

The Standard Bearer

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Called to have charity

Rev. Matthew DeBoer

The sin of forgiveness

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News from the realm of the King of kings

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God's prophet: Hear ye Him

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Reclaiming the family

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Tempting God

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani



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Meditation

Rev. Matthew DeBoer, pastor of Edgerton Protestant Reformed Church in Edgerton, Minnesota

Called to have charity

And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

I Peter 4:8

First Peter teaches that Christ is our deliverer. This book addressed mid-first-century Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor. What Peter told believers then applies to us believers today. Chapter 2:24 states, “Who (Christ) his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.” By His payment for sin, Christ gained the right to work in us so that we “live unto righteousness.” We still have a sinful nature and do sin, but sin no longer rules us. Jesus does.

The believers to whom Peter wrote faced persecution, and thus great temptation to forsake the Christian life. According to chapter 4:3-4, the unbelievers around them spoke evilly of them and made life hard for them because they did not worship idols, live unchastely, or join the drunken banquets anymore. If they simply returned to their old life, their troubles would cease. Today, some might give us strange looks or mock us for spending Sunday at church and staying away from their parties. We know that if we just started living like them, we would be accepted.

In light of this temptation, Peter commanded the saints to continue living the Christian life. In chapter 4:7 he wrote, “But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.” “Be sober,” that is, “Have your spiritual head on straight,” and be watchful for the enemy, especially the devil, as Christ’s coming approaches. Then, verse 8, the text at hand, says, “Have fervent charity among yourselves.” In these last days, we must love one another, helping each other live the Christian life in a wicked world.

What is “charity”?

The word “charity” in the original Greek of the text indicates that the love being spoken of is a love that is from God and that honors God. There are a few words for “love” in the Greek, two of which you have probably heard before. One is *phileo*, which refers to “brotherly love.” The other is *agape*, which is the word in I Peter 4:8. *Agape* is the love that is from God and

thus glorifies Him. I John 4:7-8 uses this word for love and says, “Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.”

Deuteronomy 7:6-9 helps us further understand what this love is as it describes God’s love for His Old Testament people Israel. In verse 7, we read that God “set his love upon them.” Verse 6 teaches that God loved them by determining to do good to them in eternity, “choosing” them to be His special people. Verse 9 adds that God kept “covenant and mercy” with Israel, indicating that He also loved them by seeking their fellowship. According to the passage, God’s love of His people is His seeking their good and fellowship.

God loves us and brings us into the bond of love that He has within His own trinitarian being. I John 4:8 says, “God is love.” Each Person of the Trinity seeks the good of the others and fellowship with the others. God makes us to know His own deep love and experience it. In His love, He has delivered us in Christ from sin so that we know Jesus and even have *agape* love. The Lord empowers us through His Word to love Him and one another in the church with a love that is from Him and that honors Him.

I Peter 4:8 is focused on members of the church loving fellow members. First, to love another is to seek their good to God’s glory. Peter is especially emphasizing a love that seeks the spiritual good of another, for he uses the word *agape*, referring to the love that is from God and that honors Him. Loving someone means you do all you can to help them live for Christ. You are a godly example to them and discuss God’s Word with them. When there are faults, you humbly help them turn, and when there are trials, you encourage them with God’s promises. Loving someone also includes seeking their good physically. When you know someone in the congregation is sick, tired, or hurt, you love them by assisting them however you are able.

That we love others in the church also means that we seek their fellowship to God’s praise. To fellowship with others is to live with them as one, serving Christ alongside them. You call upon God in prayer together,

talk about Him together, and encourage each other to follow His Word.

God's Word demands, "Have fervent charity among yourselves."

We are tempted not to love. It is easier not to pursue the good of one another spiritually. It is easier not to say anything about spiritual things. It is hard to help a neighbor that is sick, or your spouse that is tired, especially when assisting them would interfere with something you want to do. Regarding fellowship, it can seem better and easier to live apart from other members of the church, particularly when they have been unkind or there is a disagreement.

God says to us, "Have love!" To love others in the church it is important that we attend the functions of the church regularly, like the worship services, Bible studies, and catechism classes. If we do not, it will be hard to seek the good and fellowship of others because we will not know them and their needs. However, when present at these events, we have opportunity to fellowship and we see how we can help and encourage others.

The text demands charity, specifically "fervent" charity. The word "fervent" in the Greek language literally means "to stretch out." The idea is that we must not help half-heartedly, but reach out with great energy to do good to others.

We are to have this fervent love not just some of the time, but the text indicates that we must possess it continuously. So, even if someone has done something we do not like, we still need to seek their good and fellowship and fix any issues there are between us.

God adds that we must have this fervent charity "above all things." This shows that we need to be "sober" and "watchful," as verse 7 demands, in love for each other. Also, love is emphasized because if we do not love each other, we will not obey any of the commands in verses 9-11, including the call to "hospitality." Only if we have charity will we help each other live the Christian life in these last days.

The end of verse 8 adds a reason we are to love. We must love "for (because) charity shall cover the multitude of sins."

We commit a multitude of sins.

The word "sin" in verse 8 literally means "to miss the mark." Just as every archer has a mark at which he must aim, each of us is called by God to aim our lives at His mark, which is loving Him and loving the neighbor. One who sins not only misses that mark, but he aims his life in the opposite direction, specifically at himself and his own glory. Thus, sin is rebellion against God, and it often hurts other people. Sin makes one worthy of eternal damnation.

Sadly, we commit a "multitude of sins." Christ has delivered us so that sin no longer rules in us, but our sinful nature remains, and thus we miss the mark of glorifying God and loving the neighbor many times per day. We rebel against God and harm each other with words and deeds.

The inspired apostle says that charity "shall cover a multitude of sins."

To cover sin is to remove it from your sight. It is to forgive. It is to say, "I do not see your sins anymore. I am not going to bring them up again. I am not going to hold them against you so that the sin stands between us and our fellowship."

When we love someone in the church, we do not tell others about their sins. Telling others about someone's sins hurts the sinner and hinders their fellowship with others. Those who hear about the sins tend to keep away from the sinner. So, we do not go around saying, "Did you hear about this...?" Loving husbands and wives do not go to their friends and list the faults of their spouse. If their spouse needs spiritual help, they may need to tell the pastor or elders about it. But that is done in love, pursuing the good of the spouse. That is different than spreading the shortcomings of others. The act of spreading sin is almost always done with the proud thought that we would never do what they did.

When we love others in the church, we also do not harbor bitterness against them for their sins. Those who are bitter towards others will not be seeking their good or fellowship.

Instead of spreading sins or becoming bitter, those who truly love others in the church cover their sins when they confess. When someone says, "Sorry," we say, "You are forgiven. I do not see your sins anymore. I am not going to bring them up again. I am not going to hold them against you." That is truly pursuing the good of another and their fellowship.

We are to cover the sins that others confess to us and even some sins that are not confessed to us. We see many sins committed by church members. Since they are children of God, we assume that they confess those sins. Only in certain situations do we approach a brother personally. For instance, we go to him when we have good reason to think that he has not confessed his sins. Also, we go to the brother if the sin against us is so great that we must hear his confession to live with him in unity in the church. Then, when he confesses, we must forgive. Even before he confesses, we must have hearts that are ready to forgive.

Loving and covering sin is hard. It is much easier to hold a grudge or talk about the sin. By nature, all men despise true charity and forgiveness. Today, when

someone in the world does the wrong thing, people put it online and the masses rage against the wrongdoer. One loves and forgives only by God's power. To Him must we look for strength.

Our motivation to love and cover sin is to show gratitude to our loving God.

Peter points to God's love and forgiveness of us in the previous chapters. In chapter 1:19-20, he teaches that God determined to send Christ before the world began. Then, I Peter 2:24 speaks of Jesus "bearing our sins" on the cross. On that basis, God covers our multitude of sins. He sees us as righteous in Christ. Wonderfully, when we ask God for forgiveness by faith, He declares to our conscience, "You are forgiven! I will not hold your sins against you or let your sins destroy our rela-

tionship." What love He shows to us who have sinned against Him.

Knowing God's wondrous love, we strive to love one another in thankfulness. God is pleased when we love one another, for that love reflects the love He has in Himself. When you are tempted not to seek the good of another spiritually or physically, remember God's love for you. When you are tempted not to forgive, recall God's forgiveness. He covers our sins, and we have sinned against Him far worse and far more times than anyone has sinned against us. One who holds a grudge is forgetting the great forgiveness God has granted him and thus showing terrible ingratitude. May Christ empower us to remember God's love and forgiveness, and so love and forgive one another in gratitude.



Editorial

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

The sin of forgiveness

It may be hard to believe that, in certain circumstances, it may be sinful to say, "I forgive you." But it should not be surprising. One of the most blessed activities among the people of God—the declaration from one sinner to another, "I forgive you"—can be misused to serve a purpose the very opposite of the one for which the Lord designed it.

Christians should not only recognize that this is possible, they should expect it. Since the devil masquerades as an angel of light and recruits men and women to work on his behalf (II Cor. 11:14, 15), we should not be ignorant of his devices (II Cor. 11:2), not in this case either. The devil is so determined to ruin the blessed works of God that he can, in fact, take what is supposed to be at the pinnacle of Christian conduct and make it antichristian.

It is possible that the act of forgiveness becomes an act of sin.

The primary way in which this sin is committed is when the response to a very *serious* sin is *automatically* to declare, "I forgive you." Those who have done so may not realize that such was sinful, but we must be instructed to see it as sinful.

I first saw the expression, "The Sin of Forgiveness," in the title of a newspaper article some 25 years ago in which the author expressed horror at such a declara-

tion. A fourteen-year-old high school student in West Paducah, KY, murdered three of his teenaged classmates while they were praying. Almost immediately, students in another prayer group declared to the murderer, *automatically*, "We forgive you." The horrified author of the article called their forgiveness "the sin of forgiveness."

