access to God. We begin by considering why we need a Mediator, and who could be our Mediator. Then we will return to consider what our Lord meant by referring to Himself as the Door.

The need for a mediator

Why do we even need a Mediator? Some speak often about God and yet say relatively little about Christ the Mediator. Then there are others who speak of Christ often, but who have wrong ideas about what He accomplished.

So why is it that we need a Mediator?

Centrally, we need a Mediator because we are depraved sinners, and God’s justice demands that our sins be punished. Our sins are committed against the most high majesty of God. Justly, God demands that this sin be punished with extreme punishment, everlasting punishment, in both body and soul. Only if this sin is punished will God’s justice be satisfied.

There is no way for us to escape this punishment, unless God’s justice is satisfied. We ourselves are unable to make this satisfaction. Every day our debt increases. We need a Mediator who can satisfy the justice of the righteous and holy God in our place.

So who could do this?

One divine and human mediator

For a Mediator to be able to stand in our place, he would

have to be a man. He could not be an angel. He could not be an ox, or a lamb, or any other creature that is not a man. Since a man sinned, God’s justice requires that a man must make satisfaction for that sin.

So we need a Mediator who is a real man, with a human body and a human soul. If He was going to redeem us both body and soul, He would need to bear in both his body and his soul the punishment we deserved.

He would also have to be a righteous man. A sinner daily increases his own debt. He could not redeem others. So we need a Mediator with a sinless human nature who had never committed any sin.

Yet no mere creature could sustain the burden of God’s eternal wrath against sin so as to deliver others from it. To sustain the burden of God’s wrath our Mediator would have to be more powerful than all creatures. He would have to be very God.

Therefore, for us to be saved, we need a Mediator who is both God and a righteous man.

Yet there is more. He would have to be one person. We could not be saved by the combined work of two persons, one being God and the other being a man. Then we would have two saviors, one of whom was merely a man. Yet a mere man cannot save us. Only God can save us, and He alone must receive all the glory.

So we need a Mediator who is one divine person and who has two natures, a divine nature and a human nature. In other words, for us to be saved we need one of the persons of the Trinity to take upon Himself the human nature.

So which one of them would we need to do this? We would need the Son to do this. We would need the One who is eternally the Son to take upon Himself the human nature and be the Son of God also from the viewpoint of His human nature.

For us to be saved, therefore, we need the Son, who is the Word of God, to be “made flesh” (John 1:14) and to dwell among us. We need Him to suffer and die in our place, satisfying the justice of Almighty God.

Not by chance

It did not happen by chance that when man fell into sin he needed God to become a man to redeem him. God eternally determined that that would be the case.

God sending His Son to redeem us is not some plan B. It is incorrect to say that God’s original intention was for Adam to remain obedient. It was not the case that man frustrated God’s plan, so that God resorted to a second plan, deciding that the Son of God would become a man to save him from his sin.

No one ever frustrates God’s plan. Before man fell into sin, God had decreed that man would fall and that

Christ would come to save him. Everything that happens in time takes place precisely as God determined that it would.

Before the foundation of the world, God had elected Jesus Christ and determined to save certain persons in Him. God also determined that Adam would fall and need the Son of God to become a man to redeem him.

Yet it was only after man fell that God revealed to fallen man that He would send a Savior. After man had made himself wholly miserable, God was pleased to seek and comfort him when he fled from His presence. Then God came to him and promised him that He would give His Son, who should be made of a woman, to bruise the head of the serpent, and who would make him happy (Belgic Confession, Art. 17).

The door

So what was Christ saying by referring to Himself as the Door?

The blind man whom Jesus healed had “seen” and confessed that Christ was “of God.” When the Jewish leaders heard him say that, they cast him out of the synagogue. They acted as though they were the ones who had the keys of the kingdom of themselves, and that they could excommunicate whom they pleased.

In contrast, Jesus declared that He is the Door. It is by Him alone that one has access to God and His kingdom.

To those who reject Him and remain impenitent the kingdom is closed. As we confess in Lord’s Day 31,

“it is declared and testified to all unbelievers, and such as do not sincerely repent, that they stand exposed to the wrath of God and eternal condemnation, so long as they are unconverted.”

The kingdom of heaven is not opened to all. It is opened to all those and only those who believe in Christ, the divine and human Mediator.

So how is it that someone comes to believe in Him? Christ, the Door, is also the Light. He calls His people out of darkness. He is the One who opens a person’s eyes and causes him to see.

After the man who was healed was cast out, Jesus came to him and asked him whether he believed on the Son of God. The man answered, “Who is he, Lord, that I might believe on him?” Jesus then told him, “Thou hast both seen him, and it is he that talketh with thee.” To that the man replied, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped Him (John 9:35-39).

Jesus caused this man to see in more than one sense. By the grace of God he had come to know and confess Jesus to be the Son of God. The Light made him see and he entered by the Door.

Entering by Christ, we His sheep are fed and protected. By Him we go in and out and find pasture (John 10:9). By Him we are protected, no matter what others may say about us. Safe we are in the Mediator. He is with us, and He loves us.

May we also confess Him with joy, and live to the glory of His name.



Believing and confessing

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

As in heaven, so on earth

Lord’s Day 49

Question 124. Which is the third petition?

Answer. *Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;* that is, grant that we and all men may renounce our own will, and without murmuring obey Thy will, which is only good; that so every one may attend to, and perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven.

Imagine that you are an employer and that you have a workforce of angels. They never complain, are always punctual, never call in sick, never fudge their hours,

and are always ready, cheerfully, to do your bidding. It sounds like the employer’s dream team.

God has such a workforce of angels. About them we

read in Psalm 103:19-21, “The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. Bless the LORD, ye his angels, that excel in strength, that do his commandments, hearkening unto the voice of his word. Bless ye the LORD, all ye his hosts; ye ministers of his, that do his pleasure.”

In the third petition of the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus teaches us to ask God to help us to be more like the angels. More than that, we are asking to be submissive as God’s own Son submitted to His Father’s will.

People often think of prayer as a way of talking God into doing something that they want. True prayer, however, is not about getting what we want but about learning what God wants and bringing our will into line with His divine will. In this petition, we make a prayer of surrender and self-denial.

Thy will

What is the will of God?

The word “will” refers to what a person desires or wants. What are God’s desires? What is it that He wants? When we turn to the Bible, we find that there are two ways to answer that question.

On the one hand, the will of God is His eternal plan for all things, what is also called in the Bible God’s decree or counsel. This will of God is comprehensive (it includes all that ever happens), determinative (it is the ultimate cause of all things), and immutable (Ps. 115:3; Dan. 4:35; Is. 46:9-10).

