

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

October 15, 2022 • Volume 99 • No. 2

## Putting our trust in the LORD

Rev. James Slopsema

## What we really do at the PRC seminary

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## News from the seminary

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

## A view from Ontario, Canada

Rev. Daniel Holstege

## Battling the devil: Warfare

Rev. Ryan Barnhill

## What is gender dysphoria and its common expressions?

Prof. Cory Griess



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

**Postmaster**

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

**Reprint and online posting policy**

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

**Editorial policy**

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

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

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

**Subscription price**

\$33.00 per year in the US, \$46.00 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](http://www.rfpa.org)

Website for PRC: [www.prc.org](http://www.prc.org)

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

**Editorial office**

Prof. Barry Gritters  
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW  
Wyoming, MI 49418  
[gritters@prca.org](mailto:gritters@prca.org)

**Business office**

Mr. Alex Kalsbeek  
1894 Georgetown Center Dr  
Jenison, MI 49428-7137  
616-457-5970  
[alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org](mailto:alexkalsbeek@rfpa.org)

**United Kingdom office**

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham  
27 Woodside Road  
Ballymena, BT42 4HX  
Northern Ireland  
[alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk)

## Contents

### Meditation

- 27 Putting our trust in the LORD  
Rev. James Slopsema

### Editorial

- 29 What we really do at the PRC seminary  
Prof. Barrett Gritters

### Pertaining to the churches in common— PR Theological School—Rector's report

- 32 News from the seminary  
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

### Special article

- 34 Defending Christ's church by knowing her history:  
Jephthah's example  
Prof. Douglas Kuiper

### All around us

- 38 A view from Ontario, Canada  
Rev. Daniel Holstege

### Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

- 40 The fearlessness of Aristarchus  
Mr. Kyle Bruinooge

### Strength of youth

- 43 Battling the devil (1):  
Warfare  
Rev. Ryan Barnhill

### I believe

- 45 What is gender dysphoria and its common expressions? (2)  
Prof. Cory Griess

### News from our churches

- 47 Mr. James Holstege



REFORMED  
FREE PUBLISHING  
ASSOCIATION



## Meditation

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

# Putting our trust in the LORD

**He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife: but he that putteth his trust in the LORD shall be made fat.**

**Proverbs 28:25**

What a sharp contrast is found in this proverb, more technically known as antithetical parallelism. He who is of a proud heart is *contrasted* with he who puts his trust in the Lord. The implication is that one who is of a proud heart does not put his trust in the Lord. In turn, one who puts his trust in the Lord is not of a proud heart but is humble.

Let's look a little further into this proverb. He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife. The implication is that he who trusts in the Lord does not stir up strife but is a peacemaker. In turn, he who trusts in the Lord shall be made fat, that is, prospers and will be satisfied. He who stirs up strife shall be lean and not satisfied.

Which one of these are you? Are you one who puts his trust in the Lord and as a peacemaker you prosper in the fatness of God's blessing? Or are you one who is of a proud heart and stirs up strife, with the result that you lead a very lean and unsatisfying life under God's judgment?

The proverb merely states some facts. Implied here is a calling. The calling is to be one who trusts in the Lord so that you are a peacemaker with the promise of prosperity.

## Trust

This proverb speaks of one who puts his trust in the Lord.

The name "LORD" is really "Jehovah," God's covenant name. God's covenant is the gracious relationship of friendship and fellowship that Jehovah establishes with His elect in Jesus Christ. In that relationship Jehovah lives and dwells with His people in intimate fellowship. He also provides for all their needs—spiritual and physical for time and eternity.

To put one's trust in Jehovah means several things.

It means, first, that one sees Jehovah God as being trustworthy. He has revealed Himself in His word to be the Friend and Helper to all those who turn to Him in Jesus Christ. He will save them from all their sins.

He will live and dwell with them in intimate friendship and fellowship. He will provide for all their needs for both time and eternity. He will avert all evil or turn it to their profit. One who puts his trust in Jehovah has complete confidence that Jehovah is not only willing but also able to be what He reveals Himself to be.

To put one's trust in Jehovah means, secondly, that on the basis of that confidence one confides in Jehovah and relies on Him for all things. In prayer he shares with Jehovah his God all that is on his heart—his joys and sorrows, his burdens, his concerns, as well as his troubles. In prayer he seeks the help that Jehovah God has promised to all those who come to Him in Jesus Christ. He asks Jehovah to provide for his physical needs. He seeks the forgiveness of his sins for Christ's sake. He pleads for grace to overcome sin in his life that he may live a new life of love and service. He also seeks God's help in time of trouble—sickness, poverty, discouragement, disappointment, and death.

To put one's trust in Jehovah means, finally, that one has a sense of security and wellbeing as he lives the covenant life God provides for him in Jesus Christ, even when everything seems to be going wrong in life.

The contrasts made in this proverb point to the fact that those who put their trust in Jehovah are not proud but humble.

Only the humble will put their trust in Jehovah. In their humility they see that they are not able to provide for themselves but need help from above. This leads them to turn to Jehovah God for all their needs. In their humility they also see that they are not worthy of Jehovah's help and blessing. This leads them to seek the help of Jehovah God only on the basis of God's mercy and the perfect work of Jesus Christ that God's mercy has provided.

This trust and humility are the trust and humility of true faith. Trust in Jehovah and humility are not natural to us. They are essential elements of faith that God works irresistibly in the hearts of His elect by the power of His Word and Spirit. Thank God for this gift.

In sharp contrast the proverb speaks of those who are of a proud heart.

To be of a proud heart means to have an inflated opinion of oneself. One thinks of himself more highly than he ought. Especially two things characterize those who are of a proud heart. With their inflated opinion of themselves, they tend to be self-seeking and self-serving. No one is as deserving as they are to be recognized and served by others. They live for the praise of men. Their concern is not the welfare of others but the promotion of their own selfish desires. With that inflated opinion of themselves, they imagine that they can accomplish things they really cannot.

It is quite obvious that those who are of a proud heart do not put their trust in Jehovah but in themselves. The proud of heart imagine that they do not need the help of Jehovah God and the gracious provisions God has promised to those who seek Him in Jesus Christ. They can provide for themselves. They do not need God, except perhaps in times of dire distress. Certainly, they do not need the cross to be right with God and acceptable to Him. Nor do they need Jehovah's help to comfort, encourage, and strengthen them as they face the harsh realities of life. Those things that they cannot provide for themselves they will find in their fellow man, such as the medical profession, government programs, insurance, friends and family.

The contrast we find in this proverb is not all black and white. It is not true that those who put their trust in the Lord always are humble and trusting. Because the work of salvation is not complete in us, pride often is found in our hearts and lives. Pride lies at the heart of our depravity. To the degree this is true of us, we do not trust in the Lord but in self. We must labor to turn away from that pride and in humility put our trust in Jehovah, our covenant God.

## Peacemaker

Those who are of a proud heart stir up strife.

Examples abound of those who stir up strife. Think of Lot, whose contentious spirit led to striving between his herdsmen and those of Abraham (Gen. 13). He stands in sharp contrast to his uncle Abraham. Consider also Nabal, another contentious individual, who quarreled with David and fell under David's sword (I Sam. 25). He is contrasted with his godly wife Abigail. We all know of people in the church and outside the church who are quarrelsome, contentious, always stirring up strife in their marriages, families, church, and community.

This contention arises out of pride.

This is made clear in Proverbs 13:10, "Only by pride cometh contention."

The connection between pride and strife is easily

seen. He who is of a proud heart is in his estimation always right and his right must prevail. Because he is self-seeking and self-serving, he promotes himself at the expense of others. This inevitably leads to conflict and strife with others.

It is good to examine ourselves. If we find ourselves frequently involved in strife with others, that is a clear indication that we have a problem with pride. To be sure, not all strife arises from pride. To strive and contend for the truth arises out of faith. But even when striving for the truth and the honor of God, pride easily rears its ugly head.

If the proud in heart stir up strife, the humble hearted believer is one who lives in peace with others. He is a peacemaker.

We are called to be at peace with those around us. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it" (Ps. 34:14).

The key to living at peace with others is to humble oneself before Jehovah God and put one's trust in Him. Putting one's trust in Jehovah will bring one, first of all, into a peaceful relationship with God. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). How important this peace with God is. It is impossible for one to find peace with God in Jesus Christ and to be a contentious person with his neighbor.

To be more specific, the salvation one receives and enjoys by putting his trust in God also gives one certain virtues that promote peace. He esteems others better than self so that he listens to others, considering that they have valuable insights. He seeks the welfare of others rather than promoting himself. He is meek so that he is inclined to give up what is rightfully his if it will help the brother. He also returns good for evil. These virtues make for peace.

Again, it is good to examine ourselves. Do we live at peace with those around us? If not, we should examine our relationship with the Lord and our faith in Him.

## Fatness

He who puts his trust in Jehovah shall be made fat.

To be made fat is a figurative way of indicating that one is satisfied with abundance. In Deuteronomy 31:20 the Lord speaks of the time "when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat." Here "fat" means satisfied with the bounty of the land. According to Proverbs 13:4, "The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing; but the soul of the diligent shall be



made fat.” Notice the contrast between desiring and having nothing with being made fat, that is, having one’s desires fulfilled.

Those who trust in Jehovah shall be made fat. The Lord will bless them abundantly with the joys of the covenant. He will answer their prayers (I Chron. 5:2). He will deliver them from all their enemies (Ps. 22:4). He will give them joy and gladness (Ps. 33:21). They will know inner peace and absence of fear (Ps. 4:8). In these and other blessings of Jehovah such are satisfied abundantly.