This *expression* may be surprising for the reader, but the occasion for an editorial about it will not be. When a horrible sin is committed—for example, when a strong person uses his strength to damage someone weaker, for example, for his own sexual pleasure—it is sin to grant automatic forgiveness to the sinner. The sin is worse when the victim is pressed to forgive the abuser immediately and automatically. This is a current example many will relate to, but the subject applies in other occasions as well. No one may grant automatic forgiveness to someone who commits a serious sin. To do so is sin.

God's forgiveness

To understand how such a blessed act can become sinful requires careful understanding of what our act of forgiveness actually is. What is it to forgive another?

Because our act of forgiveness must be modeled after

God's, first examine God's. Here, we lay the foundation carefully.

Fundamental and central

The blessing of hearing God declare to us, "I forgive you," is at the very heart of the Christian gospel. Jesus taught us to pray, after material provisions, for this spiritual one: "forgive our debts." Among all salvation's blessings for this life, the Apostles' Creed mentions forgiveness, not because the others are not important but because this one is fundamental. Only because of forgiveness is there "resurrection of the body" and "life everlasting" and all the other graces of salvation. Calvin said "the Gospel makes the salvation of men to consist in the forgiveness of sins..." (Commentary on John 20:23). The Belgic Confession says that "our salvation consists in the remission of our sins." After Jesus' resurrection and before His ascension, He taught the travelers to Emmaus that the message to be proclaimed to the world is "repentance and *remission* (forgiveness) of sins."

A declaration not a decision

God's forgiveness of us is a *declaration* He makes to us. To be sure, God's forgiveness has an *eternal source*—His decree; but this decree is not yet forgiveness. God's forgiveness has a *judicial ground*—Christ's sacrifice to pay for sin; but neither is this forgiveness. Forgiveness is God's *declaration* to a man's consciousness, *in the forum of his conscience*, "I forgive you." According to the meaning of the Greek word for forgiveness ("release, let go") His declaration is: "I *release* you from the responsibility to pay for your sin; I will *let it go*, not think of you in light of it, and not let it be a barrier between us." What God determined in eternity and grounded in the cross's payment, He must now *declare* to us: "I forgive you." To illustrate, a judge may have written his *decision* to pardon a convicted and imprisoned criminal; but the convicted criminal must hear the judge declare that decision to him. This is forgiveness.

At times, here is where confusion enters. Some refer to God's decision to forgive (His eternal decree) as forgiveness, and so put forgiveness in eternity. Others refer to the satisfaction made at the cross as forgiveness and see forgiveness as an event of 2,000 years ago. To speak so may be legitimate if the cross *represents* forgiveness in a figure of speech, as *hand* means *help* in "give me a hand," or *wheels* means *car* in "I like your wheels," or *the crown* means *the king*. In all these examples, one thing closely related to another thing is said to *be* the other thing. Then "the cross" can be said to be "forgiveness" because the cross is so basic to forgiveness.

But the failure to see the difference between the cross and forgiveness causes confusion. This explains, I be-

lieve, the common practice to pray for *assurance* of forgiveness rather than for forgiveness itself. If forgiveness took place in eternity, or was finished at the cross, my only present need is to be assured of those realities. But if forgiveness takes place daily as God's *declaration* to me, then I must ask for forgiveness, not merely for the assurance of it. Of course, we must always *connect* forgiveness to God's decree and Christ's cross. But God's eternal decree and Christ's perfect sacrifice must now be applied to the sinner in God's act of forgiveness—His declaration to the sinner daily: "I forgive you."

Forgiveness for repentant sinners

God declares forgiveness to His people when they *repent* and embrace Christ by *faith*. "When I confessed transgression, then thou forgavest me," we sing from Psalm 32. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins" (1 John 1:9). The Belgic Confession teaches that the blessings of Christ, forgiveness in particular, become ours "when we believe on him" (Art. 23). If a man does not repent and lay hold on Christ, it may well be true that Christ satisfied for his sin at the cross because God chose him in eternity, but the impenitent man will not hear God declare to his conscience, "I forgive you." Instead, his bones wax old in their roaring all day. Day and night God's heavy hand is upon him. But when he owns (acknowledges) his trespass, hides not his sin from God, then God speaks the wonderful words, "I forgive."

The church and forgiveness

All this explains why Christians pray daily, "Forgive our debts," rather than, "Assure me that my debts are forgiven." But all this also explains why the *church* can forgive sins. Jesus said, speaking to His church, "Whose soever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them" (John 20:23), where *remit* is *forgive*. Of course, no church pays for sins. But the church forgives sins when, on behalf of God, the church *declares God's forgiveness* to repentant and believing sinners. Calvin said that Christ "enjoins them [His ministers] to proclaim the forgiveness of sins...." And, "...the forgiveness of sins...is committed to their trust." In an underappreciated Lord's Day (31), our Heidelberg Catechism teaches that the church declares this only to those who repent and receive the gospel by faith. To those who are unbelieving and impenitent, the church declares the opposite: they are outside the kingdom. That is, their sins are "retained" (John 20:23) or held against them. To put the matter in terms of Christian discipline, which really is the subject here, the Church Order of Dordt instructs consistories to receive a sinner and reconcile—that is, declare forgiveness—only when there is "sufficient evi-

dence of repentance” (Art. 75). Repentance—and sufficient evidence of it—precedes the church’s declaration of forgiveness.

In sum: Forgiveness from God is His *declaration* to *repentant* sinners based on the satisfaction of His justice in the cross: “I release you from responsibility to pay for your sin. Your sin will never be brought up in my dealings with you. I will not think of you in light of it.” Thus, lack of repentance in a man does not mean that Christ did not die for him or that God did not decree to save him, but it does mean that God will not declare to him, “I forgive you.”

Man’s forgiveness

As much as possible, now, our forgiveness of other sinners must parallel God’s forgiveness of us. “Forgive us...as we forgive...” Thus, our forgiveness of another’s sin is our *declaration* to the sinner, “I forgive you.” The sinner hears us speak this directly to him.

Also here—with man’s forgiveness—confusion enters. In a recent and otherwise good speech by a nationally known Christian speaker, the speaker’s definition of forgiveness came not from Scripture but from Miriam Webster, which definition had some merit but was missing the essential element of making a *declaration* to the sinner. In a podcast sermon sent to me recently, the preacher defined forgiveness as “identifying with the wrongdoer and inwardly paying their debt.” Forgiveness for these speakers is something that takes place inside us—an act and decision within me. For them, forgiveness is to give up resentment or bitterness, to give up a claim to requital or retaliation, to give up the desire that the other pay for the sin. This is a common conception in society today and may even include *some* of what God demands of us who have been sinned against; but it is not biblical forgiveness itself. We must construct our ideas of biblical concepts from the Bible.

If God’s forgiveness of us is a *declaration* that He will not deal with us based on our sin, our forgiveness must *declare* such to the sinner. If in forgiveness God says to us, “I will never bring up the sin to judge you according to it,” we must say to the sinner, “I will never bring it up to judge you according to it.” If God says, “I will not think of you in light of it, will not remember it,” that is what we must say. If God says, “Regarding that sin, I am finished with it,” we must say to the sinner, “The matter is finished between us!”

And if God’s declaration to us comes when we repent and not before that, our declaration must come when the sinner repents, and not before. Since the rule for God’s dealings with us is: “When I confessed transgression, then thou forgavest me” (Ps. 32), so the rule in our

dealings with one another is, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).

The sin of forgiveness

Thus, forgiving a brother who sinned grossly before he repents or who refuses to repent is “the sin of forgiveness.”

When we imagine that *automatically and quickly* we must say to everyone who sins, “I forgive you,” we sin.

Of course, what some *mean* when they say, “I forgive,” may not be a sin, but then it is not forgiveness either. They mean their decision not to be bitter or vengeful, not to retaliate, not to let anger consume them, a decision to go on with their life without thinking about the sin so that the sinner continues to control them. God requires those commitments of us; they are necessary for spiritual health. But they are not called “forgiveness.”

Some have called these decisions not to be bitter, and the rest, “*attitudinal* forgiveness” which they say is required automatically, as opposed to “*transactional* forgiveness” in which a declaration to the sinner is made. This is helpful to remind Christians that a proper attitude must precede any action, and even that the proper attitude may be present for a long time before any action is taken. But it confuses an *attitude* with a very important *activity*.

No Christian may say to an *impenitent* sinner: “I will never bring this up to you again. I will never think of you in light of it. The subject of your sin is forever finished between you and me.” To say so would be the sin of forgiveness.

It would be a sin to do so because if my neighbor does not repent of his gross sin, I must *not* be finished speaking to him about it. If he does not confess his sin, my calling before God is to love him by confronting him graciously about the sin. Even if he quickly says, “I am sorry,” but gives evidence that he is not sorry by doing nothing to turn from the sin, I may not declare to him that the matter will never be raised with him. In fact, I must promise him that I will be back soon with witnesses to bring him to the knowledge of sin and the grace of forgiveness for repentant sinners at the cross of Christ. I will continue to bring up the sin by bringing a report of it to the elders, so that they can labor with him toward repentance. Because I love him, I will not, I may not, forgive him.

Premature forgiveness may even be an act of selfishness. I need it for my own well-being. I do not want to be bitter, to hold a grudge, to be controlled by the past. The act of forgiveness, then, is not for him but for me.

And a call to forgive immediately and automatically may be what a sinner asks for who does not want to repent—truly repent—of their sin but continue in it without being bothered by the hard calling to reckon with the depths and consequences of the sin.

At bottom, “the sin of forgiveness” stands in the way of the true act of forgiveness, in which a man humbly says to his neighbor (both of whom are right with God under the cross of Christ!), “I forgive you.”