On the other hand, God’s will is His demand concerning how we should live. In Matthew 7:21, “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.” Again, in I Thessalonians 4:3, “For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.” God’s will is that we live holy lives of obedience in this world. At the center of this will of God is the commandment to love God and to love one another.

To which aspect of God’s will does Jesus refer to in this petition? To His decree or to His commands?

Perhaps the best way to answer this is to ask another question: Why do we have to pray for God’s will to be done? Answering this, we see that both aspects of God’s will are included in this petition. We need to pray for God’s will to be done because, on the one hand, we do not like the plans God has for our life (His decree) and, on the other hand, because we do not obey God’s will as we should (His commands).

Not my will

Praying this petition, we acknowledge that we also have a will.

When God made man, He made him a willing creature. He gave us a will, as He also has a will. The difference is that whereas His will is supreme, man’s will is subject. God did not give man independence to do whatever he wanted; rather, He told Adam and Eve what His will was for them, and He demanded that they obey that will.

At that point, Adam and Eve were sinless and had free will in the sense that they could choose either good or evil. In the use of their free will, they disobeyed God and fell into sin, with the result for us that our will is under the bondage of sin so that, apart from the grace of God, all our choices are sinful. By nature, our will is contrary to God’s will.

In the Christian, God has done something remarkable. He has given us a new heart with new desires and a new will so that we want the things that God wants, and we do the things that God commands. Even then, though, the old will to sin is still present. In Romans 7 Paul describes it this way, “I delight in the law of God after the inward man,” but, “the good that I would I do not, and the evil that I would not, that I do” (Rom. 7:18-22). There’s a struggle in him between the will of the flesh and the will of the Spirit.

As we pray this petition, this is what we recognize and confess about ourselves. We are asking God to help us to let go of, to put down, to renounce, to abandon, to crucify, to relinquish our own will. We are saying, “Not my will, but Thine be done.”

A pilgrim’s prayer

Too often our will is against God’s. Whenever we disobey, or even have thoughts of sin, we are setting our will against God’s commandments. In murmuring or wanting something different, we are wanting something other than what God has planned for us in His providence.

Here, Jesus is teaching us to pray that God will help us to abandon our own will for God’s.

That, of course, makes this a very difficult petition to pray. We are very stubborn, and we are asking God to break our stubborn will. If you have children, you know how difficult this can be. The child does not want to do what you as a parent want, and the process of breaking the child’s will includes discipline, which sometimes means pain for the child. Sometimes, this is exactly how God will answer this petition too. He has to put us through some very difficult things in order to bring us into submission to His will. In Psalm 119:67 and 71, David says, “Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.... It is good for me that I have been afflicted: that I might learn thy statutes.”

When you have learned, as a child of God, to pray this petition, then you have learned what it is to be a Christian. Then you have really learned what prayer is.

Prayer is the deeply spiritual exercise of a pilgrim who has his eye on God and prays in faith.

The Christian life is a journey. We are traveling towards heaven. We know the beginning of the journey, we know what has happened along the journey to this point, we know the end or goal of our travels, but we do not yet know the way from here to the end of the journey. There may be deep waters of trial ahead of us that we have to pass through. There may be dark valleys of death through which we must traverse. We do not know. For us, it is to keep following the signposts of God's Word, obeying His commandments, and submitting to His purposes for us as they are unfolded to us. We do that because we know that this journey is taking us in the end to heaven to be with the Lord.

God is good

God's will is not always easy, but God's will is always good.

Ultimately, God wills our eternal glory, and every aspect of His will for us in the present serves that end. There is great comfort for the believer in that. Paul puts it this way in Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." Things do not happen to us by chance. We are not like a floating bottle at sea or like feathers blown around by the wind. God in His will is leading us on to glory. In Psalm 73:24 Asaph confesses, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory." This is our confession: God is always good, both in all that He requires of us, and in all that He has planned for us.

Jesus Himself had to pray this prayer. When He was here on the earth in our human flesh, He came not to do His own will but the will of the One who sent Him. In the garden of Gethsemane, as He faced His arrest, trial, execution, and suffering for sin at the hands of the just God, He prayed, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. 26:39). What was God's good will? It was that Jesus would suffer the agonies of the cross, to bring glory to Himself and salvation to us. Jesus submitted, because He knew God's will was best.

May God give to us such hearts of submission.

God's answer

We may be assured that God does answer this prayer.

How does He do that?

Primarily, by giving to us His Holy Spirit, so that we abandon our own will and submit to His. As we pray this petition, we should expect that we will become more and more like Christ and that God will give us the attitude of the angels who serve Him in heaven.

In answer to this prayer God gives us the grace to see that, whatever the circumstances of our life, they are from Him.

In answer to this prayer, God gives the grace of obedience to His will. Think of what that means. He gives us diligence, honesty, kindness, love, and submission. He writes His will in our hearts so that we obey from the heart.

Then also, in answer to this prayer God gives us hope so that we live, more and more, in anticipation of the day of perfection when we, with the angels and all the redeemed, will do His will perfectly.

Today you struggle to understand the will of God, you wrestle with sin. But there comes a day of perfection, and that is our hope as we pray.

Questions for Discussion

1. Does prayer change God's will? Why then do we pray?
2. What is the will of God? What are some of the characteristics/attributes of His will?
3. Why do we distinguish between the will of God's decree and the will of His command?
4. God's will of decree is always accomplished, but not so His will of command. How does the will of His command (and man's disobedience to it) serve the will of His decree? Explain this in relation to man's fall into sin and Pharaoh's refusal to let Israel go.
5. What do we mean when we say, over against Arminian theology, that man does not have a free will? Does this mean we have no choice in spiritual matters?
6. What can we learn from the angels about doing the will of God?
7. Give examples from your life of how you pray this petition in regard to the will of God's command.
8. Give examples from your life of how you pray this petition in regard to the will of God's decree.
9. Give an example from your life of learning the will of God through the pain of suffering. How did you experience the goodness of God through this?
10. What is meant by "station and calling" in the catechism? Why is it important that each of us know what these are for ourselves?
11. Sometimes we are faced with the question, "What is God's will for my life?" How would you answer that question?



Ministering to the saints

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The elders' work: Conclusion

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2022, p. 208.

With this article I conclude, prematurely, my treatment of the work of elders. The conclusion is premature because I have not finished developing the topic thoroughly. However, in the interest of focusing my research and writing on topics that relate to my seminary coursework, I lay down the writing of this rubric.

This last article will be a brief overview of those aspects of the work of the elders that I have not yet treated.