He who is of proud heart and does not trust in Jehovah shall desire and end up with nothing. What is only implied in our proverb is stated in Proverbs 13:4, “The

soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.”

Let’s see how this is true. First, he will end up with nothing in his relationship with his fellow man. By his quarrelsome and bullying ways he may gain possessions, power, and influence. But his life will be empty as he lives without meaningful relationships. And most tragically he will end up with nothing in his relationship to God. He will stand before God in his sins. And the Lord will destroy him.

Let us humble ourselves before God and man, putting our trust in Jehovah God for all things, living in peace with God and men with the promise of God to be satisfied with the fatness of His blessings.



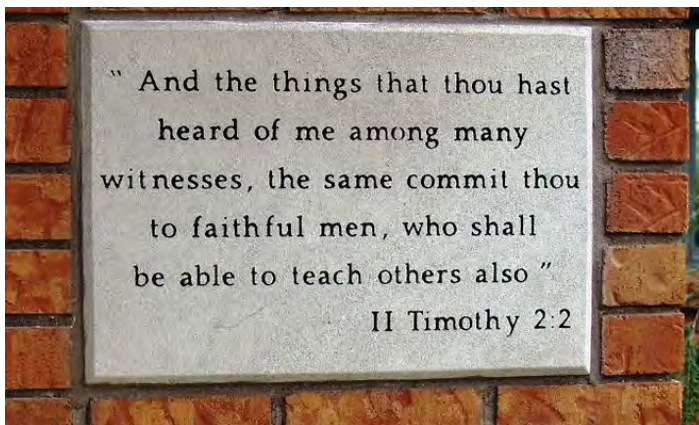
## Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Hudsonville PRC

# What we really do at the PRC seminary

**And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.**

II Timothy 2:2



There is good reason that II Timothy 2:2 is engraved in stone at the entrance of our seminary (cf. photo above). The passage is the *locus classicus* (the classic text) of biblical instruction about training ministers. It teaches us that ministers are to be trained by men who themselves are ministers—ordained ministers—

not by professional theologians. Paul and Timothy—ordained ministers—are the teachers of preachers. In fact, four generations of preachers are mentioned in the text: Paul teaches Timothy, who teaches others, who then teach the next generation. Preachers train preachers.

From our origins, the PRC have been committed to this biblical way. All our professors have been ordained ministers. In addition, all have been seasoned ministers; that is, not merely ordained men who are book-smart but men who are experienced in the ministry. An inexperienced minister can no more train ministers than a book-smart man can teach someone to fly.

## Faithful men

The emphasis in this classic text, however, is that the ministers teach students who are *faithful*. The seminary admits men for training not, first of all, who are “able” but who are “faithful.” Timothy was trained because Paul knew that he was faithful. Timothy must commit the tradition to the next generation of *faithful* men.

By “faithful” Paul is not referring to *believing* men, men who have faith in Jesus Christ, who trust Him,

know Him, and are united to Him, as though the only prerequisite for seminary admission is that a man is a Christian. By “faithful” Paul refers to men who are trustworthy, reliable, of good character, as Jesus described the man who used his master’s good for his master’s profit: “faithful servant.” A faithful man is a man of his word, as Paul describes God as faithful (II Tim. 2:13). A faithful man serves the one who appoints him, without question; does what he promises to do, even at great cost. His ‘yes’ is ‘yes’ and his ‘no’ is ‘no,’ even if it costs his life. He’s a man of his word.

What the seminary must keep in mind above all, then, is not a man’s brain-power but his character; not his GPA from the university but the report from his consistory. Faithful! *Ability* is what the seminary aims at as the *end* of the education. At the beginning of training the man must show himself as faithful.

Of course, a measure of ability is required for entrance. But keep in mind the truth of what my minister told me in my youth: If a man had a “B” average in high school, he could probably make it through seminary (‘grade-wise’). And it is also true that faithfulness must be judged not only at the beginning of the endeavor but throughout the training. Nevertheless, faithfulness is the main thing. Paul said, “Commit thou to *faithful* men.”

The importance of faithfulness for a minister is underscored by the sad reality that merely *able* men have done greatest damage to the church. Heretics are usually very capable. A man very able to carry out the work of a minister may be immoral, ambitious, greedy, covetous.

At the same time, even though “faithful” is not a reference to faith itself, faithfulness *implies* faith. A faithful man lives out of his faith in Jesus Christ, knows fully all of Scripture, heartily loves everything he knows about God, and does all his work in dependence upon his Savior Jesus Christ. A faithful man works with the deposit of truth entrusted to him by Jesus Christ, wants to know what is being ‘committed’ to him by the professors. A faithful man digs deeply into the mine of spiritual treasures in Christ, understands that the treasure in fact *is* Christ, and understands that he is but a steward in Christ’s house. Only a man who truly has *faith is faithful*.

It is not an exaggeration to say that how ministers conduct themselves is as important as what they say. If their life and conduct contradict the gospel they speak, they will be a curse rather than a blessing to the church. A man may be orthodox in his teaching, but if the orthodoxy is accompanied by a lordly attitude, self-will, or immorality, his ministry cannot be fruitful. What

we learn about Jesus is not only from what His under-shepherd says, but from the character of the man whom Jesus appointed to speak for Him. As children learn about Father from fathers, so sheep learn about their Shepherd from shepherds.

## Judging faithfulness

Faithfulness, therefore, must be judged.

Implied is the ability of the church to make such judgment, even though making it is very difficult. Compared to judging ability, judging faithfulness is far more challenging. It may be difficult for a professor to judge an exegesis paper or a sermon, but there is no difficulty like assessing a man’s faithfulness. Seminary faculty can grade ability for a report card: he got 9 out of 10 answers correct. But can a grade be put on character? Nevertheless, judging character is required.

The judgment of faithfulness can be made only by a multitude of counselors. It begins with a man’s consistory who will recommend him to the synod as a prospective student: “We judge him faithful.” Included in the circle of judges is the Theological School Committee that conducts a personal interview, which should focus on the man’s faith and faithfulness. In the end, synod herself (and then classis) must examine a man. And Scripture’s emphasis on faithfulness makes one wonder whether it is sufficient that less than 10 percent of these examinations includes the man’s giving testimony to his faithfulness.

But the main weight of responsibility to judge falls on the seminary faculty.

For this reason, the PRC seminary will not train a man online. A good deal of information may be imparted with online courses. By distance learning, the professors may judge that a student knows the languages, understands theology and church history, even has knowledge of church government. But only in person can a faculty make judgment of a man’s character. Even then they can be deceived, but they must make an effort to judge a man’s faithfulness, and that cannot be done without living with a man for some years. We may be very thankful that, since 1995, our seminary facilities include a spacious library, a kitchen, and room for the students to study after classes and to continue informal interaction with the professors.

Faithfulness does not mean sinlessness. These prospective ministers are but ‘men’ who apply. Fit for the Master’s use, indeed (see II Tim. 2:21), but earthen vessels nevertheless, and sinful. Paul emphasizes that when he calls for “faithful men,” where “men” is not male as distinct from female, but “human,” with all the weaknesses and frailties of fallen man.

In the end, indeed, only God knows the heart. Men can deceive. But judgment must be made.

### Training faithful men

The PRC seminary is committed to, in an authoritative manner, bestowing into the student's care the deposit of apostolic doctrine. "The things that thou hast heard of me," says Paul to Timothy, must be committed to faithful men. "Me" is the apostle Paul. "Among many witnesses" is not so much a reference to some formal witnesses of Paul's teaching as much as it is a reminder to Timothy not to forge his own doctrine. He must teach what he was taught—the truth of Jesus Christ that is now written down in Holy Scripture.

The PRC professor does not convey personal opinions in the classroom, any more than he may do so on the pulpit in the churches on Sunday. He conveys what Christ gave to him. What we were taught is what we teach—the gospel of a gracious salvation through the cross of Jesus Christ. The PRC professors have "determined not to know anything" other than Jesus Christ and Him crucified. This gospel—preserved in the Reformed creeds, defended in 1924, 1953, and again recently—we give to the students in our school.

Every course taught in our seminary stands in the service of that gospel. The biblical languages (Hebrew and Greek), Hermeneutics (how to interpret Scripture), Exegesis (explanation of specific passages), Dogmatics (the systematic explanation of scriptural truth), Bible history, Isagogics (introduction to each book of the Bible), Church history, Homiletics (how to preach), Cat-echetics, Poimenics (pastoral theology), Church Polity (the government of the church), and Missions—all stand in the service of preaching that gospel to God's people.

This gospel is 'committed' to faithful men not by handing them a book to read (although they read plenty!) or giving them a link to a prerecorded lecture (which might happen here and there), but by personal, face-to-face instruction, for at least three important reasons: 1) so that we know that the student understands; 2) so that we observe that he is able to teach; and 3) so that we can, for four years, judge his faithfulness.

We also teach the students to teach. If Paul instructed Timothy to teach others, Paul must have taught Timothy to teach. It is one thing to know the truth, but quite another to teach the truth. A natural aptitude to teach must be nurtured and developed into a skill that makes the minister's audience able to say, "I understand!" Faith embraces truth, since Christ is the way, the *truth* and the life. Preachers must be able to make the truth clear. And if every preacher must have an aptitude to teach, the professors who train ministers must be able to teach teaching.

### Strong in Christ's grace

But if you want to know what *really* goes on in the PRC seminary, you will not be able to see it. You will have to believe it. The students and professors are men of devotion and prayer who depend on the grace of Jesus Christ to do their work. Grace is required to teach well: clearly, carefully, in harmony with the Scripture and the creeds. Grace is especially required to live well: carefully, holily, as a model of faithfulness to the students.