Of course, saying these things may raise as many questions as they try to answer. “Doesn’t Jesus call us to forgive seven times seven? Isn’t forgiving an act of grace and withholding forgiveness show that I do not know grace? Doesn’t love cover sin, and not confront it all the time? If you don’t forgive, won’t a root of bitterness spring up in you?” These, December 1, God willing. November 15 will be our special Reformation issue.

Letters

Remembering Rev. Woudenberg

I was very happy to see the “In Memoriam” article on the late Rev. Bernard Woudenberg, written by Prof. Douglas Kuiper in the *SB* of October 1, 2022.

One morning after an Orthodox Presbyterian church service (I was, in the late 1980’s a member there), a bearded young man who was visiting the church approached to offer me three pamphlets, which I found out later were some of the little white pamphlets published by the PRC years earlier. This fellow was then receiving Rev. Woudenberg’s “Studies in Bible Doctrine” cassette tapes by mail. At that time I knew nothing of the Protestant Reformed Churches or of Rev. Woudenberg, who was then the pastor of Kalamazoo PR Church in Kalamazoo, MI.

When I read the pamphlets at home, I was especially interested in one entitled “The Christian and the Film Arts,” written by Prof. Herman Hanko of the PR Seminary in Wyoming, MI. I wrote to the author, and shortly thereafter received a letter from him. Prof. Hanko said he would be giving a lecture soon at Covenant PR Church in Wyckoff, NJ, where his son Ron was the pastor. He said he’d like to meet me and asked if I would be able to attend.

I made it to the lecture, and despite the fact that I had very little background in the PRC and did not fully understand what was said, I was definitely interested in learning more about the denomination. In the year that followed, I subscribed to the *SB* and read some books by PR ministers. I became convinced of some important points of PR doctrine that I had never been taught. The literature from the denomination had made enough of an impact on me that I quit a job I liked in New York and moved to New Jersey. It was a move I did not regret, and I was able to find an apartment and temporary jobs.

At Covenant PRC I learned much more about the denomination and became a member of that church. Five years later, as Covenant was quite small, the denominational “church visitors” advised that we close the church and transfer to other PR churches, and I was the first one to do so, it being easier for a single person to pick up and move. I knew when I moved to Michigan in May 1997 that the PRC was the religious “home” I had been looking for. That was 25 years ago.

I came to know Rev. Woudenberg himself when I telephoned him from New York to find out about the “bearded young man,” and I met him in person when he and his wife Fran moved into Sunset Retirement Home in Jenison, MI, where I live. They had an apartment in Village I where they made their home four years until the reverend’s death.

Prof. Kuiper’s article in the *SB* made me realize that had it not been for Rev. Woudenberg probably supplying the bearded young man with pamphlets, I might never have discovered the PRC. Professor Hanko played an important part, as did others. My saga shows (does it not?) that only the God of heaven and earth could have engineered all these little “coincidences” that resulted in the churches I call home.

Natalie Jefferson
Southwest PR Church

A question about reporting sexual abuse

I appreciate your recent articles on reporting sexual abuse, the work you have done and care you exhibit to help the church community and those who have endured abuse. These matters are not easy to wade through and from my experience and the many resources I have read we can agree that no abuse case is cut and dried. The answers to the hard questions we must ask ourselves as

a church community and those who have been affected personally aren't so easy to come by.

I wonder if you could elaborate further on a couple of things. You say in the first part of your second article that "for everyone involved, reporting a sexual crime is necessary." Does this apply only to ongoing abuse or would this apply to past cases as well? If a person is penitent, has confessed their sin and from all appearances has turned from that sin, is that enough, or do we still report it? As far as reporting goes, should it be reported only to the church and to his/her consistory and not to the civil authorities? Or should it be reported to both for the sake of this person's soul but also for the safety of the body of Christ? What are the practical factors pastors, consistories, parents, and teachers must consider when helping a person bring these sins into the light?

Thank you for your encouragement in walking according to God's Word, this should always be the basis for all our decision-making in all things.

In Christ,
Name withheld

Response:

Thank you for your letter and your suggestion that our private correspondence be revised and published for the sake of all our readers. I cannot answer all your questions, but your questions give opportunity to say that it is wrong to adopt a cookie-cutter approach to all cases of sexual sin. Consistories need to look at each case and make judgments: 1) does the case warrant reporting to the police? 2) does the case warrant publicity to the congregation even if we do not report to the police?

The variables are so many, and often many of these questions need to be answered at the same time:

1. What was the nature of the sin? What was the severity? How often did it take place? Once? Many times? My statement about the necessity of reporting referred to sexual "crimes." Was the activity a "crime"?

2. How old was the perpetrator: 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 30?

3. How long ago did the sin take place? 1 year ago? 5, 10, 15, 30, 40?

4. Is the perpetrator living? Is he/she a member of your congregation, a neighboring congregation? Is he/she a Christian at all?

5. Was the sin exposed and was the perpetrator sorry long ago? How did he/she show that? Who made that judgment?

6. Has there been any other case of the sin since? Not since 40 years ago? 10 years? 5 years? 1 year?

No consistory may minimize the seriousness of sexual sin. But to make the matter simple is not wise either. The above 6 points and perhaps others must factor into any particular case. The consistory must make a judgment and that's not easy.

As to your case, I do not know enough about it to make a judgment about reporting. I am thankful that you are getting advice from others who know the case better than I do. In addition to the above points, I think these are some of the factors to be considered in making the decision:

1. Your own well-being. Many things must be involved here that I do not know. Be sure to be getting the proper spiritual care from those who understand your personal situation well.

2. The well-being and safety of others who may presently be at risk. Could the perpetrator still be living in sexual sin that harms others?

3. Could there be others who may have been harmed in the past who might dare to come forward for help if the case came to light?

4. The spiritual condition of the perpetrator's soul. Do you know he is fully repentant and right before God? Have others judged this who are qualified to judge? Serious sexual sin is almost always deeply rooted in other horrible sexual sins that have long history and are not easily uprooted. And it is usually complicated by other sins—alcohol, drugs, unsupervised Internet usage, and more.

I will pray for you more again now that you have written. God give you wisdom, courage, grace, patience, and everything else you need to care for your family and bear your heavy burdens. Take them to Jesus. He has been touched with the feelings of all our infirmities, and so has grace to help in time of need. God is with you.

In Christ,
Prof. B. Gritters



All around us

Rev. David Noorman, pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan

News from the realm of the King of kings

As Christians, we believe and confess that Jesus Christ reigns supreme at the right hand of God the Father. Being persuaded that He is “the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (I Tim. 6:15), we have a blessed perspective of the world around us. All that happens in this world, whether good or evil, noteworthy or unnoticeable, is under the sovereign control of the King of kings. Some recent events relating to earthly powers provide an opportunity for us to reflect on the kingdom of God and our comfort and calling as citizens of His kingdom.

The death of Queen Elizabeth II

On September 8, 2022 the world was informed of the death of Queen Elizabeth II. She died at the age of 96, bringing to an end her reign of 70 years (1952-2022).

I could attempt to add to the flood of reflections on her life and reign, but I would certainly expose my stereotypical American ignorance of the British monarchy. Others are well-suited for this task. Carl Trueman—a Presbyterian, a professor, and significantly, a native Englishman—is one of these. Trueman writes:

The death of Queen Elizabeth II marks a watershed for Britain and for those of us who have never known any other head of our state—as is true for any lifelong British citizen under the age of seventy. Remarkably, she began her reign while Winston Churchill was prime minister and then lived to see a further fourteen individuals hold that high office. Without question she saw more change in British society than any of her predecessors, and throughout it all she remained a calm and steadfast figurehead for the nation.¹

Trueman notes that the Queen carried herself with a rare dignity, which is to be appreciated in our present age.

Unlike most heads of state today, she was a person to whom one could point and say to one’s children and grandchildren, “When you grow up, you want to be like her.” Her reign was marked with a deep sense of the dignity of her office. She never used profane language. She never sneered at critics. A generation raised on reality

TV, life-as-performance, confected Twitter outrage, and “living loud” would do well to reflect upon that. To how many other executives of the past decades can one point as a good example to follow? Maybe that is why monarchy might not be such a bad thing after all. Democratically-elected leaders often achieve their positions thanks to ruthless ambition, dirty tricks, and an overwhelming sense of their own vital importance. The queen was never burdened with such temptations, and it showed.”²

It is also reported that the Queen was a devout Christian. The British monarch held official religious duties in the Church of England and honored the Presbyterian government of the Church of Scotland, but her faith was also personal, and reportedly carried her through difficult times in public and private.³

In lieu of analyzing of Elizabeth’s life, critically examining her faith, or debating her legacy, I submit one undeniable reality that is worth considering: the Queen is dead. Despite the symbols of sovereignty, the displays of royal majesty, her laudable dignity, and impressive longevity, Elizabeth came to the same bitter end as the mightiest of monarchs and the lowliest of her subjects.

In the Queen’s house of mourning, we are reminded that there is only one King who lives eternally and reigns sovereignly, even over death itself. There is only one King who is exalted over all kings and nations, and even over death itself. Thus, Christians alone have the unique privilege of boasting in the eternal glory and perfect sovereignty of their King: “Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations” (Ps. 145:13).

Singapore and the LGBT movement

A recent report in *Christianity Today* reveals some interesting developments in Singapore.⁴ The occasion for

1 Carl Trueman, “The Quiet Faith of Queen Elizabeth II,” *First Things*, September 8, 2022 (<https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2022/09/the-quiet-faith-of-queen-elizabeth-ii>).