Overview of the elder's work

My first article regarding the work of elders examined the confessional basis for their work, as set forth in the Church Order, the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons, and the Belgic Confession.¹ My second article examined Bible passages that relate to this work.²

Based on these confessional and Scripture passages, I have been developing the thesis that the work of the elders has three main aspects to it: oversight, shepherding, and teaching. To this point I have developed only the first of these aspects, that of oversight. I have shown that elders must oversee the church's worship, and specifically the preaching and administration of sacraments; that they must also oversee the work of the offices and the work and lives of the officebearers; and that they must oversee the congregation.

This last point, the oversight of the *congregation*, is perhaps the most prominent, or obvious, aspect of the elders' work. I treated it last in order to emphasize that there are less prominent but equally important aspects of the work of oversight. To mention it last served the purpose of emphasizing that the elders must also oversee the *officebearers* and their work.

Briefly, then, I will overview the other two aspects of the elders' work. To both of these aspects I had intended to devote several articles.

Shepherding

The elder must love God's people, and know how to deal

wisely with them. As an overseer, he will recognize that some of God's people are not spiritually well. At that point he must pastor them. This aspect of his calling is based on I Peter 5:2, where Peter commands elders to "feed" the flock. Literally the word is "be a shepherd to." The Church Order, Article 23, points to this calling when it says that "the office of the elders...is...to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members." And the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons says that one aspect of the work of elders is "to serve all Christians with advice and consolation."

Carrying out this aspect of their calling, elders will find themselves involved in many situations. The sheep get discouraged, downcast, depressed; they are the objects of abuse and rejection; they have difficulties in their marriages, families, and work-places; physical pain and bodily ailments beat them down; and to all that is added sin, which manifests itself in our lives in many forms. To give specific insights in how to deal with all these situations is beyond the scope of this article. But some general principles must guide the elder in every such situation.

First, elders must sympathize and empathize; they must understand the needs of the sheep, and recognize that their needs are *real*. An elder who has good health, a good family life, and a good job situation can be quick to think that the sheep who need pastoral help are overly sensitive and overreacting to rather small problems. In some instances that may be true; in many it is not. The sheep have great burdens. When elders acknowledge that the pain we feel is real, they sympathize with us. When they understand our pain and begin to feel it, they empathize. Such elders will truly help the sheep, as Christ does us (Heb. 2:14-18, 4:14-16).

Second, elders must be tender in their approach to the sheep. To reproach or beat us for our spiritual maladies might be their first inclination ("you made your bed, now lie in it"), but is unhelpful and unloving. God does not upbraid or reproach us when we seek help (James 1:5). Neither must we in our work with others. Elders must tenderly work to understand the real ailment of the people, and its cause, and how

¹ *Standard Bearer*, October 15, 2019.

² *Standard Bearer*, December 15, 2019.

they can help alleviate it. Elders, emulate the compassion that Christ showed to many who came to Him for healing!

Third, elders must realize that they are powerless to remove the cause of suffering. Males are often “fixers”: we try to fix problems, so they are gone. But to think we can fix the problems of God’s people is naïve. To think we can fix them assumes that their problem is not deep, that our approach to problem-solving will also be theirs, and that we can change the circumstances of our lives. This ignores the fact that sin and its effects are here to stay, as long as we are on this earth. Too many well meaning elders and pastors have tried to fix what cannot be fixed.

Finally, while elders cannot fix the people’s problems, they can bring us to One who can. Above all else, in their miseries, God’s people need to be reminded of God’s faithful love, of His preserving grace, of His perfect and wise plan, and that He works all things for our salvation. When God’s people sin, elders can bring us to see that God has washed away our sins in Christ, has made us new creatures, and is preparing heaven for us. When sin’s effects make God’s people miserable, elders can remind us that Christ will remove all such effects when we die and when He comes again to bring us to heaven. When the circumstances of our lives are the occasion for our misery, elders can point us to our calling to serve God faithfully in those circumstances. All this the elders can do by bringing the Scriptures to us and praying for us.

To be clear, the work of the elder includes also rebuke and admonition. Shepherds do rebuke and admonish; their staff is used to correct as well as to comfort and lead. But even rebukes and admonitions must be given pastorally, in love, with the goal of correction.

Teaching

Every office in Christ’s body obligates the officebearer to teach. That this is true of the pastor is clear from the double reference to the office, “pastors and teachers” (Eph. 4:11). Teaching is the predominate activity of their office.

But while oversight and shepherding are the predominate activities of the elders, and showing compassion that of the deacons, elders too must teach. They do not teach the entire congregation from the pulpit, but they teach individual members of the congregation as they carry out the work of their office.

The basis for saying that teaching is an aspect of the elders’ work is found both in Scripture and in our Church Order. The bishop—not merely pastor, but also elder—must be “apt to teach” (I Tim. 3:2). The work of the

elders is both “to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members” and also “to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion” (Church Order, Art. 23). Also, Article 55 requires the minister and elders to “use the means of teaching, of refutation or warning, and of admonition” in three areas: the ministry of the Word (restricted to ministers), and Christian teaching, and family visiting.

Elders carry out this aspect of their work in various ways. First, all pastoral work involves teaching. No matter what the specific needs of God’s people are, Scripture addresses those needs either explicitly or implicitly. Scripture not only comforts us in our needs, but also teaches us how to view our need in light of God’s will and calls us to trust God to supply our need. In reading and explaining Scripture elders teach.

Secondly, family visitation is an occasion for elders to teach. Certainly, family visitation is not merely a social event. Nor ought it be only a matter of learning more of the family’s needs. It ought be also a time of instruction. Elders who know the spiritual dangers that families face can teach the families, and so help them guard against danger.

Third, Article 55 refers to “Christian teaching,” which can include formal and organized classes to teach a certain age group, such as catechism classes, or to teach the congregation regarding a certain subject.

Fourth, by “exhorting others,” Article 23 refers to teaching the principles of the Christian and Reformed faith to some who were not members of the church.

In other words, the opportunities for elders to teach are endless! For which reason, teaching is not an *option* for elders; it is a *must*.

So elders, adopt the mentality that you *can* teach! After all, if “apt to teach” is a qualification for office, and if God called you to office, then He equips you with His Spirit to do the work of the office, including teaching.

He is not necessarily a good teacher who has gone to college to get a teaching degree, or studied principles of teaching. These benefit those who intend to teach for a profession, but an elder who does not have such formal education still can teach. What makes one a good teacher is that he knows the subject he is teaching, and knows his audience, and aims his instruction to the audience’s level and benefit.

The subject matter of the elder’s instruction will always be the Word of God. The elder must know that Word. His audience will always be humans, whether believers or unbelievers. The elder must know human nature, and have a desire for the salvation of souls. Then he can teach!