*Teaching truth* is one thing—requiring grace. *Judging faithfulness* is another thing—requiring more grace. But *modeling* faithfulness takes to another level the required grace for the professors. So Paul exhorts Timothy to "be strong in the *grace* that is in Christ Jesus."

Why especially do Timothy and the PRC professors need grace? Without grace a man may teach orthodox doctrine. Without grace a man may even be able, in a perverse kind of way, to judge another's character. But without grace no man is able to model faithfulness. And that is required of the professors as much as teaching orthodoxy. Paul made clear to the churches that the *manner* in which he brought them truth ranked right up there with the *content* of what he taught them. Professors teach truth; professors model faithfulness.

For this Timothy and every teacher of preachers must seek the grace that is in Christ.

This also is what goes on in the PRC seminary. If you visit here (we invite visitors!), you will see a great deal of what we do here at seminary. But what no visitor sees is the private worship and devotions of professors and students before their day begins. What a few see is the public devotions every day when students take turns leading all of us in a time of worship—singing and reading Scripture and prayer—before coffee time. What a few see is the opening prayer before especially the first hour classes, in which fervent petitions are made to make our instruction fruitful for the formation of *able* and *faithful* men. But what these few see is a very crucial aspect of what we do here at the PRC seminary.

What goes on in our seminary, we pray, is the spiritual work of Christ's spiritual kingdom by the power of His Holy Spirit.

### The next generation of professors... and students

With last year's call to Rev. Cory Griess to professorship of New Testament and Practical Theology, the last of the next generation of professors is now in place. Prof. Dykstra has finished his work, passing his mantle to Prof. Kuiper. Prof. Cammenga has two more years



in the transition to Prof. Huizinga. Prof. Griess just finished the first of five years in taking over from the undersigned. If the Lord tarries, and if He maintains the health of the newly-appointed professors, they could be teaching together for the next 20 years.

Our hearts are glad to report that several high school and university students are inquiring from our registrar (Mr. Charles Terpstra) of the prerequisites for entering seminary after their university studies are finished! May the Lord of the harvest prepare many young men by giving them gifts for the ministry, beginning with *faithfulness* to their Lord Jesus.

At our recent convocation service, Prof. Doug Kuiper gave an excellent speech about the importance of learning history: “Defending Christ’s Church by Knowing Her History: Jephthah’s Example.” A shortened version of the speech is printed on pages 34ff. of this issue. I encourage all our members to listen to the speech accessible on the seminary website: [prcts.org](http://prcts.org) (look for the YouTube symbol on the home page). I urge all our history teachers to use the speech as an introduction to their classes.



## Pertaining to the churches in common— PR Theological School—Rector’s report

### News from the seminary

The 2022-2023 school year is well underway. After a busy summer, it is good to fall back into the routine of the daily schedule at the seminary. We continue to be very thankful for the facility that God has given us in which to work and study. A small patio addition has recently been added onto the north side of the seminary building, overlooking the woods in back. This provides us a place outside on sunny days to enjoy our mid-morning coffee break and eat our noon lunch. We are grateful for this improvement that the Theological School Committee saw fit to add to our building and grounds.

#### Faculty

Profs. B. Gritters and D. Kuiper are teaching a full slate of courses in their respective departments. Prof. Gritters teaches in the Practical Theology and New Testament departments, and Prof. Kuiper in the Church History and New Testament departments. This is the first year that Prof. Kuiper has all the courses that were formerly taught by Prof. R. Dykstra.

Profs. R. Cammenga and B. Huizinga are sharing duties in the Reformed Dogmatics (Systematic Theology) and Old Testament departments. Prof. Cammenga is in the process of retiring and Prof. Huizinga is preparing to take over all the courses that belong to these two departments.

Prof. C. Griess is busy finishing his course work and beginning to work on the thesis for his Master of Theology degree. By the end of the school year, he will complete his thesis and next school year, the Lord willing, begin to transition into teaching the courses that Prof. Gritters teaches as he continues the retirement process.

Pray for our faculty. Beseech God that He keeps us faithful to the truth that has been entrusted to us and to the calling that we have to hand it down to the next generation of seminary faculty, in order that they may carry out the call to teach others also (II Timothy 2:2).

#### Student body

This year we have students in every level of the four-year program of training that the seminary offers. All four men are diploma pre-licentiate students. That means that they are all planning to minister in the PRC. This year is the first year in quite some time that we have no foreign students enrolled in the seminary.

Matthew Koerner (fourth year) and Arend Haveman (third year) had busy but exciting summers. Both men traveled with delegations to Mexico, though at two different times and to two different parts of that country. Along with the ministers and professors who were a part of the delegations, they also spoke at the conferences that were held. In addition, Arend spent several weeks



in the Philippines under the mentoring of Rev. Daniel Kleyn. These were wonderful opportunities to involve our two most senior seminarians in the mission work of our denomination and contact with foreign churches.

Matt is fulfilling his internship under the mentoring of Rev. J. Mahtani and the supervision of the consistory of Hope PRC in Walker, MI. The internship aims at involving the student intern in as many aspects of the work of the ministry as possible. And this has indeed been Matt's experience thus far. At the end of the internship on January 1, 2023, he will be returning to finish out the last semester of his training at the seminary. However, before the second semester begins, another big change will take place in his life. On January 13, 2023, Matt and our seminary secretary, Miss Sharon Kleyn, will exchange wedding vows. We wish them both the best as they plan for their new life together.

Our second-year student is Aaron Van Dyke. The big change in the life of Aaron and his wife Sarah was the birth of their first child this summer, a daughter whom they named Olive. This will be the first year in which Aaron is involved in making sermons for Practice Preaching. This, of course, is the whole focus of seminary training. We are preachers preparing preachers for the churches. Practice Preaching is a very crucial part of the training of our students.

Our first-year student is Bruce Feenstra. Bruce was raised in our Hope PRC in Redlands, CA and is attending our Hope PRC in Walker, MI. He previously moved to the area to complete his pre-seminary education, which also enabled him to take his pre-seminary Greek at our seminary. First-year students often have to adjust to a much heavier workload than was the case in college. At times that will mean less sleep and more hours in the study carrel.

Although we have a student in every year of seminary training, the reality is that we have only four students at present. We do have some pre-seminary students who are completing their pre-seminary requirements before entering the seminary. But even taking them into consideration, we continue to have a great need for students. We have been saying this for the last number of years. It is still the case. Let us all renew our petitions to the Lord for qualified men to be trained as pastor-teachers. And may ministers, elders, parents, grandparents, Christian school teachers, and concerned church members put the call to the ministry before promising young men. Let us pray fervently that the Lord not give us in His judgment over us a famine of the hearing of His Word.

For the faculty,  
*Prof. Ronald Cammenga*, Rector



*Left to right: Prof. B. Huizinga, Prof. C. Griess, Bruce Feenstra, Prof. B. Gritters, Arend Haveman, Prof. D. Kuiper, Matthew Koerner, Prof. R. Cammenga, Aaron VanDyke*



## Special article

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

# Defending Christ's church by knowing her history: Jephthah's example\*

\* *Text of the address given at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary Convocation 2022, September 7, 2022, held in Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI.*

To graduate from the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and become a Protestant Reformed minister, a student must take 45 semester-long courses, in addition to five semesters of practice preaching, three interim courses, and a half-year internship. Nine of these 45 courses, or a full 20%, are history courses: four treat the sacred history recorded in the Bible, and five cover church history. In addition, in other classes, such as Hermeneutics, Homiletics, Church Polity, and Missions, the student is given at least some history of the discipline being taught.

This emphasis on history is notable. It does not detract from an emphasis on doctrine; another nine courses, or 20%, are doctrine courses.<sup>1</sup> It does not detract from an emphasis on practical theology, for courses in that area include another 20% of the curriculum.<sup>2</sup> And emphatically, it does not detract from learning the original languages, learning to exegete the Scriptures, and being taught an overview of the Old and New Testaments: a full 40% of the curriculum is devoted to this.<sup>3</sup> In addition to a solid foundation of exegesis and dogmatics, and in addition to preparing a man for the practical aspects of the work of the ministry, the seminary emphasizes the knowledge of church history, both the history of the church in the Old and New Testament, and the history of the church after the time of the apostles.

Why this emphasis on history? Evidently, the semi-

nary does not agree with Henry Ford's analysis of history: "History is more or less bunk. It's tradition. We don't want tradition. We want to live in the present...."<sup>4</sup> And obviously we differ with Joseph Heller's assessment that history is "a trash bag of random coincidences torn open in the wind."<sup>5</sup> To the contrary, history—specifically, the church's history—is important!

Several reasons can be given why anyone ought to know history, one's *own* history, and particularly why the church ought to know *her* history. A study of the church's history observes God's providential work of directing and upholding all things with a view to gathering and saving His church in the last day. It also enables us to trace the development of doctrine, the process of the church growing in her understanding of what God has revealed in Scripture. At the outset of the school year 2022-23, we note one more benefit of knowing the church's history: it enables us to defend false allegations made against the church of Jesus Christ. This we see from Jephthah's history, as recorded in Judges 11:12-28.

## Jephthah's example

Judges 11:12-28 relates how Jephthah, by knowing and recounting Israel's history (Israel being the church of Christ in the Old Testament) defended Israel's holy inheritance from an earthly, carnal, wicked king. This defense was not 'successful' from an earthly viewpoint, in that it did not avert war. Jephthah's desire was to avert war, but the king of Ammon would not listen. Nevertheless, before clashing swords, Jephthah endeavored to defend Israel from false accusations.