2 Truman, “Quiet Faith.”

3 Dudley Delffs, “Died: Queen Elizabeth II, British Monarch Who Put Her Trust in God,” *Christianity Today*, September 8, 2022 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/september/obit-queen-elizabeth-ii-personal-faith-christian-bible.html>).

4 Isabel Ong, “In Singapore, LGBT Perspectives Are Liberalizing. Can the Church Hold Together?” *Christianity Today*, September 8, 2022 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/september/singapore-evangelicals-377a-repeal-marriage.html>).

the report is the decision to repeal a law (Section 377A) that criminalized gay sex, and allowed a punishment for the crime of up to two years in prison. Although Singapore has a reputation for its stringent enforcement of law and its readiness to administer punishment, this law was the exception as it was rarely enforced. Now, Section 377A is off the books.

Alongside repealing 377A, the government revealed a proposed amendment to protect the government's right to define marriage. The proposed amendment was announced strategically to put to rest fears of greater liberalization in the realm of marriage and sexuality, since the amendment would permit Parliament to define and defend marriage as a union between one man and one woman. However, the language of the proposed amendment leaves open the possibility that Parliament could define marriage differently in the future—with a simple majority vote.

The short-term effect of repealing 377A and adopting the proposed amendment will likely be minimal, but in light of the rapid liberalization of the world at large, it is difficult to imagine that Singapore does not fall in line and completely adopt the LGBT movement as its own. If this is the next step, those in Singapore who maintain the biblical truths of marriage and human sexuality will be met with even greater opposition.

The LGBT movement around the world has tremendous momentum, so much that it seems unstoppable, and that is why these relatively small steps of a very conservative Singaporean government give reason for concern. But, the hearts of our rulers are in the hands of God, and the King on the throne of heaven not only reigns eternally but righteously. “He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment.... In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth” (Ps. 72:2,7). May God grant His grace to our brothers and sisters in Singapore to remain steadfast in faith and continue in godliness, and may our Lord Jesus Christ come quickly!

The danger of Christian nationalism

Within a democratic system of government, there are opportunities for Christians to strive for change, and ways for Christians to stand fast against the liberal agenda. It is legitimate for a Christian to take up a place in government, and to do so with Christian values and motivations. It is even a desirable thing that Christians might have representatives and leaders who conduct themselves according to God's Word, both in office and in their campaigns for office. In the case of U.S. Representative Lauren Boebert (Colorado), however, the use of Christian rhetoric reveals a misplaced and dangerous hope.

An article in *The Denver Post* cites examples of Boebert's rhetoric to show the danger of Christian Nationalism to America as a democracy, and pleads with Republicans and Christians to denounce Boebert's views and efforts.⁵ Here are some examples of Boebert's rhetoric:

It's time for us to position ourselves to rise up and take our place in Christ and influence this nation as we are called to do.... We know that we are in the last days. This is a time to know that you were called to be part of these last days. You get to have a role in ushering in the second coming of Jesus.

I believe that there have been two nations that have been created to glorify God. Israel, whom we bless, and the United States of America, and this nation will glorify God.

The Post also reports:

In the same address Boebert said she was “tired of this separation of church and state junk” and claimed that God “anointed” Donald Trump to the presidency.⁶

The usual leanings of the mainstream media require that we take the author's argument with a grain of salt. I do not know Boebert or her platform well enough to analyze how her religious views affect her official work as a congresswoman, nor do I make any judgments on the legitimacy of the alleged threat to democracy.

For myself, as a pastor and herald of Christ the King, the greater concern and the greater danger is that this kind of rhetoric may lead Christians in America to place their hope in politicians and political change, or in the earthly nation, America, that is only our temporary home.

Our hope and our comfort are not tied to our earthly citizenship. The kingdom of God is not the United States of America. The kingdom of God is not even of this world. The answer to liberal policies or restrictions on religious freedom is not that Christians must seek and strive for the Christianization of America. In fact, the attempt to Christianize America may very well be a dangerous departure from, if not a rejection of, the biblical truth of God's kingdom.

Instead, the Christian's hope and comfort are bound up with Christ who sits at God's right hand. Let us be sober and watch unto prayer. May our prayers for the kingdom's coming have their focus on the rule of Christ by His Word and Spirit (not the rule of a political party), the preservation and increase of His church (not an

5 Conrad Swanson, “Lauren Boebert is part of a dangerous religious movement that threatens democracy, experts say,” *The Denver Post*, September 14, 2022 (<https://www.denverpost.com/2022/09/14/lauren-boebert-christian-nationalist-republican-colorado>).

6 All quotations are from Swanson's article.

earthly nation), and the spiritual (not political) defeat of those who oppose God and His Word. For those of us who are Christians in America, let us witness to the rule of Christ by remaining steadfast in our one true

hope and fervent in our prayers, “till the full perfection of Thy kingdom shall take place, wherein Thou shalt be all in all” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 48).



Search the Scriptures

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

Habakkuk’s perplexity over God’s use of Babylon

Previous article in this series: September 1 2022, p. 466.

Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction. Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations? I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.

Habakkuk 1:12-2:1

When Habakkuk, in the last days of that kingdom, spoke to God of Judah’s wickedness, God told him that the Babylonians were coming and that God would use them to punish Judah for her sins: “For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs” (Hab. 1:6). God’s answer only raised further questions in Habakkuk’s mind, “How could God, a righteous judge, use wickedness to punish wickedness, wicked Babylon to punish wicked Judah?” Even more, “How could God use a nation that was even more wicked than Judah to punish Judah?” That is the burden of Habakkuk in 1:12-2:1 of his prophecy.

In verse 12 Habakkuk first acknowledges the answer God had already given him: “Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One? we shall not die. O LORD, thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.” Focusing on what he knows of God Himself, he acknowledges that God has sovereignly and eternally ordained all things, a marvelous confession of God’s sovereignty over evil. He acknowledges God’s holiness, that He is too pure of eyes to look on evil; He acknowledges that God is his God and the God of Israel, who cannot cast off His people whom He foreknew. He twice calls God “Jehovah,” confessing God’s unbreakable covenant with His people and His covenant faithfulness in the past. Six things, then, Habakkuk says of God: He is eternal; He is Jehovah the unchangeable God of His people; He is holy; He is the one who ordains all things from eternity; He is almighty; and He is faithful.

When Habakkuk speaks this way of God, he is saying “yes” to God’s previous answer and saying, “Yes, it must be so because God is eternal and unchangeable, the Holy One, the one who ordains all things and brings them to pass, and Jehovah, the God of His people.” Certainly He would punish Judah and would do it in His own way and time, according to what He had ordained. Certainly He would save His people too: “We shall not die” (v. 12). Habakkuk comes very close to saying, “And how foolish I was even to bring up the matter of Judah’s wickedness and the desperate situation of God’s people: the answers to my questions are in the very nature of God Himself, and I should have realized that.”

What a lesson for us! All our questions, struggles, fears, too, are answered in knowing who God is in His

sovereignty, His holiness, and His covenant faithfulness. Our questions are answered when we ask ourselves, “Who is God?” Then doubts are vanquished and fears vanish, but only then.

What Habakkuk says of God is also a response to the word of God in verse 11: “Then...he shall pass over, and offend, imputing this his power unto his god.” He is referring to the kings of the Chaldeans, who were all like Belshazzar: “They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone” (Dan. 5:4), ascribing their successes, victories, power, and wealth to their idols. Habakkuk knew, as we do, the truth of Psalm 115:4-7, “Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat.” And the truth of verse 3, “But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased.”

The heart of his confession is the statement, “Thou hast ordained them for judgment; and, O mighty God, thou hast established them for correction.” He is referring to the Chaldeans, who were ordained by God for Judah’s correction and given their kingdom and power for Judah’s chastisement.

His confession is amazing, on the order of what Scripture says in Romans 9:17, “For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth.”

Not all Habakkuk’s questions were answered, however. God’s use of the Chaldeans to punish Judah perplexed him. How could a righteous God use such a wicked nation as the Chaldeans to punish Judah? That is a question that should be asked more often. Always God chastises and corrects His people, though we are so dull that we often do not see what happens as His chastisement. Trouble in the church and at home, the rising tide of wickedness in a nation, all such things are His chastisement. His chastisement is always necessary, not only because we are all sinners but because we bear a certain corporate responsibility for all that happens in the church and in the nation. That chastisement is often meted out through very wicked men, heretics in the church and leaders in the nation who sanction and give their blessing to every kind of evil. Then the question is: “Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

Judah had sinned grievously and God’s people in Judah had gone along or were guilty by association, but the Chaldeans were self-willed, violent, without counsel, respecting no judgment but their own, worshipers of idols to whom they ascribed their successes. Why did God use them to punish Judah? Why does God use wicked nations such as the United States and Canada, who have thrown off every restraint, to chastise His people and His church?

It is possible that Habakkuk was thinking of Balaam’s prophecy in Numbers 23:21 when he said, “Thou art of purer eyes than to *behold* evil, and canst not *look* on *iniquity*: wherefore *lookest* thou upon them that deal treacherously?” (v. 13), for he uses many of the same words as Balaam did when he said, “He hath not *beheld* iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he *seen perverseness* in Israel.” And, like Balaam, Habakkuk stood upon a kind of watchtower: “For from the top of the rocks I see him, and from the hills I behold him” (Num. 23:9). How could those words of Balaam be reconciled with God’s seeing the iniquity of Israel so clearly that He would use the wicked Chaldeans against them, while at the same time He seemed not to see the wickedness of the Chaldeans?

Such use of the Chaldeans seemed to Habakkuk to contradict God’s holiness. Surely in His holiness He was a God who would punish Judah’s sins, but as One who was “of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity,” how could He look on the Chaldeans as a fit instrument for His purposes with Judah. “Wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?”