Most elders know this from the perspective of par-

ents. Every parent is called to teach his or her children, from infancy to young adulthood. Both the subject matter and the method of instruction will vary according to the child's age and needs. But the parent instinctively begins to teach. Along the way, he or she comes to realize what works, and what does not; and that what works for one child might not work for another.

With application to elders, the point is this: Whether you are teaching at family visitation, or on a pastoral visit, or in the catechism room, learn about the subject that you are to teach, and think about to whom you will teach it, and go teach it!

I cannot fish or golf. At least, so I say. To be clear, I have done both, and the experience has convinced me that I cannot. But in fact, I can. I just do not do so well, and do not enjoy doing so. To say "I cannot" can easily be an excuse not to begin. The elder does not have the option not to begin to teach.

When you teach, elders, your confidence is not that

you went to college to learn how, but that you know your subject matter as taught in Scripture. The confidence is also that God's Spirit equips you. In your first or second or tenth attempt you might be nervous. You might decide that one night or another, or at one particular pastoral visit, you did not do so well. I have had that too. But you learn from these experiences, and *that* makes you a better teacher.

One reason why elders need this encouragement is that teaching is part of their office. Another is that we have more congregations than ministers, and many congregations have more people who need instruction than the pastors can help.

So, elders, get on with teaching. You will find, not to your surprise, that to teach well, to study the subject well, and to know the audience well, is hard work. But you will also find, perhaps to your surprise, that you enjoy it!



When thou sittest in thine house

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

Nurturing our preschool children (5)

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2022, p. 205.

Nurturing involves discipline. Discipline is necessary to cultivate in our children a sense of what is right and wrong. There are various forms of discipline, of course—from an angry, disapproving look to a *good*, sound spanking. The latter of these is frowned upon and even condemned by the unbelieving world as abuse. The world does not take into account what God requires for the careful nurturing of children. But, as is always the case, our unbelieving society exerts strong influence on many in the church, as well. Modern methods of child-rearing ignore sin (a word *never* used in the world and seldom heard in much of the church world) in a child and attempt to *redirect* a child's attention rather than *correct* him or her. It is necessary, therefore, that parents in the church, especially young parents who are quick to imbibe the reasoning of the world, pay attention to the teaching of Scripture in this important aspect of nurturing our little children (and older ones as well).

Discipline

This term can be used in two ways, both applicable to our subject. In the first place, a person must learn discipline. By this is meant self-control. It is an orderly conduct or pattern of behavior. Though the Bible uses the term "discipline" only once (Job 36:10), the idea is found in a passage such as I Corinthians 9:25-27, "And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." A person who strives to master a race or some other athletic competition must be temperate, that is, must practice self-control. He does this by bringing his body into subjection. He practices, works, concentrates on himself—he disciplines himself—in order to master his sport. There is much

emphasis on this in our society, as there was in Paul's day. Physical fitness is the order of the day. So much is it emphasized that people make it an idol in their lives. Some men will spend hours running and lifting weights not just for their health (though they use this as an excuse) but in order that they might bulk up in order to show off their physique. Likewise, some women will spend hours jogging and on the weight machines. They will starve themselves, as if this outward beauty is what will make them attractive to others. We well know what discipline is in this sense of the word.

Paul uses another example in II Timothy 2:3, 4, "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier." A soldier is trained in boot camp to be hardened to the elements and foes he will confront on a battle field. He disciplines himself in the art of war. This, then, is what we mean by the word *discipline* in the first place.

Our children must grow up disciplined in a certain behavior. They must grow up to conduct themselves properly in this world. They must be trained to behave in an orderly way. There are certain norms by which we must train our children to live. Rude and unruly children are an embarrassment. I know, this is no longer the norm today in a society that elevates self above every code of behavior. We live in an age and world in which everyone does what they choose to do. What they *feel* is right takes priority over what *is* right. In our world of self-centeredness our children must be disciplined to live according to the norm of God's Word and commandments. The believer indeed has a certain code of conduct that he must discipline himself to obey. That code is God's Word. Parents are in duty bound to discipline their children to walk in the way of God's commandments in thankfulness for God's favor and love.

Children must be trained while they are small to obey not only parents but all authority, to show respect for adults, and to be seen and not heard when conversation is going on. When children ignore the commands of their parents, make snide remarks to an adult, or are loud and unruly, it shows a lack of discipline in their lives. This, in turn, reflects upon parents who are called by God to train their children in self-control. If little children are not taught this when they are young, when older they will lack self-control in more serious matters such as sexual purity, sobriety, godly speech, and proper entertainment.

Discipline. God's people are a disciplined people.

The Bible then teaches us *how* such discipline is accomplished, that is, by means of discipline. Discipline

in this sense of the word is training that corrects, molds, or perfects one's spiritual conduct. Discipline is punishment when one does not conform to the code of God's Word. It is enforced obedience. We have already pointed out that a disciplined spiritual life is taught by means of instruction and example. But a life of self-control cannot be fully achieved without discipline, or, as the Bible speaks of it, chastening.

It is at this point that the world, and many in the church too, will take offense at what I write. So, let me not state it. I will let God state it for us. Neither will I just give references, but will record the Word of God in full. "He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes" (Prov. 13:24). The word translated "chasten" here in the Hebrew is literally "to correct by blows." Ouch! Sounds harsh! We will explain this more fully after giving a number of other quotes.

Solomon continues in his proverbs: "Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying" (Prov. 19:18). "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child; but the rod of correction shall drive it far from him" (Prov. 22:15). "Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from hell" (Prov. 23:13, 14). "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29:15). Every young parent needs to spend time studying these passages of Proverbs, the Bible's handbook on child-rearing.

In his commentary on Proverbs 19:18, Charles Bridges, who served in the Church of England in the early 1800s, wrote this insight concerning this Word of God:

"Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; lest they be discouraged." (Col. 3:21.) But let not the rule—*chasten—spare not*—be a "hard saying." Is not tenderness for the child a cover for the indulgence of weak and foolish affections? There is much more mercy in what seems to be harshness, than in false tenderness (Prov. 23:13, 14). Let the child see that we are resolved; that we are not to be diverted from our duty by the *cry* of weakness or passion. Far better that the child *cry* under healthful correction, than that parents should afterwards *cry* under the bitter fruit to themselves and children, of neglected discipline. "Eli could not have devised which way to have plagued himself and his house so much, as by kindness to his children's sin. Parents need no other means to make themselves miserable than sparing the rod" (Bishop Hall's *Contemplations*, Book xi.xii). Yet much less of it would be needed, did they govern, as they ought to do, by the steady decision of a word, a frown, or a look.