The inheritance in question was the land of Gilead, east of the Jordan River. Specifically, at issue was the southern part of Gilead, which the tribes Gad and Reuben inherited. Reuben's southern border was the river Arnon, which flowed westward into the Dead Sea, and

1 These include a course in Introduction to Dogmatics, one course devoted to each of the six loci of Reformed doctrine, and two courses on the Reformed creeds.

2 These include courses in Homiletics, Advanced Homiletics, Liturgics, Catechetics, Church Polity (2), Missions (2), and Poimenics.

3 These include Hermeneutics (2), Hebrew grammar (2), Hebrew reading (2), Advanced Hebrew, Old Testament Exegesis (3), Old Testament Introduction, Greek reading (2), New Testament Exegesis (4), and New Testament Introduction.

4 Henry Ford, interview with Charles N. Wheeler, *Chicago Tribune*, May 25, 1916 (quoted at <https://www.thoughtco.com/henry-ford-why-history-is-bunk-172412>, accessed August 29, 2022).

5 Joseph Heller, *Good as Gold* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 72.

which separated Israel from Moab. Gad's northern border was Jabbok, a river that flowed westward into the Jordan about 30 miles north of the Dead Sea. The land between these rivers was part of the inheritance that Jehovah gave His people, part of the earthly picture of heaven.

The Ammonites lived east of the tribes of Gad and Reuben. Desiring to extend his borders westward, the king of Ammon invaded this land. To justify his actions, he questioned Israel's right to this land and spoke lies about Israel's history in order to claim the land for himself. The king's argument was that this land had once belonged to the Ammonites and that Israel took the land away from the Ammonites when Israel came out of Egypt (13). In doing this, the king of Ammon said that Israel was not just; it ought do the honorable thing by restoring these lands peaceably to the Ammonites.

To these assertions Jephthah had an answer. His answer was based on his knowledge of Israel's history, and it exposed flaws in the reasoning of Ammon's king. Jephthah's fundamental response (19-23) was that the land never had belonged to the Ammonites. It had belonged to Sihon king of the Amorites and to Og king of Bashan. That the king of Ammon was lying and Jephthah was telling the truth is evident from Numbers 21:21ff.

In addition, Jephthah made the following points as a matter of historical fact. First, it was the *Amorites* not the *Ammonites* who had taken the land from the king of Moab. If anyone had claim to the land, it was the Moabites. But the Moabites had never asked that this land be returned. Second, all these events happened 300 years ago. For centuries the land had not been in Moab's possession. Enough time had elapsed that the king of Moab would be unreasonable to request that the land be returned. Even more, the king of Ammon was being unreasonable for asking to be given a land that was never his!

Third, the land had become Israel's as a result of war. The victor gets the spoils! And Jehovah, Israel's God, had fought for them and given them the victory. The king of Ammon's real issue was not with Jephthah, but with Jehovah. Let the king of Ammon fight for the land, if he wishes, and take whatever land his god, Chemosh, gives him. For these reasons, Jephthah concluded, the king of Ammon was in the wrong, and Jehovah would judge him.

Today, too, the church's inheritance is attacked. Many arguments used to attack our spiritual inheritance involve distortions of history. Scripture is part of our precious inheritance; but history is twisted to argue

that the Bible is not reliable. We are told that the flood and the virgin birth and resurrection of Christ were not historical events. And we are told that men through whom the Lord worked in history to accomplish His purpose did not in fact do what Scripture tells us they did: Noah did not build the ark, and David did not kill Goliath.

The understanding of the doctrines of sovereign grace are part of the church's inheritance, as is the great Protestant Reformation that developed these doctrines. But today we read books that assert that the great Protestant Reformation was a classic and colossal misunderstanding—Luther and Calvin did not really understand what Rome was all about (forget, of course, that they were raised in the Romish church). The New Perspectives on Paul movement and the Federal Vision men suggest that the Reformers misunderstood Paul. This involves not only an exegetical or doctrinal question, but also a historical question.

Some allege that the great Synod of Dordt was a blot on the church's history: Christians fighting with Christians! Prince Maurice, who overthrew Oldenbarnevelt in the political arena (and this, in God's providence, paved the way for the Synod to be held), was a shoddy man. Oldenbarnevelt, sympathetic to the Arminians, was the real martyr. And men defend the Arminians as the victims who were treated unjustly.

Bearing more directly on the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the theory has recently been circulated that one of our retired professors, one who helped develop our understanding that God's covenant is one of sovereign, particular grace, has in fact been promoting Hubert De Wolf's view of the covenant, for which De Wolf was suspended when he was a PRC minister during the schism in the early 1950s.

These are only a few instances of historical distortions in the service of personal causes. Into the substance of the allegations we do not have time to enter. But they underscore that the enemies of the truth distort and wrongly interpret history to discredit God's work in giving His church her spiritual inheritance.

These few instances demand an answer to the question: Will we respond, and if so, how? Every child of God must face the question; but certainly the current leaders of the church (pastors and professors) and future leaders (current seminarians) must face the question. The question is not *whether* we will respond to these charges. The question is, what will our response be?

The burden of this speech is that our response must be to identify not only the theological errors in all these views but also the historical distortions. For the history of which we speak is the history of the church of



Jesus Christ. What is attacked is not only truth as God has revealed it, but also the record of the work of Jesus Christ in gathering, defending, and preserving His spiritual body in earthly institutions that are true churches of Jesus Christ.

We must know our history. By knowing it, we can debunk error. Whether those who distort history see their error or not (some are blind, so they will not and cannot), we must know that they are wrong.

### **Lessons that this example teaches**

Jephthah's historical example teaches us at least four lessons.

The first is the importance of the church's leaders and officebearers knowing our history. If the officebearers must, the seminarians must. So why does the Protestant Reformed Theological School seminary devote many courses to this subject? For several reasons. First, because in one way or another, at some time or another, to one degree or another, each officebearer will have to use his knowledge of church history to teach, rebuke, admonish, defend, or correct, the members of the church, or others with whom the officebearers have contact. Second, the church's spiritual leaders, including her pastors, must help guard the church against errors she once made, and help her develop in true doctrine and good practice. To do so requires him to know her history. In his evangelism and outreach efforts, his knowledge of her history will be a defense against slanders, lies, and misrepresentations.

The second lesson regards the necessity of the members of the church knowing their history. Jephthah knew his history, and put it to good use in his position of leadership. But we must realize two things about him. First, he did not wait until he was a leader to learn the history; he learned it before he became a leader in Israel. Second, before becoming a leader he was, in the eyes of many other Israelites, an outcast.

These two points underscore the importance of the members of the church, even those who are not officebearers, knowing the history of Christ's church. No one likes being viewed as an outcast. However, that others viewed Jephthah as an outcast did not stop him from loving Israel and from learning her history. Our learning the history of the church is not motivated, first, by our being made a leader or officebearer in the church. Rather, it is motivated by the fact that we belong to the church, because Christ shed His blood for us and redeemed us. Further, our learning church history must be motivated by realizing that God will in some way use us—every member of the church—for His church's good. How, we do not know; nor did Jephthah

when he learned this history. But every member of the church knows that God will use us to instruct the future generations or encourage the present generations, and a knowledge of church history serves that purpose.

I am not suggesting that every member of the church will, or can, or even must, have a detailed knowledge of the two thousand years of the church's history. Some might focus on the history of missions, because that is their interest. Others will love the Reformation era, and read eagerly of that part. Still others might be fascinated by the history of the church in the British Isles, or some other geographic region. Study what interests you! But be sure that one thing that interests you, to one degree or another, is the history of Christ's church.

The third lesson is the fundamental importance of possessing an accurate knowledge of church history. Jephthah's response indicates that he had such. He knew who had possessed the land in question before the Israelites had, and even before the Amorites had. He knew how long ago Israel had taken possession of that land, and by what means. A vague and general knowledge of church history cannot answer a specific lie, because it is not able to detect it as a lie. An accurate knowledge is necessary. So for us. One can know history generally, and benefit from a general knowledge. But to answer the historical lies that the church's enemies spout forth requires a specific and accurate knowledge of the church's history and its details.

Implied in this is a weighty point: to have an accurate understanding of history is to show that one loves truth. We love truth as revealed in Scripture and as manifested in Christ. Doctrinal truth, revealed truth, matters to us; it is the basis for our faith and life. But how God governs history in His providence—that is, what fact follows upon what other fact, or what event is the historical cause of another—is also truth. It is not doctrinal truth in the narrow sense, but it reveals God's power, wisdom, mercy, and other attributes. In addition, the facts of history, as they actually happened, are truth in that they are an aspect of the unfolding of God's counsel. To know our history accurately, then, is to honor God's work in history.

A fourth lesson is that we rightly interpret the facts and events of the church's history. Jephthah interpreted the events of church history; his interpretation is given in verses 23-24, 27: Jehovah, Israel's God, gave Israel the land of Canaan, including that land east of the Jordan River that was in dispute. The king of Ammon must know that, at bottom, his issue was not with Jephthah but with Jehovah, and Jehovah would judge the matter, that is, would make clear to whom He had given the land.



For at the heart of the proper interpretation of all history is the understanding that the exalted and ascended Lord Jesus Christ works in history, governing every event of history with a view to the defense and preservation of His church. Interpret history *only* as the record of the progress of the nations of men, or *only* as the development of the human race, and you do not interpret it rightly. This is true even regarding that history revealed in the Bible. That Noah built the ark the Bible clearly states. To deny it is folly. To suggest that God built it, leaving the impression that the ark miraculously appeared, is strange. But let us properly interpret the history: What was God doing in and through Noah, that caused Him to work in Noah that faith by which he built the ark?