Habakkuk goes on to emphasize their wickedness in verses 14-17:

And makest men as the fishes of the sea, as the creeping things, that have no ruler over them? They take up all of them with the angle, they catch them in their net, and gather them in their drag: therefore they rejoice and are glad. Therefore they sacrifice unto their net, and burn incense unto their drag; because by them their portion is fat, and their meat plenteous. Shall they therefore empty their net, and not spare continually to slay the nations?

The Chaldeans, in the folly of their unbelief and idolatry, were like fisherman catching the nations in their net or with a hook (an angle) and rejoicing over their cruelties—like fishermen who would then worship their net and offer sacrifice to it, because it was their net that brought them their portion and their meat. Habakkuk adds, “Will it never end? Will they

be like fishermen, who when they have emptied their net, go out and cast their net again? When they have caught Judah in their net, who will be next? Will they be allowed to destroy all the nations and fill the earth with their wickedness? Where is the God of judgment? Why does He linger, who will surely punish Judah, but who allows a nation even more wicked to prosper and flourish?”

Habakkuk's reference to fishermen is a reference to the cruelty of the Chaldeans who continued the Assyrian practice of stringing their captives together with hooks through their noses or lips like fish and whose monuments (that is, those of the Chaldeans) show their gods dragging captives in a fishing net.

Habakkuk's puzzlement is similar, then, to that of Asaph in Psalm 73:3-11:

For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride compasseth them about as a chain; violence covereth them as a garment. Their eyes stand out with fatness: they have more than heart could wish. They are corrupt, and speak wickedly concerning oppression: they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walketh through the earth. Therefore his people return hither: and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them. And they say, How doth God know? and is there knowledge in the most High?

God's people suffer and the wicked prosper in their wickedness. If God is purer of eyes than to behold evil, how can such things be? Do His eyes, so pure, not see? Such questions arise when God delays, or so it seems. God's people know, as Habakkuk did, that He is a God of judgment, the Holy One, but why so long in judgment? Why does He not come and destroy the wicked and their wickedness?

Chapter 2:1 is part of Habakkuk's inquiry. He means that he will wait for God's answer, but waiting, he expected to be reproved. That is a beautiful acknowledgment of his weakness and sin, the kind of acknowledgment that every child of God makes when he stands before His heavenly Father, distressed, disturbed, asking, and praying. He is always like the father who came to Jesus and said, "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." And always God does correct, reprove, and help, always remembering that we are dust. We see that in Scripture, for "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man

of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16, 17).

Habakkuk's reference to his watch or watchtower is a reference to his position as a watchman for God's people. His inquiries were not only his but those of all the seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. For their sakes as well as his own he would wait for an answer from God and, when it came, he would cry the news to them.

For that answer Habakkuk would wait. He would "stand" upon his watchtower until an answer came. In that Habakkuk does what every child of God should do, for God answers in His own way and in His own time. In that already, Habakkuk shows that the just shall live by faith. Waiting on God is an act of faith, for it is done in the confidence that God will answer and that His answer will be good, even when He reproves and corrects.

From his watchtower Habakkuk would see the dust stirred up by the advance of the Chaldeans, and he would see the smoke of their judgment; but he would also see an explanation of the Lord's ways, for His ways are not our ways and His thoughts are not our thoughts. More importantly, from his watchtower he would see Christ, just as Balaam saw Him long before: "the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them" (Num. 23:24). He would see Christ by faith and would tell those who were waiting that the just shall live by their faith.

How appropriate, then, the prayer of Calvin:

Grant, Almighty God, that as thou seest us labouring under so much weakness, yea, with our minds so blinded that our faith falters at the smallest perplexities, and almost fails altogether—O grant that by the power of thy Spirit we may be raised up above this world, and learn more and more to renounce our own counsels, and so to come to thee, that we may stand fixed in our watch-tower, ever hoping, through thy power, for whatever thou hast promised to us, though thou shouldst not immediately make it manifest to us that thou hast faithfully spoken; and may we thus give full proof of our faith and patience, and proceed in the course of our warfare, until at length we ascend, above all watch-towers, into that blessed rest, where we shall no more watch with an attentive mind, but see, face to face, in thine image, whatever can be wished, and whatever is needful for our perfect happiness, through Christ our Lord. Amen.



Taking heed to the doctrine

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

God's prophet: Hear ye Him

The rejection of the will of God has reached an astounding degree in recent years. Only a very small percentage of the population still confesses that God desires to save only some people. The commandments of our Lord are increasingly violated. Now there is also a rapid rise in the rejection of God's will concerning one's gender. What once was a very small and mostly male group of gender-deniers has now become an increasingly large group including many women and girls.

How is this to be explained? Is the rejection of God's will concerning whom He has determined to save and the rejection of God's will concerning what we are called to do or not to do related to a rejection of God's will concerning one's gender?

The answer to that question is yes. They all amount to a rejection of what God has made known concerning His will. Jesus Christ, the faithful prophet of God, declares to us what God's will is. All of us are called to listen to Him.

This is the beginning of a series of articles on Christ's prophetic work. We will consider what Scripture tells us concerning Christ's work as our chief Prophet and Teacher. Along the way some applications will be made to a number of practical matters common in our own day.

Christ: God's officebearer

When we talk about Jesus as God's Prophet, we are referring to His office. Jesus is God's officebearer.

An office refers to a position of authority, and an officebearer is someone who holds an office. One who is an officebearer is called to represent God and has been given authority to perform some specific tasks that God has given to him.

The name Christ means "anointed one." That Jesus is the Christ means that He has been chosen by God and anointed with the Spirit to serve as God's officebearer.

The office that Christ holds is threefold. Jesus is our Prophet, our High Priest, and our King. Some might refer to these as three offices. We often refer to them as three aspects of one office.

Lord's Day 12 of the Heidelberg Catechism summarizes what Christ does as Prophet, what He does as High Priest, and what He does as King. The same Lord's Day points out that all believers are officebearers under Christ. We are engrafted into Christ and partake of His anointing. Christ's Spirit within us qualifies us to serve as prophets, priests, and kings under Christ our Lord.

In this article, we are considering specifically the prophetic aspect of Christ's work. What is the task that God's prophet is called to perform?

Speaking in God's name

God's prophet is the officebearer God has chosen and qualified to make known to the people what God says.

When God spoke to His people at Mt. Sinai, they were very frightened, so much so that they asked God not to speak to them directly again. They came to Moses desiring that God speak to Moses and that Moses then tell the people what God had said. The people said they feared death if God spoke to them directly again: "And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die" (Ex. 20:19).

Such was their request.

In response, God promised that He would do as they requested. He would raise up a faithful prophet and put His Word in the prophet's mouth. The people then would hear God's Word by the mouth of His prophet.

Moses told the people: "And the LORD said unto me, They have well spoken that which they have spoken. I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him" (Deut. 18:17-18).

The people, then, were exhorted to listen to what God said through His prophet. They were not to say to the prophet, "That is not what God says. That is just your own word." They had asked to hear God's Word through His prophet, and they needed to heed what God would say through His officebearer.

God told them in no uncertain terms that He would punish all those who refused to listen to His Word spo-

ken through the prophet: “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him” (Deut. 18:19).

A New Testament commentary on this verse explains what God meant by “I will require it of him”: “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people” (Acts 3:23).

The people were to listen to the Word of God declared by His prophet. When Christ was transfigured on the mount, God spoke from heaven and exhorted us to hear Him: “And behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him (Matt. 17:5b).

Christ, the faithful Prophet, has come. All of us are called to listen to Him.

Christ revealing to us God's will

Speaking of Christ's prophetic work, Lord's Day 12 says that what Christ declares to us is “the secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption.” God speaks by the mouth of His Prophet who declares to us God's will.

The will of God is spoken of in more than one sense. Sometimes the will of God refers to what God has determined. Other times His will refers to what He calls us to do. We often refer to this as the distinction between the will of God's *counsel* and the will of God's *command*. Christ reveals to us the will of God in both respects.

Christ declares to us God's will in the sense of what God has decreed. Christ makes known to us that some people have been unconditionally chosen by God. Only for the elect has Christ died and only in them does the Spirit of Christ work faith. By God's Prophet the will of God concerning our unconditional salvation is proclaimed to us.

Christ speaks to us also about what He has done for us personally. He makes known to us not only that some people have been redeemed, but also that we personally are among those who are saved in Him.

Christ also declares to us God's will in the sense of what God commands us. Christ, our Lord, tells us what we must do. He tells us this in words, and He also shows us by His example.

Such is a brief overview of the work of our chief Prophet. We are then exhorted to hear Him.

“Hear ye him”

The almighty God, the Creator of heaven and earth,

speaks to us. He who loves us so much that He sent His Son to die in our place tells us about Himself and about our calling to serve Him.

We, then, must listen to Him. We must believe what He says, and hearken to what He calls us to do. If someone refuses, God will “require it of him” (Deut. 18:19).

The devil would deceive us into thinking there will be no judgment if we reject what God says. Our Lord has told us otherwise. God has told us what He will do to those who impenitently refuse to heed what He says.

Though a regenerated child of God sometimes rejects what God says for a time, he will not remain impenitent his whole life. God will work in him to bring him to repentance. During the time that he refuses to do what he is called to do, God will chasten him until he humbly turns to God requesting that God forgive his sins and deliver him from evil.

Those who continue impenitently will be given over to their sin. God has made known the truth. He has declared what the reality is. Those who reject the truth will be given over to their sin, so that their thinking and speaking will be out of harmony with reality.

Many today deny what God's will is concerning salvation. God says the reality is that He desires to save only some people and that He saves them unconditionally. Many reject this and insist that the opposite of reality is the truth.

God says the reality is that man by nature is totally depraved and he is completely unable to do anything good. Many reject this and state that there is still good in the nature of man and that he can still do works that are good in the eyes of God. Again man rejects what God says and insists that the opposite of reality is the truth.