Are the days of proper discipline of a child past now

that the unbelieving world points a harsh finger at godly parents who seek to discipline their children in proper behavior and conduct toward God? God's Word is clear: Parents who spare the rod *hate* their children, but when they properly spank their children when they sin, they *love* their children (Prov. 13:24). That child who is left without chastisement when he sins will ultimately bring shame upon his mother and father. The foolishness of sin is bound in the heart of a child. A spanking or paddling will save his soul from hell. Why would godly parents who are concerned about the spiritual welfare of their children *not* apply the rod when their child commits a sin against God?

The writer to the Hebrews compares the chastening (discipline) of a child with the chastening we as God's children receive from His hand. We read in Hebrews 12:5-11,

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

God our Father chastens His children with many afflictions, some of them sore and painful. He does this for a reason, of course. He loves us and deals with us as His sons and daughters. "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards and not sons." Once again, in the Greek the word chasten means "to scourge." When God scourges His children, it yields the "peaceable fruit of righteousness."

The same is true when we discipline our small children. I say small children. Discipline may not wait until the child is school age. By that time it is too late. A kindergarten teacher was once asked by a parent, "What can I do to prepare my daughter for kindergarten?" The answer was simple, "Teach her to obey authority." Rebellion is bound in the heart of a child, just as it is in all our hearts. Sin, after all, is rebellion. Discipline yields this fruit: righteousness. Not the imputed righteousness that is ours through the cross of Jesus Christ alone. But

discipline yields the fruit of living in a right way, a way that is pleasing to God, a way that is in accord with His commandments. This fruit of discipline results in peace in the family. Are you looking to overcome unruly and self-centered children? Chasten them.

Two points of importance must be kept in mind in the discipline of our little children. First, the language of Scripture seems harsh—it *seems* harsh. When we read it superficially, it might even seem as if God is teaching us to abuse our children. There are those, even in the church, who do indeed abuse their children when disciplining them. They do not chasten correctly. That is horribly sinful behavior on the part of parents. Discipline may never become abuse. But the Bible does speak of a rod. This is a stick or a staff. It also speaks of beating the child with a rod. The word "beat" today has a bad connotation. It implies waling on a child until his backside is covered with stripes, perhaps even bloody stripes. Solomon does not mean this when using the word "beat." The word simply means to smite. The idea then is that when a little child walks in disobedience to mother or father, then they are to slap his backside (not face, arms, or back—but butt). This can be done with the hand, but if this is not effective enough (I remember my mother bruising her hand), then a stick can be used.

The stick is not to be used in a fit of uncontrolled wrath, but with a firm and righteous hand. Will it hurt? Yes. But it will not maim or bloody. Neither will that stick need much more than a couple of whaps across the backside. That is not harsh or cruel. It is, in fact, an act of love; one that a parent humbly acknowledges will correct and lead on the path of righteousness. Parents realize that if their children grow up to be rebellious and vain, the punishment of God on them will be much heavier than a rod.

The second point of importance we bear in mind is that parents will not need to chasten their children over every little mishap or naughty act that they perform. The rod is not to be used incessantly with every offence committed. Depending on the wrong, lesser forms of discipline can be effective, without neglecting the rod. Blatant disobedience or rebellion must be punished quickly. A little child (the terrible twos?) will test his parent's authority through disobedience. For example, I may command them not do something and they will do it anyway—sometimes repeatedly. Such disobedience is not a little thing, especially when the children throw their temper tantrums when told "no." This is rebellion and must be punished. But there are also different means that can be used when our children simply misbehave. These means are well enough known. But

even these means will be ineffective unless the threat of chastening stands behind them.

There is another reason the rod will not need to be administered frequently. When children learn that father or mother mean what they say requiring of them obedience, then when they do wrong, a hard look or a stern warning will be sufficient. They will understand the consequences if they continue in their sin. It is not the rod that corrects often times, but the threat of the rod that can stand behind much of our discipline.

Bear in mind once more the teaching of Proverbs 19:18, “Chasten thy son while there is hope, and let not thy soul spare for his crying.” Some parents of a soft nature hesitate to discipline their children. They feel sorry for their

children when they cry. “Let not your soul spare for their crying.” Remember the peaceable fruit that discipline renders. Other parents feel their children will hate them when they grow up. This is far from the truth. Believing children will grow up thanking their parents for teaching them a disciplined life, and that by means of discipline.

Using God’s Word as our guide, then, we train our children by instruction, example and by discipline—all necessary aspects of nurturing our preschool children. “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6). What a blessed promise God’s Word gives believing parents who apply themselves to the nurture of their children! May we not weary in this well-doing.



Church and state

Mr. Brian VanEngen, member of the Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney

Roe Overturned

On Friday, June 24, 2022 the United States Supreme Court issued its opinion in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*.¹ This decision, which overruled the longstanding abortion rights case, *Roe v. Wade*, created much controversy. Before the decision was even issued, a draft opinion of the court was leaked in an unprecedented breach of the confidentiality normally maintained by the Court for draft opinions or dissents.² Protests were held outside the homes of conservative justices, despite federal laws prohibiting actions that could intimidate or otherwise influence federal judges’ decisions. A man was even arrested for plotting to assassinate conservative Justice Brett Kavanaugh.³ In this article, we will look at the decision, what the Court did and did not decide, why the decision was so controversial, and what this decision about abortion rights can tell us about the status of the law relating to churches and religious rights.

The decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization* was authored by Justice Alito and, other

than the responses and references to the concurring and dissenting opinions, reads much the same as the draft version that was leaked earlier. Justices Neal Gorsuch and Amy Coney Barret joined in the opinion, and Justices Thomas, Kavanaugh, and Chief Justice Roberts each filed concurring opinions. Justice Alito provides a very thorough and interesting discussion of the legal analysis surrounding constitutional rights, especially rights that are not explicitly spelled out in the U.S. Constitution.

Justice Alito began by pointing out that there is no right to abortion explicitly spelled out in the Constitution. We must always remember when interpreting the Constitution that one of the main functions of the Constitution was to restrain the power of the government. Even when the Constitution does not explicitly refer to a right of an individual, sometimes the Court finds that such rights are implied by the Constitution, either by the rights contained in the first eight amendments to the Constitution, or because the rights are so embedded in our history that it can be assumed that the framers intended them to be among the fundamental rights protected by the Constitution. When *Roe* was decided in 1973, the Court ruled that the right to an abortion is part of a right to privacy that “springs” from the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and Fourteenth Amendments. Justice Alito criticized the *Roe* opinion, noting that the

¹ *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, 597 U.S. ____ (2022).