Another danger against which we must guard is that of misinterpreting an event by taking a self-centered view of it. Jephthah did not interpret Israel's history and the victory that he knew Jehovah would give to mean that Jehovah was on *his* side, as if *his* cause is what really mattered. That is, he did not take a self-centered view of this history, as if God was approving of him and all that he did. He knew that at stake was Jehovah's cause and honor. Jehovah would arise to defend Israel, through Jephthah, for the sake of Israel and of His great name.

It is easy for us to interpret history from a self-centered viewpoint. Perhaps we received a promotion or some other significant earthly advantage. Was this a sign of Jehovah's love for us? Was this His way of exalting us? No; we must view it as an additional opportunity to serve Him and His church.

### The benefits of such knowledge

At least three situations arise in which such knowledge is beneficial. The first is war. That, of course, was the situation in which Jephthah found himself. The Ammonites were threatening war. Jephthah was prepared to lead the Israelites in their defense of their God-given inheritance. But if a faithful portrayal of true history, rightly interpreted, would avert war and cause the Ammonite king to rethink whether he wanted to press his false claim to the land, then God be praised! In that case, a knowledge of church history would have helped avert war. The point applies whether the war is merely earthly or also spiritual.

The second is the opposition of unbelief. Unbelief argues against truth, distorts truth, and fabricates lies to advance its cause. Truth opposes unbelief. Of course, only the Holy Spirit can change the unbeliever into a believer. And He does, in each for whom Christ died! When He changes the unbeliever into a believer, He

also renews the minds of God's children to hate and oppose unbelief. We oppose unbelief by speaking and promoting truth. This, again, is the situation in which Jephthah found himself: speaking truth to oppose Ammon's unbelief.

The third is the instruction of future generations. How often in Scripture is the history of Israel set forth so that the younger generations might know it! The entire history of Old Testament Israel was written for our example (I Cor. 10:11). The psalmist (Psalm 78) resolves to teach the *next* generation, that *they* might teach the *next* generation what had been taught already by the generations preceding the psalmist! What he resolves to teach is Israel's history and the doctrines about Jehovah and salvation that Israel's history illustrates.

So ought we know the church's history, from the beginning in Genesis 1, through all that which is recorded in Scripture, and including all that has happened during the two thousand years of the reign of our ascended Lord. To that end, the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary teaches that history.

The result of teaching and knowing the church's history is not that war is always averted. Judges 11:28-33 record that Jephthah's right portrayal of history did not avert war with the Ammonites. Today, a proper portrayal of the history of the Christian church, or the Reformed church, or the Protestant Reformed Churches, will sometimes invite further confrontation and spiritual battle.

The result of teaching and knowing the church's history is not always that the church appears to have an earthly victory. Stephen reminded the Jews of their history, and his reminder brought on him their hatred, persecution, and death (Acts 7).

But always, the result of teaching and knowing the church's history is that our exalted Lord's purposes are accomplished; hearts are either softened or hardened; occasion is given for the enemy to persist in its lies and hatred, or to turn in true repentance; truth is presented and His church defended; Jehovah's sovereign grace and Christ's faithful love for His church are set forth; and His continued defense and preservation of His church is recounted.

Students, learn your history well.

Professors, let us be diligent in teaching history.

Supporters of our theological school, pray for us in every respect, but in this also.

For history is not bunk.



## All around us

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of the Wingham Protestant Reformed Church in Wingham, Ontario

## A view from Ontario, Canada

Toward the end of last year, the Lord called me to the Wingham Protestant Reformed Church in Ontario—from a mission field in the metropolis of Manila in the Philippines, to a furlough in the United States, to a pastorate in a small town in rural Canada. The Lord leads, and we follow. But when He led me from a mission field in densely populated islands in the western Pacific to a little congregation in Wingham (the only Protestant Reformed church in the huge province of Ontario), He did not revoke the missionary calling as such, for He calls every preacher to this work in one way or another. I still hear His voice saying, “Go and do the work of an evangelist in addition to feeding my sheep.” Canadians tend to be less interested in hearing about Christ than Filipinos, and hostility to the Christian faith is growing steadily here. More on that at the end of this article. But that must not stop us from doing evangelism to the best of our ability.

Upon moving to Canada, I took a greater interest in the ecclesiastical landscape here. There are Christian Reformed, United Reformed, Free Reformed, Canadian Reformed, and other Reformed denominations here in southern Ontario, and we have met people from all of the above. We began meeting Canadian Reformed people fairly quickly after moving here. They are the churches founded by Dutch Reformed people who began immigrating from the Netherlands to Canada after World War II in the 1950s. Their ancestors came from the Liberated Churches of Klaas Schilder. You recall that he and Herman Hoeksema had a close friendship at first, but that in the end they parted ways because of strong disagreement on the doctrine of the covenant. The Protestant Reformed differ with the Canadian Reformed in that area of theology. We teach that God promises salvation to the elect alone among those who are baptized, for His promise of salvation always results in salvation, and God gives salvation through faith in Jesus Christ to the elect alone. But they teach that God promises salvation to all who are baptized on the condition that they believe in Jesus Christ, but that He gives salvation only to those who fulfill that condition (though they say God fulfills the condition in the elect).

Although we have this significant theological difference with the Canadian Reformed, we do not consider them false churches or their ministers vipers on the path to hell, as some have said of the PRC and their ministers. On the contrary, though we cannot have official ecclesiastical relations with the Canadian Reformed Churches because of our differences in doctrine, we must not deny that they are true churches of Jesus Christ. We may be sure that there are many true believers sitting in their pews who are our brothers and sisters in Christ, and we will meet them someday in heaven.

The Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC) had 19,692 souls in their pews in 66 churches in eight classes at the end of 2020.<sup>1</sup> That might seem big compared to the 8,314 souls in the PRC in 33 churches in two classes at present.<sup>2</sup> But compared to other denominations (and the sea of humanity all around us), it is still a very small number. The CanRC are located throughout Canada, but there is a large band of churches a couple hours east of Wingham. It runs from Toronto south to Hamilton and then east to Niagara Falls. There are no CanRC churches in Wingham or the immediate vicinity. For that reason, we get frequent visits to our worship services from CanRC families who are on holidays somewhere along the Lake Huron shoreline.

### A look at Canadian Reformed missions

The magazine of the CanRC is *Clarion*. When we moved to Wingham, I started reading it, with a particular interest in their mission work. The March 18, 2022 issue had an article by Eric Onderwater, a “mission pastor” in the Grace Canadian Reformed Church located in an “incredibly diverse” neighborhood in Brampton, a city in the Greater Toronto Area. He explains that the diversity of peoples in his area (Nigerians, Jamaicans, Indians, Filipinos, and more) presents “both an opportunity

<sup>1</sup> 2021 *Yearbook of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches and the Free Reformed Churches of Australia*, 7.

<sup>2</sup> 2022 *Acts of Synod and Yearbook of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America*, 247.

and challenge for ministry. The opportunity comes as many of our neighbours are open to Christianity.... The challenge is there is a great deal of cross-cultural learning needed for us and the congregation. Mistakes are easy to make, such as that time Lisa and I served chicken to Hindu vegetarians”[!] (p. 158). He lists the kinds of outreach they do to the unchurched: “First, discipling, teaching, and supporting new members opens doors into their networks. If new members receive enough support, they will start bringing their friends and family to church. This is the most powerful driver of mission. Second, Lisa and I continue to build relationships with our neighbours and meet new people in our neighbourhood.... Third, we have some outreach programs” (p. 159). Good food for thought for our local evangelism efforts.

The CanRC also send foreign missionaries to various countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, and Papua New Guinea. The April 15, 2022 issue had an article from one Jonathan Chase, a missionary sent to Brazil by the Aldergrove Canadian Reformed Church (in British Columbia just north of the border from Lynden, WA). He writes that Brazil is “in name, a largely Christian country...Roman Catholic...Pentecostal.... Thus, the work that we are engaged in is different than the type of missionary work that is aimed at those who have never heard the name of Christ. We want to promote reformation in the churches of Brazil, so that believers and churches would be raised on the strong foundation of the gospel, rather than the many and diverse inventions of man-made religion or distortions of the gospel” (p. 222). Sounds similar to much of PRC mission work through the years.

Another article caught my attention for a reason you will see. The July 22, 2022 issue had an article from a missionary sent by the Bethel Canadian Reformed Church in Toronto to the nation of Papua New Guinea (PNG), located on the eastern half of an island that is part of Indonesia, a couple thousand miles to the southeast of the Philippines. The name of the missionary is *Rev. Kleyn*—Cornelis Kleyn—a relative of the two Rev. Kleyns we know so well in our circles. This other Rev. Kleyn writes, “There is a hunger for truth in PNG, where peoples’ lives are being destroyed for lack of knowledge due to traditional customs and the presence of every denomination under the sun. Although commitment to the Reformed churches is slow, there is a steady growth in depth and membership, for which we thank the Lord” (p. 446).

He explains in his article that there are seven Reformed churches or church plants in Papua New Guinea that are divided into northern and southern regions. He writes regarding outreach, “With twice yearly outreach tours in the PNG highlands and regular local outreach-

es, we hope and pray that the Lord may continue to add congregations in the coming years” (p. 446).

They have a theological school called the Reformed Churches Bible College in the southern region of PNG. Kleyn writes, “We run a two-year Certificate course in Reformed studies and have seventeen students in this program in 2022, in addition to five students in the three-year Diploma program with a focus on ministry” (p. 447).