As a just judgment, God gives man over to his sin. When man impenitently continues to state that the opposite of reality is the truth, eventually he may get to the point that he will state the opposite of reality on very obvious matters such as what one's gender is. When men say they are women or women say they are men, or when people say that they do not know what a man or a woman is, what they are saying is contrary to what obviously is reality. Such is the judgment that comes upon a society in which people often confess as truth the opposite of what is reality.

Sadly, what is common in the world is becoming more common also in the churches. The way of escape is to listen to God's Prophet. We must hear what God says not only on matters such as our gender, but also on everything else He has made known to us concerning His will.



When thou sittest in thine house

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

Reclaiming the family (1)

Introduction

Satan is a ruthless enemy of the church of Jesus Christ. In Revelation 12 we learn that Satan is filled with great anger because of the victory over him that Christ achieved at the cross. In that anger he has turned against the bride of Christ to make war with “the remnant of her seed which keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (vv. 12, 17). In this war with the church Satan uses every means possible to obliterate her name from the earth. His intent is to be rid of her and the cause of Christ. We often hear of this arch-enemy of the church in the preaching. His name has become commonplace among us. But we do not always think of him as one who transforms himself into an angel of light in order to work among God’s people as if he is one of us (II Cor. 11:14). Do not be deceived! Satan is real and dwells among us! His angry attacks are leveled at the church as a whole as well as families and individuals in the church! He hates us with a vengeance!

Satan is proficient and cunning in his war with the church in this world. I have learned this in my own personal battle with Satan, and as a pastor who can now look back over three, going on four, generations born into the church. Satan probably smiles as I write this because he is more shrewd and powerful than I am even aware.

Three evils characterize Satan in his battle with the church and believers.

Number 1: Satan is deceptive. Satan’s attacks on the church are not merely frontal. When two armies clash with each other, the generals behind the scenes send their armies in a direct, frontal attack on one another. In the meantime, these generals send other soldiers in another direction in an attempt to outflank the opposing army and attack them unawares. The hope of these generals is that by deception they might be able to destroy the armies of their enemy by surprising them.

Satan works in the same way in his battle against the church of Jesus Christ. At times he sends into the church false teachers and preachers who love and make a lie (Rev. 22:15). These men level a frontal attack against which the church must defend herself. Satan de-

sires to destroy the church by robbing her of faithfulness to God doctrinally. A battle ensues in the church. The church focuses all her attention and efforts on this battle. In the wake of the battle officebearers and members of church are left weary. God’s saints in the Protestant Reformed Churches have experienced this in their recent controversy. I am sure other churches have experienced something similar. How ruthless are the attacks of Satan on the church—and deceptive!

While Satan attacks the church from one direction, he is busy sending his armies of devils to attack the church from another direction. While God’s saints are focusing their attention on defending the church doctrinally, Satan attacks the church in the lives of her members. His focus is on destroying the families of the church. We must understand that where God chooses to establish His church in this world He continues that church in the line of the generations of believers. It is true, of course, that God also with each new generation adds to the church new believers who have been called out of this world. These are always a refreshing addition to the church. But when they become a part of the church, they too cling to the promise that God saves in the generations of believers. To that promise God remains faithful too. Yet, God does not save automatically in the generations of believers without using any means. God accomplishes this promise in the way of godly homes and families that understand their place in the church and covenant. God establishes His church from one generation to the next by means of sanctified marriages where husbands and wives know their particular callings in the home and in the church. God uses the means of conscientious parents who take seriously the vows they speak at the time of baptism to raise their children to the best of their ability in the nurture and fear of God’s name. The family is therefore vital to the cause of Jesus Christ and the church.

Satan knows this! He is subtle and deceptive in his attacks on the church. While the church defends herself on one front, that is, doctrinally, Satan attempts to outflank the church from another position, that is, the family. He knows that he can accomplish the defeat of the church not only by doctrinal error but also by de-

stroying the family unit. The strength of the church is inseparably connected to the strength of the home and family. So Satan sets himself to destroy the family in the generations of the church.

Number 2: Satan is relentless and persistent. If the church is not always on her guard, Satan is quick to infiltrate, divide, and devour the church and her members. Peter describes the devil as a roaring lion who is ready to pounce upon his prey to tear her in pieces. His relentless attacks on the church come by way of the wicked world and its appeal to the sinful flesh in God's people. The temptations he casts in our path are myriad. These temptations are common to every generation, but Satan uses modern devices, trends, and ideology to lure God's people from the proper understanding of the home and family. In other words, the devil is adept at using the unbelieving world to accomplish the demise of many a family in the church. He does not let up! In every area of life the unbelieving world is present and is teaching us its ungodly ways and lifestyle. When our eyes and ears tune in to the world in its music, movies, and magazines, we are being taught the immorality and lust of this world. When we read its literature, Satan by means of his ally, the wicked world, turns us from the teaching of Scripture to follow after a worldly way of life in the home. When we lend our thoughts and desires to follow after the world, Satan will fill our sinful flesh with all kinds of notions that may seem right, but which lead us away from God. Satan is persistent in his attacks on the church and family by using the unbelieving world to turn us from God and His Word.

Number 3: Satan is patient. I know it may seem as if he is in a hurry since his time is short. But we may not be deceived: he slowly and patiently works to turn the church away from her Lord and Master, Jesus Christ. He works slowly over the course of generations. In the course of several generations a once faithful church can become proud then complacent in the truth. Her members who in their generations were zealous of the gospel, now begin to depend for their salvation on the church and her ordinances rather than humbly looking to the cross for forgiveness. The result is, life in the home and family wanes. Husbands and wives lose their spiritual focus. Parents view their children as a burden rather than a blessing. Everything looks superficially clean on the outside but there is very little in the way of real family life on the inside. A lamenting observer might ask himself or herself the question: "When did this happen?" Or, "How did this happen?" Well, it did not happen overnight. It slowly developed this way in the course of a few generations. The church finally reach-

es the stage where her Lord admonishes her with these words: "I will come unto thee quickly and remove my candlestick out of his place, except thou repent" (Rev. 2:5). Satan is patient in destroying the church slowly in her generations.

Now, much more can be written about the attacks of Satan on the church of any age. But in reality that is not the subject of this article or the ones that follow. I write of the attacks of Satan on the church merely as an introduction to the subject I wish to address in the next several articles: *reclaiming the family*. My subject is not merely on the family, although this is elementary to the topic. My subject, however, is *reclaiming* the family. Implied is that over the course of several generations the traditional, biblical, dynamic family unit that was so much a part of the life of the church is changing. It is not disappearing (though in some cases it is), but it has taken on a different face—a face that does not bode well for the church.

Having made this bold statement, I need to qualify it. This is not meant to accuse families of the church as if they are not genuinely working at establishing a godly home. Neither does this mean that they are deliberately ignoring God's Word to walk in their own ways. Of some this is true, but it is not true of all. I speak of *reclaiming* the family because Satan has been persistent and patient in the generations of the church using the subtle ways of the world to change our understanding of such things as the roles of husband and wife in marriage, the communal life that must be carried on in the home, the instruction and proper discipline of children, to name only a few. Much of this has taken place over time. For that reason, this change may not be glaringly apparent. But it is there. It is good, therefore, that we consider what the Scripture says about the family.

It also must be said that this change has not necessarily affected every family in the church today. The church today has young, vibrant families who faithfully follow after the Word of God without giving in to the pressures of the worldly wisdom of our present society. Such families will also be able to read these articles and be reconfirmed in their efforts in the home.

That being said, it is my intention to address what I believe are essential guidelines to establishing a godly home. These guidelines will include requirements for sanctified dating, marriage, the roles of husband and wife, and biblical parenting. It is not my intention to write extensively on each of these subjects. Others have produced excellent articles and books based on Scripture addressing these various issues. It is my intent to study the developments that have taken place in our society over the past generations that have had an

impact on the thinking of our world on these subjects. I would then like to warn against the impact that these are having on our thought processes in the church as well. After all, the church does not live in a bubble. We are in the world, though not of it. The world therefore has an impact on the church, even though we are called to be spiritually separate from the evil influences of the world. It is so easy for the members of the church to follow in the footsteps of the world, even if

it means we may be a few miles behind the world and its ways.

Though it is true that we need to be warned of the influence of unbelief on the Christian family, we also need to understand the wisdom God's Word sheds on establishing and maintaining a pious marriage and a genuine life in the family. Warnings are always needed, but so is positive instruction in Scripture. May our future articles present both.



Strength of youth

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Walker, Michigan

The sin of tempting God

Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.

Matthew 4:7

Take heed and harden not your heart,
As did your fathers, nor depart
From God to follow in their ways;
For with complaints instead of praise,
With doubt instead of faith confessed,
They put His mercy to the test.

(Psalter 254, st. 4)

Beloved young people of the church, beware of the devil who brings strong temptation *to tempt God*.

Imagine this scene: The devil, as an angel of light, flies you to Jerusalem and sets you on the pinnacle of the temple. There he whispers, "Go to the edge of that precipice. Cast yourself down, for God will send His angels to bear you up." Have you heard that temptation to tempt God before? Not only have you heard it in reading about Satan's temptations of Jesus in the wilderness recorded for us in Matthew 4 and Luke 4, but have you not discerned the same devil tempt you in a similar manner? Be not naïve, but rather be wary of the temptation to tempt God! Let Jesus' response reverberate in your soul: "It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."

To tempt God is to put God on trial. Psalter 254 poetically and clearly explains the heart of tempting God: "They put His mercy to the test." To tempt God is the human attempt to force God's hand of mercy against His revealed will. In the temptation of Jesus referred to above, the devil lured Jesus to jump from the temple pinnacle. This was not to get Jesus to commit suicide but to put

God's mercy to the test. In risking His life, Jesus would have been attempting to manipulate the hand of God to save Him with angels. Jesus refused to tempt God.

Jesus' example connects us to another example. While Jesus resisted tempting God, the church of Israel succumbed. In Exodus 17, we find Israel, graciously redeemed by the blood of the Passover Lamb and delivered from Egypt through the midst of the Red Sea. God had already opened wide His hand of mercy to provide the church with food and drink. But at Rephidim (a.k.a. Massah, meaning "Temptation"), we find the church striving with Moses, threatening to stone him. And "They tempted the LORD, saying, Is the LORD among us, or not?" (Ex. 17:7b). With those words in their hearts, they tempted God. Knowing full well God's mercy, they put God on trial. They attempted to force God's hand of mercy by challenging Him to prove Himself.

Tempting God is serious sin. While every sin deserves the infinite wrath of God in hell, Scripture shows us that some sins are worse than others. To tempt God is not a sin of ignorance. It is what Scripture calls the sin of presumption. The heart, having tasted God's mercy in Jesus Christ and knowing full well God's mercy, now proudly and rebelliously treats the merciful God as a slave to manipulate, to challenge, to put on trial. As though entitled to God's mercy, the evil heart demands of God to prove His mercy by saving according to man's timing and way. Indeed, to tempt God is as bad as it sounds.

Scripture repeatedly warns us against this sin of tempting God. Numbers 14:22 says that the church tempted God ten times in the wilderness. Psalm 78 bids the church afterward to learn from "history's light," ex-

horting fathers to warn their children not to tempt God (Ps. 78:18, 41). Paul reiterates this call in the New Testament. “Neither let us tempt Christ, as the sons of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.... Now all these things happened unto them for examples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” (I Cor. 10: 9, 11). “Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Mas-sah” (Deut. 6:16). With abundant admonishment, God calls His people not to sin so grievously by tempting Him.

And yet, we tempt God. First, we might tempt God regarding our *physical* health and safety. Similar to jumping off the temple pinnacle, if we needlessly risk or neglect our bodies, we tempt God. For a name or for a high, Christian young people live “on the edge.” They leap into danger as though they are indestructible. And as the Israelites said, so they might say, “Is God among us? He will save me, will He not, even when I put myself in harm’s way?” Likewise, neglecting the care of the body is also a manner of tempting God. Reformed Christians who immoderately smoke, vape, drink, or unreasonably circumvent doctors and medications, may rationalize this neglect with the hyper-spiritual claim that this is to trust God. On the contrary, this is to tempt God. Another example pertains to the physical health of others in the church. When the church knows the real danger of abuse in her midst, and then takes little to no action for the protection of Christ’s lambs, we tempt the Lord. We put His mercy to the test.

Secondly, we might tempt God regarding our *spiritual* health and safety. To stand on a proverbial precipice and presume upon God’s mercy by throwing ourselves into spiritual danger is to tempt God. Do you struggle with drunkenness? Then do not hang out with those who encourage the sin. Do you struggle with pornography? Then do not look at a screen without accountability. Do you struggle with bitterness? Then stop listening to and reading material that is full of slander. To pray, “Lead me not into temptation,” and then cast yourself into it is not only foolish hypocrisy but also to tempt God. Whenever we intentionally cast ourselves into spiritual danger while claiming God’s preserving care, we tempt Him.

Likewise, the neglect of spiritual responsibilities while presuming upon God’s grace is to tempt Him. For example, God has revealed that while prayer is not a condition, He will give His grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray. To neglect prayer, presuming that God will give His grace and Holy Spirit no matter what, is to tempt Him. Additionally, God has shown that His gracious covenant promises are to children of believers, yet He fulfills His promises in homes where parents faithfully instruct these children. Parents tempt God when they insist on God’s mercy as they neglect their

children’s spiritual care. Another example demands the reminder that while repentance is not a prerequisite for salvation, God shows us that we will enjoy the peace of His forgiveness only in the way of sincere repentance. To insist by doctrine or life that God has already forgiven you while you remain impenitent is to tempt God.

The creedal warning against the sin of tempting God is about the means of grace:

Wherefore, as the apostles, and teachers who succeeded them, piously instructed the people concerning this grace of God, to His glory, and the abasement of all pride, and in the meantime, however, neglected not to keep them by the sacred precepts of the gospel in the exercise of the Word, sacraments and discipline; so even to this day, be it far from either instructors or instructed to presume to tempt God in the church by separating what He of His good pleasure hath most intimately joined together. For grace is conferred by means of admonitions; and the more readily we perform our duty, the more eminent usually is this blessing of God working in us, and the more directly is His work advanced; to whom alone all the glory both of means, and of their saving fruit and efficacy is forever due. Amen. (Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Art. 17).

If preacher or teacher communicates with his instruction that God will mercifully grow and preserve His people spiritually even when they intentionally separate themselves from the preaching of law and gospel in the church, that is to tempt God. If member or young person lives his life imagining that God will mercifully save even when he purposefully neglects the means of grace in a true church of Jesus Christ, he tempts God.

To tempt God is grievous sin deserving destruction. When the Israelites tempted God in the wilderness, He sent fiery snakes to destroy them (Num. 21:7; I Cor. 10:9). God’s Word threatens: “Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. Unto whom I swear in my wrath that they should not enter into my rest” (Ps. 95:8-11). Each of us must repent, for each of us is guilty of this sin. While turning from this sin, believe in Jesus Christ. Turn to Him who was cursed for us that we might be blessed. Turn to Him who endured God’s wrath that we might enter His rest. Turn to Him who though tempted never tempted God, and whose perfect obedience is judged as our own.

For Jesus’ sake alone, God forgives. For Jesus’ sake, He gives repentance and faith to hear that forgiveness. And for Jesus’ sake, He gives His Spirit to resist the devil’s temptation to tempt God. So the child of God cries, “Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins” (Ps. 19:13a).



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? (3)

Previous article in this series: October 15, 2022, p. 45.

“Male and female created he them”

So much of our learning is distinguishing things from other things. As children, we learn what things *are* in part by learning what they are *not*. My first grader had a hard time reading the word “where,” but it became easier for her when she learned to distinguish it from “wear.” Who knew that there were three types of fire trucks? But when a fireman distinguishes a fire *engine* from a fire *truck*, and both of those from a fire *rescue vehicle*, you understand what each one is and its role in the work of the firemen. Seeing proper distinctions helps us understand and remember truth.

Three foundational distinctions

This is why when God teaches us in Scripture, He too makes distinctions that help us understand the reality He created. In the book of Genesis, the Holy Spirit teaches us three key distinctions that are foundational for all true understanding. The first is the distinction between God and the creation. “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.” If God created it, then He is not part of it. He is to be distinguished from what He created. And even though God goes on to make beings who are a reflection of Himself, they are not God but are always *creatures*. He is the Maker; they are the made. They are to submit to Him and not to assume His place.

The second foundational distinction in the early part of Genesis is between human beings and all the rest of God’s handiwork. The way God creates humans and then interacts with them indicates human beings are rational and moral creations. Unlike the animals, humans are capable of more than impulse. They can reflect, reason, and examine their own existence. Even the way they interact with God’s rule over them is unique. All creatures are under God’s rule over His creation. Human beings, however, are alone able *consciously* to live under that law of God, aware of what they are doing. A fish is under the law of God for fish: it must live in water. If a fish is outside the law of God for fish, it

dies. But the fish is not staying in the water because it is consciously aware of this. Human beings alone are able consciously to put themselves in line with God’s law.

The third fundamental distinction in the early parts of Genesis is between two kinds of the special rational, moral beings God created: male ones and female ones.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; *male and female created he them* (Gen. 1:26-27).

God created maleness and femaleness. And God created maleness and femaleness to be a fundamental attribute of the human beings He made. That is, all human beings are sexed beings. God did not create androgynous human beings and then later stamp maleness or femaleness on them. Rather, we read, “male and female created he them.” God made two kinds of human beings and their maleness or femaleness cannot be separated from their humanness. You cannot dissect a human being and cut out the sex and be left with a functioning human being. Rather, if you reduce human personhood down to its most essential level, what you have is still a male human being or a female human being. As we will see, this is true even if the sex organs are removed. Sex (maleness or femaleness) is an essential part of what it is to be human.

Though the Fall affects everything, God’s created order is upheld by His providence even after the Fall. The Lord Jesus confirms what we have said about sex in the New Testament when teaching about marriage:

And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning *made them male and female*, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder (Matt. 19:4-6).

This text has always been one of the ‘go-to’ texts to

understand the Lord's teaching about *marriage*. The Lord teaches that God's creation of marriage remains in force after the Fall. But the times in which we live force us to go back to this text and recognize more is here. The Lord also tells us that the fundamental law of marriage is tied inseparably to *God's creation of males and females*. "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother..." For what cause? Because He created them "male and female." Thus, not only is it the case that the reality of marriage between a man and a woman for life remains true after the Fall, but the fundamental reality that undergirds that truth, namely, that God created *male* humans and *female* humans remains true after the Fall. The one is dependent on the other.

For this reason, even after Elijah was taken to heaven, he remained male. When he appeared on the mount of transfiguration, he appeared to Peter as a recognizably male being. And when *we* get to heaven, we too will remain male or female. When our bodies rise from the dead and we are ushered into the new heavens and new earth, we will not be sexless, but we will retain our maleness or femaleness. It is true that marriage will no longer exist, and procreation and intercourse will likewise cease (Matt. 22:30), but we will somehow remain who we are as creations of God. Grace does not annihilate creation. Instead, glorification will exalt creation to its highest potential, filling its cup to the brim with the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Exactly what that looks like for sexed beings in the new heavens and new earth, no one on earth knows. Will we have external or internal genitalia? If so, for what purpose? If not, what will we look like? But not knowing the answers to those questions does not change the fact that we will be male beings or female beings for all eternity.

The testimony of our cells

When biologists dig down into the building-blocks of human beings as deeply as they are able, they still discover maleness or femaleness. In biology the definition of "sex" is based on the organization of the being for reproductive function. The male *gives* genetic material for reproduction, and his biology is organized for him to be able to do so. The female *receives* genetic material and *gestates* new beings, and the female's biology is organized for her to be able to do so.¹ Yet, what allows for this difference is the genetic makeup of

the cells of males and females. As a 2001 study by the National Academy of Sciences puts it, "every cell has a sex."² The objective cellular basis for male or female is the presence or absence of the Y chromosome—or, more particularly, a gene on the Y chromosome called the SRY gene.³ This gene is found 99.998 percent of the time on the Y chromosome.⁴ If that SRY gene is present there in the cells of a being, the being is male. If that gene is not there, the being is female. There is a host of developments that the presence or absence of that SRY gene sets into motion, of course, and there are things that can go wrong at times in those developments. Nonetheless, every being who has the SRY gene is male, and every being who does not is female. And every single cell in a male *has* an SRY gene. Conversely, every single cell in a female does *not* have an SRY gene.

The presence or absence of the SRY gene is determined at (and by) fertilization.

An X-carrying sperm produces a female (XX) embryo, and a Y-carrying sperm on which is found the SRY gene produces a male (XY) embryo. Hence the chromosomal sex of the embryo is determined at fertilization. As soon as there is a new human being, that being is of a definite sex.⁵

Every single one of the SRY genes in the 30 million cells of a man cries out in judgment and even mockery of his attempt to change his maleness to femaleness. Given voice, the cells would declare, "Dressing a certain way will not change your sex! Puberty blockers will not change your sex. Even a sex-change operation will not change your sex. The change cannot be made! It is impossible! If the feat is genuinely attempted, you die, for maleness is in every single one of your cells!"

Similarly, every SRY gene in the cells of the 4 billion males on earth cries out in judgment and even mockery of the *female's* attempt to change her femaleness to maleness. Changing her look, changing her pronouns, mutilating her God-given breasts and genitalia will not do it, they remind her. Every SRY gene cries out, "But I am not there in you! It cannot be done. You are female in every single one of your cells!"

1 See, for example, *Encyclopedia Britannica's* definition of "sex": "The sum of features by which members of species can be divided into two groups—male and female—that complement each other reproductively." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed 7/28/2022.

2 Theresa M. Wizemann and Mary-Lou Pardue, "Every Cell Has a Sex," *Exploring the Biological Contributions to Human Health: Does Sex Matter?* 2001 (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK222291>).

3 "It is the overriding presence of a gene on the Y chromosome [SRY] that results in development of the male gonadal phenotype [physical display of maleness]." Wizemann and Pardue, "Every Cell Has a Sex."

4 The .002 percent of the time the SRY gene is not on the Y chromosome will be discussed briefly in another article.

5 T.W. Sadler, *Langman's Medical Embryology*, quoted in Anderson, *When Harry Became Sally*, 78.

The failure of liberalism

The voice of those genes is merely an echo of the witness of the Word of God to this age. Every moment of every day the Scriptures cry out in Genesis 1:27, “Male and female created he them!” That means preachers, teachers, churches, and denominations who are abandoning the most obvious of general revelations and the most simple of special revelations to embrace the redefinition of sex and gender are denying the unified, clear, and persistent revelation of God. Predictably, those who do so have already abandoned the truth that every Word of Scripture is the full, complete revelation of God. These have doubted the reliability of the first chapters of Genesis long before their conclusions about sex and gender. Kissing the feet of the culture is their first priority. Instead of heeding the call of Scripture “That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph 4:14), these embrace every wind of doctrine passing through, no matter how contrary to God’s Word and even to common sense it is. They have paved the way for the creature to declare himself the creator, setting himself above God to determine his own gender. They have proclaimed human beings as nothing more than animals and told humanity to

submit to their base impulses and to celebrate them. They have lied, calling men, women and women, men; defying God’s unalterable good and distinguishing work. Far from heeding the call to shine the light of truth into the midst of darkness, they snuff out the light and plunge people into darkness.

This is not love. Some of God’s sheep follow behind, including some who struggle with same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria. In II Kings 6 Eli-sha and the sons of the prophets build a house, as every officebearer in Christ’s church is called to do. This house, built by the prophets, is the church as the dwelling place of God’s people. This requires cutting down the trees of man’s wisdom with the axe head of the Word of God. When the axe head falls off and sinks to the bottom of the pond, the church has abandoned the Word. How can the church fell the trees of secularism with a handle and no head! May these leaders, churches, and followers together cry out “Alas, master!” and may the Spirit of Christ recover the axe head again—a return to a firm trust in the reliability of the Scriptures. Scripture and creation together cry, “Turn ye, turn ye, for ‘male and female created he them!’”

Reports of Classis East/West

September 14, 2022

Classis East convened at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church on Wednesday, September 14 at 8:00 A.M. Rev. J. Maatman served as chairman and capably led the thirty-eight delegates (from the nineteen member churches) in all of the work of classis. Seven elder delegates and one minister (Rev. E. Guichelaar) delegate served Classis East for the first time and therefore signed the Formula of Subscription.

Routine matters treated on Wednesday morning included asking and answering the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order, approving the work of the stated clerk and of the classical committee, and appointing the committees of pre-advice.

Classis carefully considered a discipline case brought by one of the member churches. After hearing a report of the consistory’s patient labors with the member who remains impenitent in sin, classis advised the consistory “to proceed with the announcement of the name of the member under discipline to the congregation per Articles 76 and 77 of the Church Order.”

Classis declared a protest of a decision made at its January meeting to be legally before the assembly. Classis did not sustain the protest.

Classis also received a report from a special committee

to investigate an abuse case. Classis approved the work of the committee, mandated that it continue in its work, and added two men to the committee. Classis received a report from another special committee regarding suggested changes to the Rules of Classis for the distribution of the agenda of Classis East. With a few amendments, classis adopted the recommendations of the committee, declared the work of the committee finished, and disbanded the committee.

Zion PRC forwarded an overture to Classis East proposing that Synod 2023 appoint a denominational study committee to “develop the theoretical basis for dealing with abuse in the local congregation.” Classis approved the overture and will forward it on to synod for its approval.

The rest of the work of classis included adopting a classical appointment schedule for supplying the pulpits of two vacant congregations (Georgetown and Hudsonville), approving the reimbursement of expenses incurred for the meeting, thanking the caterers, and determining the time and place of the next meeting of Classis East. Classis decided to meet at Grandville PRC on January 11, 2023.

Classis adjourned around 12:30 p.m. on Thursday. We thank the Byron Center congregation for graciously hosting classis for a day and a half.

May God use the decisions of classis for His glory and the welfare of our churches.

Rev. Clayton Spronk
Stated Clerk, Classis East

September 28, 2022

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on September 28, 2022 in Doon PRC (Doon, IA), finishing its work by about 9:30 p.m. The Doon congregation had opportunity to show off the new addition to their church building, and they did a fine job in hosting, including scrambling to make arrangements for the delegates during a town-wide power outage for several hours in the afternoon.

Rev. S. Key had the opportunity to lead classis in opening devotions, which was fitting as this was his last meeting of classis before emeritation. He gave a humbling and encouraging meditation on Psalm 112:7, “He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the LORD.”

Delegated to classis were 28 men (11 ministers and 17 elders), and they were joined by three synodical deputies from Classis East. Rev. M. Kortus chaired classis for the first time in his ministry, and led the meeting capably.

The questions of Article 41 of the Church Order were asked and satisfactorily answered. Regular reports from the stated clerk, classical committee, and reading sermon library committee were read and their work approved.

One important item on the agenda was a request from Loveland PRC for the emeritation of their pastor, Rev. S. Key. Classis approved the request for emeritation effective January 1, 2023 (which received the concurrence of the three synodical deputies from Classis East), approved his financial support for 2023, and expressed thanksgiving to God for his 36 years of faithful service to our churches. Rev. Key has especially been used of God for the benefit of the churches in Classis West, having served as pastor in the classis for 31 years, as stated clerk for six years, as a representative of the classis to synod 27 times, as church visitor for 19 years running, as a member of many special committees of

the classis, and as a humble and wise leader in the classis. May God bless Rev. Key and his wife as they enter this new phase of life!

An individual submitted a protest to classis of decisions taken by a previous meeting of Classis West that related to the refusal in September 2021 to seat delegates from the former consistory of First Edmonton PRC and to approve the labors of the church visitors with that congregation. Classis did not sustain the individual’s protest.

In closed session, classis treated an appeal of an individual regarding the discipline work of a consistory. After careful deliberation, classis did not sustain the appeal.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply for the vacant congregations of Doon (IA) PRC, Hosanna PRC (Edmonton), Randolph (WI) PRC, and the soon-to-be-vacant Loveland PRC. Due to the large number of vacancies and small number of active pastors, classis decided to request assistance from Classis East in covering five Sundays in the next six months.

Classis received a special request from a congregation for subsidy for 2023, and a special request from a congregation to increase subsidy for 2023. Both requests were approved.

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$8,853.17.

Classis West will meet next in Lynden (WA) PRC on March 1, 2023, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma
Stated Clerk, Classis West

Announcements

Reformed Witness Hour reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. W. Bruinsma

- November 6—God’s Promise Confirmed (1)
Acts 2:39
- November 13—God’s Promise Confirmed (2)
Acts 2:39
- November 20—Rejoicing in God’s Gifts
Deuteronomy 26:10, 11
- November 27—Losing in Order to Win
Philippians 3:8