² See Rev. A. Spiensma’s article in the June 2022 *SB*, pp. 398-400.

³ “Man with Pistol, Crowbar and Zip Ties Is Arrested near Kavanaugh’s Home” *The New York Times*, Section A, p. 20 (June 9, 2022).

framework of the decision read more like legislation passed by Congress than an opinion of the Court.

It should be noted that the *Dobbs* decision also overruled a 1992 case known as *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*.⁴ This case had overruled significant portions of the *Roe* decision, but left standing the main premise of *Roe*, that there is a constitutionally protected right to abortion. The *Casey* decision seemed to recognize the weak reasoning of the *Roe* decision, and instead found the right to abortion based on the “liberty” protected by the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. The argument is that the Due Process Clause protects not only procedural due process, but also substantive rights that are implied. As Justice Alito points out, decisions referring to these rights are usually based either on rights spelled out in other amendments, or on rights “deeply rooted in our history and tradition.” It is often assumed that rights which are deeply rooted in our history and tradition are implicitly included, and not explicitly mentioned because they are taken for granted. He notes that the drafters could not have had abortion rights in mind when the Fourteenth Amendment was drafted in 1866, as three-quarters of the States had made abortion at any stage of a pregnancy a crime by that time. This prohibition had continued largely up until the time *Roe* was decided.

Finally, the doctrine of *stare decisis* played a large role in *Casey*’s retention of the main premise of *Roe*. Many critics of the Court charged that the present Court should refrain from overruling *Roe* and *Casey* in the *Dobbs* case based on this doctrine as well. The term *stare decisis* means “to stand by things that have been decided.” This doctrine provides that a court should not quickly overturn or reverse a precedent set by a previous ruling of the court. As Justice Alito indicated, there are four reasons for the doctrine: first, it protects those who have taken action based on the court’s previous ruling; second, it reduces the incentive for challenging settled precedent and re-litigating issues that have been decided; third, it contributes to the actual and perceived integrity of the judicial process; and fourth, it restrains judicial action by respecting the judgment of those who have dealt with important issues in the past. The doctrine of *stare decisis* is not absolute, of course, and as Justice Alito pointed out, the Court has several times overturned previous decisions that were deemed simply to have been wrongly decided. Most notable are such decisions as *Brown v. Board of Education*, which reversed the Court’s previous rulings regarding racial

segregation in public schools.⁵ In his concurring opinion, Justice Kavanaugh points out that the *Obergefell* case, which paved the way for homosexual marriages, overturned previous precedent.⁶

The three dissenting liberal justices did not devote much argument to defending the legal reasoning of *Roe* or *Casey*, but instead focused on the doctrine of *stare decisis* and on the policy considerations, such as impact the ruling would have on poor women who could not afford to travel to another state to have an abortion. The dissenters argued that the Court’s reasoning would have an effect on other prior decisions as well, especially those in which the Court found rights that were not spelled out explicitly in the Constitution.

So what did the Court really decide? The reactions to the Court’s decision have been strong, with pro-life advocates celebrating a major achievement in the nearly 50-year-long fight against *Roe*, and abortion rights advocates claiming that the rights of women were being destroyed. Newspapers often made it sound as if the Court had outlawed abortion. At root, the Court simply said that there is no federally protected right to abortion. The right to an abortion, or potential criminal penalty for it, then depends on state law. If state law allows abortion, abortions can continue as before. The concern of abortion advocates is that states will use the opportunity to make more stringent laws against abortion; but in order to do so, the elected representatives of the people will have to vote to approve such legislation.

So why the outrage that has led some to go so far as to threaten the lives of conservative Supreme Court Justices? The “right to privacy” that the *Roe* Court found hidden in the Constitution became a broad license for “every man to do what was right in his own eyes” (Jud. 21:25). The Court’s opinion in the case of *Lawrence v. Texas*, which struck down Texas’ laws against homosexuality and eventually paved the way for homosexual marriage, cited *Roe v. Wade* and its right to privacy.⁷ The majority took great pains to state clearly that this ruling only applies to abortion, and will not affect any of the other precedents such as *Lawrence*, which legalized homosexuality, *Obergefell*, which found a right to homosexual marriage, or *Griswold v. Connecticut*,⁸ which legalized birth control. As stated previously, the effect on precedents was one of the concerns expressed by the dissenting justices. If there is no right to privacy ‘springing’ from the Constitution to support abortion

5 *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483, 491 (1954).

6 *Obergefell v. Hodges*, 576 U.S. 644, (2015)

7 *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 U.S. 558 (2003).

8 *Griswold v. Connecticut*, 381 U.S. 479 (1965).

4 *Planned Parenthood of Southeastern Pa. v. Casey*, 505 U.S. 833 (1992).

rights, how can there be a privacy right that supports the other rights that have been recognized in recent years? One thing the liberal justices may have a point about is the effects of this decision reaching further than abortion. In fact, within days of the ruling, the State of Alabama cited the opinion as a basis for banning gender-affirming treatments for transgender youths.⁹

The effect of this ruling on churches and religious organizations may take years to determine, but there are a couple of observations that can be made. First, the current makeup of the court seems to be moving more towards strict textualism in interpreting the Constitution. If a right of the people or a power of the government is not explicitly stated, the Court will be less likely to interpret the language to conform to find rights or powers in the name of conforming the Constitution to modern society. This type of interpretation is generally more favorable to churches and religious groups that are more conservative.

Next, in past articles under this rubric, we have

⁹ Kim Chandler, “Alabama Cites Abortion Ruling to Argue for Transgender Medication Ban,” Associated Press (June 30, 2022).

looked at many examples of cases where the evolving “rights” being found in the Constitution come head to head with the right to free exercise of one’s religion. It may be a church or religious school that is in danger of offending someone’s ‘right’ to be homosexual or transgender because of the biblical teachings they maintain. Or an employer whose desire to operate his business in accordance with God’s law is required to buy abortive birth control for his employees. Several of the Court’s rulings lately have extended religious liberty rights, and now the Court seems willing to deny federal protection for ‘rights’ that religious people find offensive as contrary to God’s law. This trend could result in opportunities to take advantage of the law for the protection of the church. On the other hand, Congress could take action legislatively to overturn *Dobbs*, or could even resort to “court-packing” by adding liberal justices to reverse the trend. In the meantime, we should be careful to use every opportunity we can to exercise the freedoms God has given. We wait to see what the Father’s will is, as we continue to enjoy for a time the freedom to worship Him.



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

What was the first RFPA publication? (Hints: It was not a magazine, and it was in a foreign language.)