They also have a couple of grade schools for the children of Reformed believers. Kleyn writes that the vision of a parent-run school is “a new concept for many people here in PNG. Most see schools as outreach tools—but how can little children reach out? As missionaries, we have been encouraging a covenant school vision, since we believe it is important to focus on the covenant children so that the next generation can praise the name of the Lord even more than the present generation. Please pray about the future of these fledgling schools” (p. 448).

He also mentions a large outreach that took place last May that “dealt with the Fundamentals of the Christian Faith. We taught on the Bible Alone, Christ Alone, Grace Alone, Faith Alone, and to the Glory of God Alone in addition to preaching on these topics to drive the message home” (p. 448).

The Lord is working through other denominations too for the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the world, and when the mission of the whole church on earth to the whole world is complete, Jesus will come again as he said.

### Canadian money supports vile sexual sin

But the work of local evangelism here in Canada, as in the United States and elsewhere, is in many ways more difficult because of the deep and growing hostility to Christianity. The Canadian government, led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, recently approved the spending of \$100 million over five years to support what they call the 2SLGBTQI+ community. According to CBC News, “Trudeau touted the plan as the first such federal initiative of its kind.”<sup>3</sup> It aims to “fight discrimination, break down barriers, to advance rights and to build a future where everyone in Canada is truly free to be who they are and love whom they love.” Most of the money will go toward “community organizations focused on diversity and inclusion because that’s ‘where the real work of support comes from.’” There will be more efforts to “protect and support” people who “survived conversion therapy, which [Trudeau] called ‘a cruel and dangerous practice’ and which was criminalized earlier this year in Canada.” They will encourage the use of

3 <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/federal-action-plan-lgbtq-1.6564977>

the acronym 2SLGBTQI+ which stands for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, and “additionally sexually diverse people.” So our God continues to give them over unto vile affections.

Ottawa (the capital of Canada) seems far from Wingham, which is a small town surrounded by fields of corn and wheat. But this matter is actually not far away at all. Last June, for the first time as I understand, the Wingham town council decided to fly the gay pride flag for the whole month. When I walked from my study

at church to my car to go home each day, I could see that flag flying just over yonder, a stark reminder of the darkening times we live in.

Yet the gospel is going forth in the world, and so we know that Christ comes quickly. We must strive to continue our efforts to reach out to the lost all around us here in Canada and everywhere, remembering the promise of our Lord, “Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”



## Search the Scriptures: Bible characters

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge teacher of New Testament history at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan and member of Faith PRC

# The fearlessness of Aristarchus

**Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you.**

**Colossians 4:10**

It would be an obvious truism to say that someone who is described as fearless is said to lack fear. There must be more—for why are they described this way? Implied is that they lack fear because they trust in something, or someone else.

For the child of God, fear is a very real emotion. Paul, a great man, was transparent about his own fear when writing to the Corinthians (I Cor. 2:3). The city, overtaken with idolatry and sensual living, made him afraid to carry out God’s calling for him there. Yet God *commanded* him to “be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee” (Acts 18:10).

Therefore, for that same child of God, fearlessness develops and increases as we learn to trust in Him (Ps. 7:1; 16:1; 20:7; 56:11). However, we are never perfectly fearless in this life, for our trust in God is always marred by our sinful natures. Nonetheless, for Aristarchus, a rather obscure New Testament figure, fearless was exactly what he was.

He is mentioned five times in Scripture, and through the narrative of the references, there are five ways he was a fearless servant of the Lord.

Aristarchus was a Greek man from the Macedonian capital of Thessalonica. He was very likely a convert of Paul when he first traveled there on his second missionary journey in c. AD 51. Paul, arriving with Silas and

Timothy, planted a church after only a short stay before being driven out of the city by an angry mob of Jews (Acts 17:5).

In addition to Jews strongly opposed to Paul’s message, pagan worship, including cult followings, thrived in Thessalonica (I Thess. 1:9). One form of this was a specific cult called the Cabirus Cult, which had many worshipers in Thessalonica upon Paul’s arrival. Some of the elements of this cult descended from the island of Samothrace, and Paul may have gained some of his prior knowledge of the cult through his brief stop on the island before arriving in Macedonia (Acts 16:11).

The Cabirus cult was based on the legend of a young man (Cabirus) who was murdered by his two brothers. The attraction for its followers was the claim that the spirit of Cabirus was alive in Thessalonica, helping the poor and less fortunate.<sup>1</sup> There were various rituals involved in its practice, including cleansing and admission of guilt. Additionally, the purpose of the cult was to give a common identity and be a unifying force for many in the city.<sup>2</sup>

In light of this, it is very possible that Aristarchus was one of these cult followers until the power of the Spirit changed his heart through the message of the gospel.

After his conversion, Aristarchus became fearless.

1 Robert Jewett. *The Thessalonian Correspondence*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1986), 166-167.

2 Charles A. Wanamaker. *Commentary on I and II Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 3.



Leaving cult worship behind for the true and living God, he surrendered everything to the Lord. The message of the missionaries found entrance into his heart, and he knew with certainty that He could trust in God for his salvation. Fearing the Lord was soon shown to be the foundation for his fearlessness.

What a contrast between the legend of Cabirus and the gospel message! For a pagan Gentile like Aristarchus, the *new way* that Paul promised through Christ must have been an amazing realization. God used the emptiness of cult worship to fill a void in the hearts of many in Thessalonica. Superficial similarities existed between his old pagan ways and the new Christian way (Christ and Cabirus were both martyred heroes, for example); yet, fundamentally opposed in every respect. No striving to gain favor and acceptance from a spirit from the past. Rather, believe in Jesus Christ and be saved (Acts 16:31).

And so Aristarchus was a changed man. At some point thereafter, he became a traveling companion of Paul (Acts 19:29). The context of his first reference is Paul's extended stay in Ephesus on his third missionary journey.

The latter part of Paul's time there was the riot in the great theater led by the silversmith Demetrius. He made his living off manufacturing small "travel" statues of Di-

ana, a goddess whose temple was cited by the Greeks as the greatest wonder of the ancient world. Demetrius and others mass-produced these silver statues so Diana could be worshiped "on the go" throughout the known world.

After the gospel went forth in Ephesus and beyond for at least two years (Acts 19:10), Demetrius realized that his accounting was showing red. Sales were down—and the spread of Christianity was to blame. A riot of the silversmiths soon ensued.

Luke describes the riot as chaos, so that some who were present did not even know what the fuss was about (Acts 19:32). Paul's contacts in Ephesus kept him from entering the theater and engaging the rioters (19:30-31), but Aristarchus was caught and brought into the mayhem (19:29).

What was Aristarchus thinking at this point? Was he questioning his commitment to his new faith, or fearless in his resolve to confess the name of the Lord before men? If Aristarchus so soon became a companion of Paul in his missionary work, we can be confident that he was fearless as the riot crescendoed and many cried out "Great is Diana of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:34).

In this setting, he endured public association with Paul (who was not there) for the span of two hours, before the town clerk finally silenced the mob with the voice of reason (Acts 19:35-40). I imagine that Aris-



tarchus became *more and more* fearless as the riot continued, knowing that the Lord was with him. What confidence!

In the Lord's providence, Aristarchus was preserved in Ephesus and continued on with Paul on the third missionary journey, northward through Macedonia, revisiting the churches that had been previously planted (Acts 20:1-3).

Our understanding of Aristarchus's fearlessness becomes stronger when we find him in Acts 20, at the conclusion of the third journey, gathered with Paul and other travelers, saying farewell to the Ephesian elders on the shores of Miletus (likely a safer rendezvous after the riot in Ephesus). Aristarchus was fearless because he was committed to traveling with Paul back to Jerusalem as they prepared to set sail from Asia (20:4).

In a previous *Standard Bearer* article ("The commitment of Silas," July 1, 2022), it was shown how Silas had to endure fear of the unknown to travel *into* Asia, Macedonia, and Achaia, and leave his comfortable Jewish setting in Judea. *Aristarchus*, on the other hand, needed courage to leave *his* familiar Macedonia to travel eastward towards Jerusalem. He feared nothing, being willing to travel with Paul, a man whose future looked dim. It was a given that Paul would not be well received by the Jews there (Acts 21:11).

More specifically, one of the purposes for Aristarchus traveling with Paul and others (Sopater of Berea, fellow Thessalonian Secundus, Gaius of Derbe, Tychicus and Trophimus of Asia, Timothy, and Luke), was to represent the Thessalonian church. Throughout the third journey, Paul had been collecting from the churches to help relieve the poor in Jerusalem (I Cor. 16:1-4; Gal. 2:10; II Cor. 9:1-7). Paul carried out this mission for two reasons: first, because the Jerusalem community desperately *needed* the assistance; but second, to show the unity of all the Christian churches in the empire.

In a way Aristarchus was one of the first delegates of the early church, with credentials in the Thessalonian church. As he arrived in Jerusalem with other men from different churches, he soon realized that the Jewish leaders there were hostile to the message of salvation by faith alone through Christ alone.

But he was fearless. When they framed Paul by using Aristarchus and his other Gentile counterparts as supposedly treading the holy ground of the inner court of the temple (Acts 21:29), Aristarchus stood by Paul with confidence. When Paul was before *another mob* of Jews, trying to reason with them that he was indeed a messenger of the Lord Himself, sent to preach to Gentiles (Acts 22:21), Aristarchus boldly associated himself with him, for he knew that the Lord was behind this

mouthpiece who had brought his own soul out of darkness into light.

And Aristarchus endured the hardships of being a companion of Paul for two years in Judea, before he faced new challenges as Paul appealed his imprisonment to Caesar Nero in Rome.

Therefore, the next step in the Aristarchus narrative is that he willingly boarded the ship that brought Paul to Rome as a prisoner (Acts 27:2). The rollercoaster of this voyage was described in a previous *Standard Bearer* article ("The loyalty of Luke," June 1, 2021). As the Lord promised Paul that no soul would be destroyed during the storm (only the ship), Aristarchus was one of the 276 onboard who survived (27:37). His previous experiences facing his fears prepared him for the trials that came on that difficult journey.

We know Aristarchus made it all the way to Rome because his last two references in Scripture are from Colossians and Philemon, where Paul mentions him in his final greetings (Col. 4:20; Phile. 24). Paul wrote these epistles while in Rome as a prisoner under house arrest (c. AD 60-63).

And so we are finally brought to the significance of the reference at the beginning of the article: "Aristarchus, my fellowprisoner saluteth you." One final example of the fearlessness of Aristarchus—being imprisoned for the cause of Christ in Rome. Others, like Epaphras, also became imprisoned for being a messenger of the gospel (Phile. 23). While Aristarchus was imprisoned in Rome, however, he was described as Paul's fellowlaborer (24).

In this we see that Paul trusted Aristarchus, even as Aristarchus trusted in the Lord. He saw that the Lord worked mightily in Paul, being led to endure many experiences with him on the mission field.

But finally, think about what Aristarchus *saw*. Do you notice a pattern with Aristarchus' experiences? He was fearless through *mobs* led by men who opposed the gospel. The angry mob of Jews who drove Paul, Silas, and Timothy out of Thessalonica. The unruly mob of silversmiths in Ephesus who dragged him into the great theater. The obstinate mob of Jews in Jerusalem who framed him as he represented Thessalonica in bringing relief to the poor.

Finally, fearless as he experienced the voyage to Rome, being put in chains as a fellow prisoner with Paul. Perhaps he even experienced a martyr's death that he would have received willingly, too—for he had confidence in the glory to come.

What experiences! What trust! What a life!

Through it all, *fearless*. For he feared the Lord of his salvation.



## Strength of youth

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

### Battling the devil (1) Warfare

A little boy, eyes wide, body shaking, and hands perspiring, tucks himself even deeper under his bedsheets. His young mind spins: perhaps if he can cover his whole body and close his eyes, he can disappear from it all. He hears the distant sound of footsteps, shouting, and even the sudden burst of gunfire. If he gathers the courage to peek out his bedroom window, he sees masked men in the distance, the same brutes who night after night have made it their business to terrorize the locals. During the day, no children are allowed outside and adults make only necessary travels on the city roads. The boy's dad and mom talk in low voices, but the son catches enough of their words to complete the puzzle: the terrorists are slowly gaining the upper hand over the local government, and soon the middle-eastern region where they live may be overrun by these bloodthirsty and cruel men. The child cowers in fear, not knowing what might happen to his house, his family, and his own life should the government's resistance against the terrorists fail. The smells, sounds, and sights of war surround this boy every day.

Sadly, this is a reality for many around the world. They live in a war zone. They experience the horrors of conflict continually. Lurking enemies threaten and assault daily.

And yet, reader, I wonder how often we think about the battle *we* are in. You might say about that boy hiding in his bed, "What he experiences is *real* war—I can't imagine living in the midst of such heated conflict." But you, too, are in a war—a war no less real than what is happening overseas in many regions. You, also, know and daily experience the heat of battle, no less than someone inundated with the sights and sounds of terrorist attacks. Young person, you are a Christian soldier in a *spiritual* warfare. The conflict rages all of your life. The adversaries cease not to assault, and they are bent upon your destruction.

This series of articles is about our spiritual warfare particularly against the devil. In this first article, we will simply establish the fact that we are in a spiritual warfare and that we have enemies. In the following article, we

will narrow our focus to one of those enemies, Satan, and will explain his identity and tactics. After that, we will have a few articles addressing our battle against this adversary, taking our instruction mainly from Ephesians 6, the classic passage on spiritual warfare.

The subject could not be more urgent. Hear the urgency in I Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour." Take heed to the sobering words of Ephesians 6:11-12: "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Take to heart the warning of Revelation 12:12: "Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time." And then, look around you and see the devastation this dragon leaves in his wake: broken marriages, rebellious children, rent churches, painful betrayals, rampant slander...on and on the list goes.

#### Warfare

That we stand and fight as soldiers in spiritual warfare is not always before our mind as it should be. We forget that as we wake up from sleep, Satan lurks. We so often fail to see or care about the flying arrows and sword thrusts of temptation as we walk through our day. Instead, we frequently view our life as a stroll down a winding path next to a lazily flowing river under the warm sunshine. Even when we remember the reality of the battle, we often deceive ourselves into believing that the enemies, though real, do not present any real threat; we become dull to their presence. It is even the case that in our pride, we rely upon our own strength, foolishly thinking that we would never fall wounded from a projectile sent from the enemies' hands. When Satan and his allies observe these spiritual insensitivities and foolish patterns of thinking, they rub their hands in glee—for such a young person is a prime target for attack.



Conscious of it or not, you are on a battlefield: when you wake up, as you walk down the school hallway, as you enjoy a Friday night with friends, as you sit in church, as you hold phone in hand, as you lie down for sleep. Every year, every month, every week, every day of your life—hot battle!

### The Bible tells us so

The foundational passage is Genesis 3:15, known as the ‘mother promise,’ an announcement of warfare and victory spoken after the fall of our first parents: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” God put *enmity* between the devil and the woman, and between their seeds—an enmity that runs through all of history. Battle, warfare, and conflict exist between the reprobate and the elect. But unlike earthly warfare, the outcome of this spiritual warfare is not in question: the seed of the woman has the victory. The comforting gospel spoken in the hearing of trembling Adam and Eve was that God would give His Son, who should be made of a woman, to bruise the head of the serpent. This crushing blow Christ delivered at the cross. When you step on a snake’s head with some force, it might thrash about for a while, but it will soon die—it has, after all, been dealt a deadly blow. Christ has bruised the serpent’s head; while Satan does thrash around for a while (as the church experiences in the New Testament age), his doom is sealed, and soon Christ will return to throw him into the lake of fire. Christian soldier, fight against Satan in the consciousness of this good news: You have the victory in the Lord Jesus Christ!

The ‘mother promise’ stands at the head of many other passages speaking about spiritual warfare. A classic passage on this warfare is Ephesians 6:10ff., which concerns the armor of God. By referring to “armor,” the apostle is drawing upon something in the ancient world his readers would have readily understood: a Roman soldier with armor. When a Roman soldier went to battle, he would not go in his regular clothes and barehanded. He would enter the fight with armor, what he was suited up in and the instruments he carried. Each piece of the equipment was designed either to prepare the soldier for battle, or to defend him, or, in the case of one piece, to go on the offense. In Ephesians 6:10ff, the apostle Paul is not referring to that physical armor, but to the spiritual armor of the Christian soldier, designed either to prepare him for battle, defend him in it, or to go on the offense. The point is that the Bible speaks of our life as Christian soldiers in a warfare.

Faithful summaries of Scripture, our confessions

also speak the language of war. I call your attention to one of those confessions, the Heidelberg Catechism, in three places. Lord’s Day 12 teaches us about the title “Christ,” and follows this instruction with an explanation of the term “Christian”: “But why art thou called a Christian? Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing...that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures.” Young people, you are kings, and kings fight against sin and Satan in this life! Lord’s Day 33, teaching us the doctrine of conversion, includes battle vocabulary. One part of the true conversion of man is the mortification of the old man. Every catechism student in eighth or ninth grade knows that mortification means “to kill.” The mortification of the old man is the *killing* of the old man—that is the language of conflict. Lord’s Day 52, Q&A 127, continues this theme; notice the Catechism’s wording as it summarizes the sixth petition: “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil; that is, since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh cease not to assault us, do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory.”

Rightly, then, does theology call the church on earth the “church militant.” She is a fighting church, and you, dear reader, are a part of her ranks.

### Enemies

In any warfare, there are enemies. Earthly soldiers must know the foe, else they cannot fight effectively. So must Christian soldiers know the adversaries.

Our Heidelberg Catechism helpfully identifies our mortal enemies in Q&A 127 as “the devil, the world, and our own flesh.” We are warned about the wicked world in I John 2:15-16: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world.” Galatians 5:17 refers to the sinful flesh: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”

Then, there is also the devil, the one upon whom we are focusing in this series. Who is he? What is his history? What tactics does he use in his warfare against us? These questions and more we will answer next time.





## I believe

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

# What is gender dysphoria and its common expressions? (2)

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2022, p. 13.