PRC news (denominational)

On June 19 Rev. E. Guichelaar accepted the call he had received from Grace PRC—Grand Rapids, MI (May 22). His farewell in Randolph (WI) PRC was held on July 17. He was installed as the third pastor in Grace’s history on July 31.

On May 22 the Consistory of Hosanna PRC—Edmonton (note the new name!) announced a trio of Revs. R. Smit (Philippines), J. Smidstra (First PRC—Holland), and C. Spronk (Faith PRC—Jenison, MI). On May 29 the congregation voted to call Rev. Smidstra. And on June 19, he declined this call. Subsequently, Hosanna’s Council formed a new trio of Revs. A. Brummel (Calvary PRC—Hull, IA), J. Holstege (Zion PRC—Jenison,

MI), and R. Smit (Philippines). On July 10 the congregation voted to call Rev. Smit.

On June 5 Rev. J. Smidstra declined the call to Hudsonville PRC (MI). Hudsonville’s Council then formed a new trio of Revs. N. Decker (Grandville, MI PRC), Rev. J. Laning (Hull, IA PRC), and Rev. D. Noorman (SW PRC—Wyoming, MI). On June 26 Rev. N. Decker received that call.

On June 5 Rev. J. Holstege received the call from Doon (IA) PRC. That trio included Revs. N. Decker and M. DeBoer. On June 19 he declined this call. After the Council formed a new trio, Doon voted to call Rev. N. Decker on July 10.

Rev. J. Marcus was installed in Peace PRC on June 12, with Rev. J. Engelsma leading the service. The congregation held a night of fellowship on June 17 to welcome the family. We rejoice in God’s goodness in providing a place of labor for him and pray that he and

his family will experience God's great blessing serving that congregation.

Seminary news

Prof. B. Huizinga and his family traveled to Northern Ireland to participate in the BRF family conference (July 9-16) held at Castlewellan Castle, where he, along with Prof. D. Engelsma, spoke on the theme of "Union with Christ" and preached.

Prof. D. Kuiper is teaching a summer class on PRC history. As the 100th anniversary of our denomination approaches, he is covering the first twenty-five years—1924-1949. The class is open to all PRC members and friends in the area and those who may be visiting from out of town. The class is being held at Southwest PRC (to accommodate the good numbers!) on the Wednesday evenings of July 6 (Grandville PRC), 13, and 20, and August 10, 17, and 24 at 7:30 p.m. Do you want to learn about the early history of the PRC? Then make sure you attend this class—it's not too late! You may also watch the recorded classes through the seminary's website—prcts.org (YouTube channel).

After being part of the delegation (along with Prof. C. Griess) that went to Tabasco, Mexico in late June, Sem. M. Koerner began his internship at the beginning of July in Hope PRC-Grand Rapids under the mentorship of Rev. J. Mahtani. You may recall that he was supposed to do his internship in Randolph PRC under Rev. E. Guichelaar, but when he accepted the call to Grace PRC, Hope was asked to fulfill the internship.

Sem. Arend Haveman was in the Philippines for two and a half weeks (June 23-July 11) as part of a brief missions "internship." He assisted Rev. D. Kleyn in various aspects of the work there and spoke a word of edification in the churches. From all accounts, it has been a rewarding experience.

Sister churches

The Contact Committee of the PRC informed the churches that Revs. Jim Laning and Bill Langerak traveled to the Philippines to participate in a special conference on July 2 sponsored by our sister church, the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. They, together with Rev. Daniel Kleyn, gave three speeches and participated in Q&A sessions. The conference theme was "Contending for the Faith: Doctrinal Development Since the Schism." On the following Sunday Rev. J. Laning preached in Berean PRC, while Rev. W. Langerak preached in Provident PRC. The CC asked us to "pray that the Lord will bless this work of our churches together with our sister churches in the

Philippines for the cause of the truth and the good of His church universal."

Missions/evangelism news

Zion PRC, the calling church for home missions, sent out a call to Rev. J. Smidstra on May 29. That initial trio included Revs. A. Brummel and C. Spronk. On June 19 Rev. Smidstra declined this call.

First PRC-Grand Rapids invited those in the area to a singspiration/Mexico update evening on Sunday June 12. This was tied to her plans to sponsor two trips to different areas of Mexico this summer. Those in attendance could learn more about the work and also hear an update on a book translation they are working on as well. A collection was taken to help cover the costs of this outreach. In her June 26 bulletin, First had this note about the first delegation that went from June 27-July 4: "Professor Griess, Dan and Madeline Monsma, and several others [Rev. J. Mahtani, Kyle Bruinooge, Matt Koerner, Sharon Kleyn] are leaving tomorrow morning for Tabasco, Mexico, visiting churches and believers there. This visit includes two conferences [on Christian education] and preaching in different churches."

First PRC-Holland: The Evangelism Committee, with help from Georgetown (MI) PRC, is holding an outreach Bible Study this summer. It is meeting on alternate Wednesdays at the Howard Miller Public Library in Zeeland. Rev. J. Smidstra led the first meeting, which was on the subject of "Hope in Troubled Times." Members were invited to attend and encouraged to invite others to attend as well. Her EC printed business cards for the members to hand out to help advertise this special work.

PRC news (congregational)

Summer translates into outdoor activities for our congregations too, and that's reflected in the recent bulletin notices.

Calvary PRC held her church picnic on Saturday, June 11, at the Boyden City Park in Hull. Activities included kickball games (K-8), supper, and softball (high school or older). Glad to see that traditional church softball game kept alive.

Doon PRC held her church picnic on July 9 at the Community Center. This included two special events: fellowship with the Smit family, on furlough from the Philippines, and...a softball game! More good traditions!

First PRC-Grand Rapids has a monthly golf outing at Gracewil Country Club for members. The first one was held on Saturday June 18.

Grace PRC's Activities Committee is back to having morning "Coffee in the Park" at Sunset Hills Park in Stan-

dale. This is mostly for the ladies and children, although maybe there are some male retirees who come too.

Hudsonville PRC had her church picnic on June 22 at the Hudsonville Fair Grounds.

Kalamazoo (MI) PRC held a potluck dinner outside on the church yard on July 19.

Providence (Hudsonville, MI) PRC held a “parking lot party” on July 13. The members were invited “to a night of fellowship and fun,” with kids encouraged to bring their bikes and scooters and adults their yard games and lawn chairs.