## The diagnosis of gender dysphoria

Back to your co-worker. Does she really have feelings of being a boy though she was born a girl? As we will see in future articles, it is not the case that everyone who presents themselves as another gender does so because of genuine (clinical) gender dysphoria. There are other reasons. However, there is no doubt that feelings of gender dysphoria exist for some people. It does not help anyone, including the church, to attempt to deny this. It is important to note though, that these feelings exist on a continuum of lesser to greater. That is, different people who have these feelings, experience them more or less intensely and persistently. Furthermore, for the same individual the feelings can wax and wane at different times, and can even depart altogether. For now, as a *description of the experience itself*, and as a *marker of the greater end of the continuum*, the description DSM-5 gives of diagnosable gender dysphoria can be helpful. The manual distinguishes between children and adolescents/adults:

Gender dysphoria in *adolescents and adults* is a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and their assigned gender, lasting at least 6 months, as manifested by at least two of the following:

- A marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- A strong desire to be rid of one's primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one's experienced/expressed gender (or in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
- A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)
- A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or

some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)

- A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)

In order to meet criteria for the diagnosis, the condition must also be associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Gender dysphoria in *children* is a marked incongruence between one's experienced/expressed gender and assigned gender, lasting at least 6 months, as manifested by at least six of the following (one of which must be the first criterion):

- A strong desire to be of the other gender or an insistence that one is the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one's assigned gender)
- In boys (assigned gender), a strong preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; or in girls (assigned gender), a strong preference for wearing only typical masculine clothing and a strong resistance to the wearing of typical feminine clothing
- A strong preference for cross-gender roles in make-believe play or fantasy play
- A strong preference for the toys, games or activities stereotypically used or engaged in by the other gender
- A strong preference for playmates of the other gender
- In boys (assigned gender), a strong rejection of typically masculine toys, games, and activities and a strong avoidance of rough-and-tumble play; or in girls (assigned gender), a strong rejection of typically feminine toys, games, and activities
- A strong dislike of one's sexual anatomy
- A strong desire for the physical sex characteristics that match one's experienced gender

As with the diagnostic criteria for adolescents and adults, the condition must also be associated with

clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, determining who has “strong” feelings this way is quite subjective. And whenever something is a fad in society, what is already subjective plays victim to manipulation. Every time a boy plays with his sister’s dolls, he is not manifesting gender dysphoria. Often a child’s imaginative play showcases nothing more than his/her creativity and innocence. Teenagers too (especially under the influence of this age) feel and do and say many things. Some will question who they are for a time perhaps. Some will see that they do not particularly like all the things others of their gender enjoy. These realizations are not necessarily true gender dysphoria. The diagnosis “gender dysphoria” is *supposed* to be limited to those who feel *intensely* what is listed above and for whom these feelings *persist* and cause significant difficulty in all aspects of their lives.

### An important comparison

The best way to think about gender dysphoria perhaps is to compare it to anorexia. There are perfectly healthy adolescent girls who look in the mirror and say, “I look so fat.”<sup>2</sup> No one concludes from that, or even from the fact that two days later the girl will not eat desert, that the girl has anorexia. However, there is a small fraction of the population who feels fat even though they are skinny, and for whom this notion is *persistent* and *destructive*. They begin to starve themselves. That is anorexia. In a similar way, a small portion of people feel genuine persistent distress concerning their gender.

The estimated number for whom this is true is tiny. The *DSM-5* manual estimates that it is between .005% and .014% of males, (that is, between 5/100ths of 1 percent and 1.4 tenths of 1 percent of males). For females it is between .002% and .003% of females (that is, between 2/100ths of one percent and 3/100ths of one percent of females).<sup>3</sup> To be clear, this is not the amount of people who say they *ever* have had feelings of incongruence between their physical sex and how they perceive themselves. But, rather, this is the percentage of those with persistent and destructive feelings of incongruence between their sex and how they perceive themselves.

Despite this statistic, the number of people *claiming* clinical gender dysphoria has skyrocketed. In fact, the number of people claiming *any* aspect of the so-called

LGBTQ+ spectrum has skyrocketed. A couple of decades ago the percentage of the population who claimed to be homosexual or bisexual or the like held steady at between 2-3%. A recent Gallup poll revealed that that number has jumped to 7.1% of the population.<sup>4</sup> The majority of this 7.1% are from the youngest American generation.<sup>5</sup> Social contagion is a powerful thing. Regarding gender issues, this social influence apparently affects girls more than boys. In 2016, 46% of sex reassignment surgeries performed in the United States were performed upon women. In 2017, that number jumped to 70%.<sup>6</sup> In Britain, the number of youth who claim gender dysphoria has increased 4,000% over a decade. Three-quarters of these are girls.<sup>7</sup>

### A real issue for some

Despite the power of social influence behind these numbers, genuine gender dysphoria does exist for some. And even in many cases where clinical gender dysphoria should not be diagnosed, there are real feelings on the lesser end of the continuum. Another article will address possible explanations for true gender dysphoria. Maybe the co-worker did at one point (perhaps still does) have some feelings of being a boy though she is a girl. And it is important to know that *true* gender dysphoria is an immensely painful experience, just as anorexia is. As much as we would have compassion on someone who is suffering from the one, we ought to have compassion for someone suffering from the other. People have described gender dysphoria as always putting on layers of clothing when you are cold but never ever being able to get warm. Around 41% of people who affirm their gender dysphoria and identify as transgender will attempt suicide, compared to 4.6% of the general population.<sup>8</sup> Certainly this indicates something of the

1 *DSM-5*, 452-453.

2 Increasingly, at a younger age due to societal influence.

3 *DSM-5*, 454.

4 Jeffrey M. Jones, “LGBT Identification in U.S. Ticks Up to 7.1%,” *Gallup Inc.*, February 17, 2022 (<https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx>).

5 “The increase in LGBT identification in recent years largely reflects the higher prevalence of such identities among the youngest U.S. adults compared with the older generations they are replacing in the U.S. adult population.” J. Jones, “LGBT Identification.”

6 Referenced in Abigail Shrier, *Irreversible Damage: The Transgender Craze Seducing Our Daughters* (Washington D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2021), 33.

7 Tony Grew, “Inquiry Into Surge in Gender Treatment Ordered by Penny Mordaunt,” *Sunday Times*, September 16, 2018 (<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/inquiry-into-surge-in-gender-treatment-ordered-by-penny-mordaunt-b2ftz9hfn>).

8 Referenced in Ryan T. Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally: Responding to the Transgender Moment* (New York: Encounter Books, 2019), 93.

pain, difficulty, and confusion being endured. Certainly, God's people can and must sympathize deeply with this.

Yet, just as we may not deny the reality of the terribly difficult feelings, we must deny those feelings the right to determine the gender of a person. Feelings can be terribly

strong, but they can change over time and under various influences. Feelings are not always mouthpieces for objective truth. And, as most Christians ought to know well, even more rarely are they indicative of God's will.



## News from our churches

Mr. James Holstege, member of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan and administrator at Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids

Greetings, dear reader of the *Standard Bearer*! It is our hope, the Lord willing, to begin a new supplemental series to "News from Our Churches," in which we explore the organic nature of the church. Especially, we want to take a look at that part of the great and glorious body of Christ in the world we know fondly as the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, along with her sisters and friends.

We are described in Scripture as living members, alive by the regenerating Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, who lives in us. We live, as members of a body unto our Head, to His glory and praise. Our life in this body can be summed as follows: walking in the way of love. Love toward God, because He first loved us, and love toward one another. "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity [love]" (I Cor. 13:13). "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" (I John 4:11). So it is, from this perspective of the church, her organic nature, filled with living members, that we wish to explore. We do so gladly, in order to help us pray for one another, and to love one another.

As we approach the 100th anniversary of the PRCA, we plan to start this series by using the opportunity to reflect and look backward. Several of us can trace our own family heritage to the early beginnings. We are looking for those of you who know your family history. We want to hear from all parts of our denomination. Remember, we

are all important members of the body, where there is neither Jew nor Gentile, bond nor free. We certainly could use your help! Do you know your family history? We would appreciate hearing from you.

While our family histories intersect with individual churches, we also hope to explore the congregations. We hope to hear firsthand or perhaps second-hand accounts from some of you about the early days in our churches. Perhaps you or your forebears were part of a mission station, or a congregation that no longer exists. We hope to explore our own Christian schools and the important role they have played in our denominational history. Perhaps we can take a look at some previous conferences or celebrations. The 25th, 50th, and 75th anniversary celebrations certainly come to mind.

Looking beyond our approaching 100th anniversary, and as we continue to contemplate the wonder of God's amazing grace, we hope to use this series in order to look more closely at our current lives within the churches and so much more. May it serve to bring praises to our glorious Head, the Lord Jesus, and to bring us closer to one another during these last days in which we live. "For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another" (I John 3:11).



## Announcements

The RFPA Book Club gave you **every** book...

But now you can **choose** your books!

Sign up for a customized Level 1 or 2 membership to select either our newest books or any books of your choice from our full catalog.

To sign up, please call **616-457-5970** or scan the QR code. [rfpa.org/pages/membership](http://rfpa.org/pages/membership)

**Sign up today!**



### Level 1

**Any 4 books per year**

+ a *Standard Bearer* subscription  
+ 2 free books for signing up\*

### Level 2

**Any 8 books per year**

+ a *Standard Bearer* subscription  
+ an *Ignited by the Word* subscription  
+ 4 free books for signing up\*

\*Sign up by **October 15, 2022**, to receive your free books from our Complimentary Books Catalog

### Reformation Lecture:

**Sexual Abuse in Calvin's Geneva**  
7:30 P.M. on October 27, 2022

Southwest PRC (Wyoming, MI)  
Livestream at [southwestprc.org](http://southwestprc.org)

Ecclesiastes 1:9 tells us “there is no new thing under the sun.” Is that true with respect to sexual abuse? Did this horrific sin manifest itself in the life of the Reformation churches? If so, is there anything we can learn from the Reformers and the consistories about how to handle this travesty found in the church yet today? Plan to attend this timely lecture (or listen online) as Prof. Cory Griess explains how the consistory in Calvin's Geneva handled cases of sexual abuse.

### Bound volumes

The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 98. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the **RFPA office** before the end of October. For additional orders, call Skyler at (616) 457-5970.