And, of course, we cannot forget camping! Southwest PRC held her church campout at Dutch Treat in Zeeland (MI) June 18-25. On Friday night they invited those who did not camp to come for a potluck-style dinner and singing. Byron Center PRC held hers at the same campground from July 9-16 and included a beach day for the congregation on Wednesday as well as a potluck dinner with games on Thursday. And by now you may also know that Immanuel PRC in Lacombe (Alberta) invited those with passports and travel plans to join them at their annual church camp August 1-4, which included “a lovely facility...with cabins, spots for campers and tents along with beach access and many activities.” Such good memories of those church campouts.

And, not to miss out on a great outdoor activity, Trinity (MI) PRC’s men and boys gathered at the Wasink farm in Holland for a fishing night on June 10.

Hosanna PRC-Edmonton: Yes, you read that correctly. The reconstituted PRC that was formerly named First PRC of Edmonton, AB has decided to rename the church Hosanna PRC. That decision was made by the congregation on May 29, and the next Sunday the Consistory added this note: “We rejoice that the Lord has given us this name and we pray that He will bless our congregation as we go forward (Mark 11:9)—“And they that went before, and they that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna; Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord: Blessed be the kingdom of our father David, that cometh in the name of the Lord: Hosanna in the highest.” Let us continue to pray for this ‘new’ congregation.

Young people activities

Pittsburgh PRC’s young people took an enjoyable and edifying visit to the Creation Museum in Kentucky the first weekend of July.

The Western Young People’s Retreat was held July 12-15 at Camp Sanders in Tensed, Idaho. The theme of the retreat was “Walking by Faith” based on II Corinthians 5:7, with Rev. S. Regnerus and Rev. J. Langerak speaking. We trust it was another profitable time of

Christian fellowship and spiritual growth for the young people who attended.

Church library feature—Hudsonville (MI) PRC

Kristen Kamps sent in this description of Hudsonville PRC’s church library along with two pictures. We thank her for this great contribution to our church library feature.

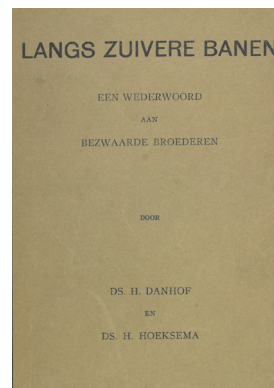
“In 2011, Hudsonville remodeled the church building, adding a new fellowship hall and classrooms. During that renovation, a beautiful new room for the library was added. Our library has a well stocked adult section that includes Christian living books and many doctrine and church history books. We also have a large children’s and junior’s section that is very well used. We are thankful for this resource for our congregation.”



Trivia answer:

The first publication of the Reformed Free Publishing Association was *Langs Zuivere Banen*, (Dutch for “Along Pure Paths”) written by Revs. H. Danhof (First CRC, Kalamazoo) and H. Hoeksema (Eastern Ave. CRC) between the end of 1923 and June of 1924 when the CRC Synod met and adopted her three points of common grace. The eighty-five-page pamphlet was a further refutation of this doctrine, a subject of intense debate in the CRC at that time. Danhof and Hoeksema were responding to criticism of an earlier and larger work critical of common grace, “Sin and Grace”

(*Zonde en Genade*). As you will note, *LZB* was prior to the formation of the PRCA and the publication of the *Standard Bearer*—but not by much! If you wish to know more about this early RFPA publication, you can read it in English (including Prof. D. Engelsma’s historical introduction to it) in *The Rock Whence We Are Hewn* (RFPA, 2015), pp. 157ff.



Announcements

Teacher needed

Reformed Heritage Christian School of Kalamazoo, MI is seeking the following positions for the upcoming 2022-23 school year:

- Full-time elementary teacher for 5th-6th split-grade classroom (health benefits offered).
- Part-time elementary teacher for 3rd-4th split-grade classroom, primarily in the subjects of math and language arts.
- Part-time school secretary, approx. 28 hours per week.
- Part-time high school choir director/elementary music teacher.

About us:

Reformed Heritage Christian School was founded by parents in 1993 who desired to provide their children with a quality education that is rooted in the Scriptures according to the Apostles' Creed and the Reformed standards. Spiritual growth of students is a priority of the school. Parents who provide for their children a Christian education that is consistent with what is taught in the home and church will see the blessing of this approach. We are a small, but growing school, with approximately 50 students currently enrolled in grades K-12. Apply by visiting refhcs.org or send a cover letter and resume to board@refhcs.org.

Wedding anniversary

Lord willing, on August 17, 2022, our parents, **Ken and Doris Hoksbergen**, will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. We thank God for seeing fit to give us a godly example through them and the blessings we experience together as a covenant family. They have willingly given of themselves for us and for others throughout the years of their marriage. May God continue to bless them. Psalm 92:1-5: “It is a good thing to give thanks unto the LORD, and to sing praises unto thy name, O most High: To shew forth thy lovingkindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night.... For thou, LORD, hast made me glad through thy work: I will triumph in the works of thy hands. O LORD, how great are thy works! and thy thoughts are very deep.”

Ed and Sarah Hoksbergen

Andrea, Faith, Jennifer, Seth, Nathan,
Natalie, Allison

Matt and Melissa Regnerus

Jesse, Micah, Amber, Drew, Aubrey

Kurt Hoksbergen

Shannon and Bethany Schuller

Haley, Madison, Connor

Hull, Iowa

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 14, 2022, at 8:00 A.M., in the Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 13, 2022.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk

Seminary Convocation

Seminary convocation will be held on September 7, at 7:30 P.M., in Trinity PRC. Prof. D. Kuiper will give the address.

Announcements continued

Annual meeting

The Annual Meeting of the RFPA will take place on September 22, at 7:30 P.M. Miss Joyce Holstege will be the speaker.

Reminder

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

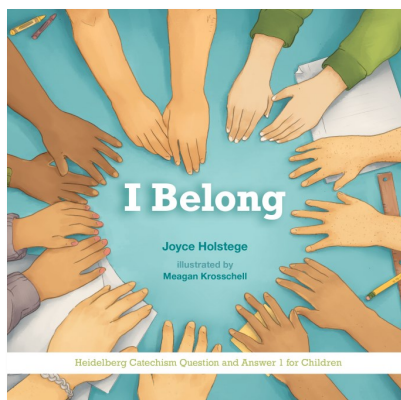
I Belong: Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer 1 for Children

Written by Joyce Holstege

Illustrated by Meagan Krosschell

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Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. C. Haak

- August 7—Remember Me, O God, for Good
Nehemiah 13:30, 31
- August 14—The Secret Providence of God
Romans 8:28
- August 21—God Did not Spare His Own Son
Romans 8:31, 32
- August 28—No Condemnation! It Is Christ Who Died
Romans 8:33, 34

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Doon, Iowa on Wednesday, September 28, 2022, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 29, 2022. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon's Consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk