

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

January 15, 2023 • Volume 99 • No. 8

Whiter than snow

Rev. Michael DeVries

My heart desires thy peace: The Three Forms of Unity

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The Council of Constantinople: Evaluation

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A conversation about believing

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

Postmaster

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

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Subscription price

\$33.00 per year in the US, \$46.00 elsewhere
esubscription: \$20.00
esubscription free to current hard copy subscribers.

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Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prc.org

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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

Whiter than snow

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

Psalms 51:7

Many of us who live in northern climes have what we might call a ‘love-hate’ relationship with snow. What beauty there is on a cold, sunny morning after a new-fallen snow! Snow means fun for the children—making a snowman or sledding on a nice hill. Many enjoy winter recreation in the snow—skiing or snowmobiling. The ‘hate’ part of it usually comes with the hazardous driving conditions on slippery roads or in blowing snow. Heavy snowfall often entails work in clearing the snow from driveways and sidewalks. As a boy, I sometimes dreaded the extra time and work needed doing the farm chores like caring for the livestock during snowy weather.

The scientific study of snow is fascinating. There are four main types of snowflakes: needles, dendrites, plates, and columns. The shape and size of the snowflake is primarily determined by the temperature where the snowflake is formed in the upper atmosphere. Each snowflake is composed of tens, perhaps hundreds, of individual snow crystals. Each snowflake is a symmetric, hexagonal, branched, fern-like crystal. Snow is white because visible sunlight is white and the complex structure of snow crystals reflects sunlight instead of absorbing sunlight. Snow is a wonderful example of the intricacies of God’s design in His creation.

The Scriptures speak of snow. In Job 38, the beautiful chapter emphasizing God’s sovereignty in creation, the Lord asks the rhetorical question: “Hast thou entered into the treasures of the snow? Or hast thou seen the treasures of the hail?... Out of whose womb came the ice? And the hoary frost of heaven, who hath generated it?” (Job 38:22, 29). It is our mighty God who makes and sends the snow, each individual snowflake in each flurry, storm, or lake-effect squall. It is the work of the Lord, according to Job 37:6, “For he saith to the snow, Be thou on the earth....” The psalmist speaks of it too, as we sing from Psalm 147,

*He sends His swift commandment,
And snow and ice enfold
The world, and none are able
To stand before His cold.*

Can you imagine anything that is whiter than the newly fallen snow? Perhaps we are so accustomed to seeing snow that we fail to consider that characteristic of snow. But those who come from southern climes and see fresh snow for the first time are often amazed by its brilliant whiteness. The sun shining upon the snow is nearly blinding. Yet there is such a thing that is whiter than snow. In the realm of the natural it may well be that we can conceive of nothing that is whiter than snow. But in the realm of the spiritual God has made something that is whiter even than the fresh-fallen snow.

The psalmist David was convinced of that. He was not exaggerating when he declared here in Psalm 51, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.” For God by His Spirit had given David to see and know this amazing whiteness by way of the stark contrast with the awful darkness of his own sin. The man after God’s own heart had fallen so far into this dark, black abyss of sin. His hands were bloody with the blood of Uriah whom he had murdered in order to cover up his sin of adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah. It makes us cringe! There is something about the sin of David that makes it most abhorrent among the notable sins recorded in Scripture. In its own way it repels us even more than almost anything that his predecessor, king Saul, had done. For these sins were not crimes of passion, but willful, premeditated sins in which he walked for a time. He knew the depths of sin’s darkness.

For God had graciously sent the prophet Nathan to David with His Word. As applied by the Spirit, that Word broke him. It penetrated to the depths of his heart: “Thou art the man” (II Sam. 12:7). It brought him down as one horribly blackened with sin, humbled in the dust before his God. By grace he was bowed down in heart-felt sorrow and repentance before God.

He is given to confess how blackened with sin he was. “For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight...” (vv. 3, 4). Even more, he also sees the blackness of his very nature, that from his infancy he has walked in ways of darkness: “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me” (v. 5).

Now he is able to plead for washing from his iniquity and cleansing from his sin. He beseeches God to create in him a clean heart and to renew a right spirit within him (v. 10). He yearns for the joy of the Lord’s salvation to be restored unto him, for the gladness that forgiveness full and free affords.

“Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean.”

David would be rid of the sin and guilt that blacken him. He would be made pure. God alone can purge us with hyssop. Hyssop, as referred to in Scripture, clearly points to spiritual cleansing. Hyssop was evidently a rather common plant in the land. It was required for the cleansing of the priests, as well as when a leper who was healed came to the temple to be pronounced clean by the priest. But, most importantly, it was used in the celebrating of the Passover. The Israelites were to take a bunch of hyssop, dip it in the blood of the Passover lamb, and then sprinkle that blood on their doorposts (Ex. 12:22).

So hyssop focuses our attention upon the Passover. To be purged with hyssop is to be cleansed by the blood that was applied with hyssop, the blood of the lamb that was slain. And the blood of the Passover lamb was a type of the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. Hyssop points us to the cross of Christ and the shedding of His blood to remove the blackness of our sins. David needed that spiritual cleansing. He needed the Lamb of God. He needed the shedding of the blood of Christ to wash away his sins.

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

David would be washed from the blackness of his sin. He desired to be made supernaturally white, spiritually white. He would be whiter than snow through the blood of Christ. For his sins and his sinfulness demand punishment. The justice of God must be satisfied. In true faith David knew that God had provided

a way for His people to be cleansed. Those sprinkled by the blood of the Lamb would be made whiter than snow!

Do we see and know our sin and misery? Are we mindful of the blackness of our sin and sinfulness? Do we have spiritual ears to hear God’s Word, “Thou art the man! (or woman or young person)”? There is a remedy to remove our blackness and every guilty stain. There is that which can purge and cleanse the most vile sinner.

Make no mistake, we need purging, true washing! Not just a dusting off, a slight touch up, or a quick rinse! We need to be made whiter than snow. Only the blood of Christ provides that cleansing. And what is whiter than snow? Obviously, it is not of man, not of us. But it is of God—it is the righteousness of Christ! We are washed by the blood of Christ. We are clothed in His righteousness. We are sanctified by His Spirit unto newness of life so that with love and delight we would serve God.

Let us not overlook the fact that this psalm is a heartfelt prayer. And this verse about purging and washing is an earnest petition. Is this our prayer of sincere repentance? Are we characterized by a broken spirit, a

broken and a contrite heart that God will not despise (v. 17)?

In that way may our petition also be that of David in verse 15: “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall show forth thy praise.”

“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

As we gaze through the window at the newly fallen snow, or if we just look at pictures of winter snow scenes, or if we only in our minds imagine the beauty, purity, and whiteness of snow, let us call to mind this beautiful Word of God! And may our hearts sing from Psalter #140, stanza 3,

*I am evil, born in sin;
Thou desirest truth within.
Thou alone my Savior art,
Teach Thy wisdom to my heart;
Make me pure, Thy grace bestow,
Wash me whiter than the snow.*



Editorial

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

My heart desires thy peace: The Three Forms of Unity

Christ the Head

The peace of the church is found in her Head Jesus Christ. When brethren dwell in sweet accord in the church, the good and pleasant unity that they enjoy does not find its basis and expression in all kinds of external, earthly realities that might otherwise give men a sense of close affinity. Rather, the peace and unity of the church, like any other elements of the church's nature and life, are to be found in Christ who is "...the head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that all in all" (Eph. 1:22-23). Exalted at God's right hand, Jesus Christ takes the members of His body, as manifested in local congregations on earth, and by His own Spirit He draws them together in true spiritual unity by drawing them up unto Himself the Head (Eph. 4:15-16; Col. 2:19).

Pure doctrine

Christ unifies His church by giving her agreement in the pure doctrine of the holy Scriptures. The "one Lord" unites His church in the "one faith" (Eph. 4:5) by giving us pastors and teachers (Eph. 4:10-11), so that through the preaching of the truth we might "come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God" (Eph. 4:13). The first object of the ascended Lord's unifying work was the Pentecost church of Jerusalem described in Acts 2. The many new converts who were added to the church enjoyed cheerful Christian fellowship as they gladly received the word that Peter preached about Jesus (Acts 2:41) and "continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine" (v. 42). The early church was not built upon "the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6). The members did not reject Jesus in order to seek their salvation in their own righteousness, nor did they deny the final judgment and bodily resurrection in order to live as brute beasts anticipating annihilation in the dust one day. Had they embraced the false doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees, then their fellowship, their being together and having all things in common, their selling of their possessions and goods and parting of them to every man who had need, their continuing daily

with one accord in the temple, their breaking bread from house to house, and their eating of meat with gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2:42-46) would not have been expressions of true peace in Christ but merely the earthly affinity of any other association of people who share something in common. The brotherhood of the early church in Jerusalem was rooted and grounded in the apostolic doctrine that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again the third day according to the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:3-4), a doctrine hostile to that of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

To be sure, true unity requires that Christ give His church more than agreement in the faith once delivered to the saints. The Spirit of Christ must work in the church *true brotherly love* as "the bond of perfectness" (Col. 3:14), so that her members speak the truth "in love" (Eph. 4:15). Otherwise, in all her zealous confession of orthodox theology, the church becomes nothing but a "sounding brass" (or noisy gong, I Cor. 13:1), in which the members might have a full head of Bible knowledge and zeal for propositions, but no charity for people. Then hearts are empty, the peace of the church is but a show, and loveless church members eventually bite and devour one another until the body is consumed (Gal. 5:15). The Spirit of Christ must work in the church *genuine holiness* of heart and life, otherwise gospel truth is adorned with the hideous garments of wickedness and oppression, and the church is full of lusts. And is not *that* the cause of in-fighting and endless quarrels in the church, for James writes, "From whence come wars and fightings among you? Come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?" (James 3:1). The Spirit of Christ must clothe the members of the church in *humility*, otherwise their confession of sound doctrine is noxious to God, and He will resist them in their pride (I Pet. 5:5) and abase them (Luke 18:14) so that they have no peace. To be sure, peace within the walls of Jerusalem requires that God give more than agreement in the faith, certainly more than mere agreement on paper. He must cause many lovely graces to flow out of hearts that truly know the Lord Jesus.

Nevertheless, doctrinal unity is first and foundation-

al because, when Christ the Head draws the members of His body unto Himself in true spiritual unity, He always draws His people unto the saving knowledge of Himself in the Scriptures. Graces like love, holiness, and humility are necessary, but they will fluctuate in the body and not always be as obvious as they ought to be. But there must always be the unchanging rock of the objective truth of God's Word believed, confessed, and defended in the church. The Reformed faith underscores unity in the truth by teaching that the true church maintains "the pure doctrine of the gospel" (Belgic Confession, Art. 29), and consists of members who are "agreeing in true faith" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21), and are "all expecting their salvation in Jesus Christ" (BC, Art. 27).

Reformed confessions

The one faith (pure doctrine of the Scriptures) that serves as the foundation upon which Jesus Christ unites His church is expressed in the "Three Forms of Unity." Reformed churches find the answer to the question, "What is the truth of God's Word?" in the collective teaching of the three confessional documents called the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. The Spirit does not leave it up to every minister and church member to go to the Bible as an independent theologian seeking to determine, as it were, from scratch, what Scripture says about God, the world, man, sin, the Savior, the covenant, salvation, the church, and the future. The Spirit leads the church into all truth as Jesus promised (John 16:13), and He gives the church the form of sound words (II Tim. 1:13). Reformed churches express that truth in the logical, systematic, comprehensive, antithetical, catechetical, beautiful, warm, clear, and officially approved Forms or Standards we call the "Three Forms of Unity." As the very name indicates, the Three Forms of *Unity* are essential for unity because the doctrinal truth contained in them is the basis for the unity of the church as she represents the cause of God over against the wicked world and all sects that are in the world and assume to themselves the name of the church.

The key to church unity and maintaining peace in a congregation and denomination is faithfulness to the Three Forms of Unity. When you ask God to give unity to your church, to preserve unity in your church, and to strengthen unity in your church, then you are first of all beseeching God for the grace to be and remain committed to the Three Forms of Unity. Peace in the church requires officebearers to sign the Formula of Subscription upon their installation into office. In so doing, the servants of the Lord heartily promise their

commitment to all the articles and points of doctrine contained in the Three Forms of Unity, and that they will diligently teach and faithfully defend that doctrine without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same by their public preaching or writing. Unity is in the Three Forms of Unity.

When the churches stay in the boundaries of the Three Forms of Unity, there is peace. To stray from the confessions and promote strange statements and teachings that come from either ditch along the proverbial straight and narrow path of orthodoxy is to threaten the peace of the church. Going beyond the confessions and deliberately attempting to impose one's own (mistaken) conception of Scripture upon the churches troubles the churches. Condemning the doctrine of the confessions as erroneous does damage to church unity. Taking positions that contradict the confessions, or failing to counter and refute attacks against the confessions, imperils church unity. Unity is in the Three Forms of Unity.

The Three Forms of Unity are not restrictive. They do not force the believer, the minister, the church, or the Scriptures themselves into a tight and oppressive little box. There is still freedom of expression within the boundaries of the confessions so that the rich and deep doctrinal teaching of the Scriptures can be explained and applied without every preacher being required to use the exact same, limited number of expressions sentence after sentence. Moreover, there is freedom for careful development within the boundaries of our confessions. If doctrinal development is like the erection of a building, then development does not proceed outward away from the foundation of the structure, but upward. The Three Forms of Unity allow upward growth. For example, what the confessions say about God's rewarding of our good works is essential and very important, but brief. On the basis of Scripture, much more can be said; but whatever *is* said must harmonize with the foundation laid by the confessions.

Illustrations

In recent years, the Three Forms of Unity have rightly played a significant role in the preservation of truth and unity in the PRC. Doctrinal disputes carried through the assemblies to the annual meeting of synod were judged and answered with settled and binding decisions grounded in the Three Forms of Unity. Two instances stand out as notable.

First, Synod 2018 addressed the relation between our good works of obedience and our experience of covenant fellowship with God by judging that certain protested sermon statements had given to the believer's good works a place and function out of harmony with

the Reformed confessions. Synod took quotations from three sermons and demonstrated from the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord Day 32 (the necessity of good works), Lord's Day 45 (Christian prayer), and Lord's Day 23 (justification by faith alone), how the protested statements were out of harmony with the confessions (*PRC Acts of Synod 2018*, pp. 61ff.). Synod also proceeded to give further doctrinal explanations grounded in the confessions, so that the Three Forms of Unity were used to settle the issue troubling the churches.

A second notable case illustrating the point that peace in God's church is based upon the doctrinal unity of the Three Forms of Unity involves the decisions of Synods 2020-2021 concerning the doctrine of repentance. The heart of the issue was a protestant's objection to the preaching that the believer enjoys God's merciful pardon in the way of repentance. Synod 2020 (the decisions of which were upheld by Synod 2021) determined that the teaching "that we repent and in the way of repentance experience the mercy of God is the teaching of Scripture and the confessions" (*PRC Acts of Synod 2020*, p. 79). Synod then appealed to Isaiah 55:7 and Psalm 32:5, as well as to Canons of Dordt V.5, which confessional statement teaches that the saints "by such enormous sins...sometimes lose the sense of God's favor for a time, until, on returning into the right way of serious repentance, the light of God's fatherly countenance again shines upon them." Again, synod used the Reformed confessions and judged that the sermon being protested was setting forth the simple truth of the official standards of Reformed churches on the doctrine of repentance.

Wherever there are doctrinal disputes that must be settled by the churches, the Three Forms of Unity must be used for peace in the church. Should there ever be questions about the nature of saving faith, the personal benefit of doing good works, God's rewarding of the believer's good works, the time of justification, remaining depravity in the regenerated believer, or other doctrines, answers are to be found in the Three Forms of Unity.

Historically, in times of doctrinal controversy, the PRC has used the Three Forms of Unity to demonstrate that the Reformed faith teaches sovereign, particular

grace. The confessions do not allow but exclude the doctrinal position that there is a grace of God to all men, including the reprobate, manifest in common gifts to all men; that the preaching of the gospel is a gracious offer of salvation on the part of God to all who externally hear the gospel; that the covenant promise of God is conditional and for all who are baptized. Positively, the Three Forms of Unity teach that all the covenant blessings are for the elect alone; that God's promise of salvation is only for the elect, and He always fulfills His promise; that election is the sole cause and fountain of all our salvation, out of which flow the gifts of grace, including faith; that faith is a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby God's people appropriate salvation in Christ; that the preaching comes to all, and God seriously commands faith and repentance, and that to all those who come and believe God promises life and peace.¹

Conclusion

By the mercy of God, the official theology of the PRC is not the theology of devils or men, but the theology of Scripture as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity. Commitment to the Three Forms of Unity must continue. It is the way of the old paths. If your heart desires the peace of the church, then pray to God for ongoing commitment to the Three Forms of Unity. Let us continue to catechize and teach another generation of our youth the Three Forms of Unity. Know the confessions, read them, study them, be at home in them, love them, and prize the preaching of them. This is what Reformed churches do. Because, as the members say with the psalmist, "My heart desires thy peace."

Wherever there are doctrinal disputes that must be settled by the churches, the Three Forms of Unity must be used for peace in the church. Should there ever be questions about the nature of saving faith, the personal benefit of doing good works, God's rewarding of the believer's good works, the time of justification, remaining depravity in the regenerated believer, or other doctrines, answers are to be found in the Three Forms of Unity.

1 Much of this paragraph is based on and taken from the "Introduction to the Declaration of Principles" in the *Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (2005), pp. 410-11.



Search the Scriptures

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God's second answer to Habakkuk's perplexity (cont.)

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2022, p. 130.

In Habakkuk 1:12-2:1 Habakkuk had questioned God's sovereign use of wicked Babylon to punish Judah. God's answer to Habakkuk has two parts. God would tell Habakkuk in chapter 2:5-20 that Babylon would also be punished for its wickedness, especially its wickedness against Judah; but first, out of concern for His people, God tells Habakkuk that the just will live by faith. They, justified by faith, would experience God's use of Babylon as chastisement, not as condemnation. Living by that same justifying faith through the difficult times ahead, they would continue to serve God and to enjoy His peace and blessing while in exile.

Because God's people need to be reminded that they must live by faith, God tells Habakkuk to "Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it." The vision is God's word to Habakkuk, received in a vision, especially the words of chapter 2:4. The tablets on which the vision would be inscribed must have been something like the tables of stone on which the law was written, for the words "write" and "tables" are the same. Many speculate that the tables Habakkuk used were hung in the temple for all to read, but that we do not know.

There are several interpretations of the running and reading in the last part of the verse. In most interpretations of the phrase, those who read and run are God's people in Judah. Habakkuk had to write the prophecy for them so that they would not miss it. Their running, then, is figurative. Habakkuk had to record his visions so that they would not be missed, just as an inscription written large enough would not be missed even by someone running past (Calvin). That interpretation is not supported by the Hebrew. Similar is the view of those who understand "runneth" to mean, "may read without difficulty and with understanding."

Another interpretation is that Habakkuk is to write these things for Judah so that, even in the face of the coming of the Babylonian captivity, they would continue to run (we would say, walk) faithfully and in obedience to God and would also run to tell others of God's grace to them. Reading Habakkuk's words, they would not

stop running. Those who read and run are still God's people in Judah, but their running is not just a figure of speech but a reference to their obedience.

Others say that Habakkuk is himself the one who runs with the vision to God's people having read it himself. He had to run as a herald to bring God's message. This last interpretation is behind some of the modern Bible versions. The NIV has, "Then the LORD replied: 'Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that a herald may run with it.'"

We prefer the interpretation that emphasizes the purpose of the prophecy: Habakkuk was to write that God's people in Judah might continue to obey and serve God, that they might run and not be weary, might be encouraged and not discouraged, either by the sins of Judah or by God's chastisements. We, too, reading and realizing that the vision is still being fulfilled, must continue to "run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:1, 2). The one who would read and run, then, was the believing member of the tribe of Judah, who, reading Habakkuk's prophecy, would not falter in the face of the coming judgments.

Recording God's word was important, for what God had said would not immediately come to pass: "For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry" (v. 3).

Many of the citizens of the nation at the time paid no heed to God's words through His prophets, and the delay only hardened them in their unbelief and disobedience. Those who believed would not cease believing God's word nor keeping His commandments, though the fulfillment of the prophecy was delayed. They would read and run in the days of Habakkuk, and they would read again and continue to run when God's word was fulfilled and Jerusalem destroyed. Reading and running, believing and serving God, they would live by faith during the most difficult and distressing times.

After tarrying, the vision would be fulfilled. It would "speak, and not lie." The word *speak* is to pant or puff,

and the vision, God says, was panting and puffing, running and hastening, toward its fulfillment. There would be a delay, but even while delayed it would be hastening to its fulfillment, coming inevitably and quickly. In the end, it would not tarry. Babylon would come as the rod in God's hand, and the just would have nothing left but their faith.

It is interesting that the verse speaks of the vision tarrying and not tarrying. Calvin explains:

We indeed make such haste in all our desires, that the Lord, when he delays one moment, seems to be too slow. Thus it may come easily to our mind to expostulate with him on the ground of slowness. God, then, is said on this account to delay in his promises; and his promises also as to their accomplishment may be said to be delayed. But if we have regard to the counsel of God, there is never any delay; for he knows all the points of time, and in slowness itself he always hastens, however this may be not comprehended by the flesh. We now, then, apprehend what the Prophet means.¹

As Calvin suggests, the passage has application to us. We, too, waiting for Christ's coming and the fulfillment of all promises in Him, experience the longsuffering of the Lord as delay and have to be reminded that "the Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness" (II Pet. 3:9), and yet we see in the signs of Christ's coming that He is coming quickly as He promised and is not tarrying.

Thus we too, no matter how difficult our own way may be and no matter how distressing things may be for the church, live by faith and not by sight, believing that the church, chosen of God and precious, redeemed by the blood of Christ and indwelt by His Spirit, cannot be overcome by the gates of hell. We must believe that we ourselves cannot be separated from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord, and believing, must go on unto perfection. As those whom God has justified, we can do nothing else.

Verse 3 shows that Habakkuk's vision looks far beyond Habakkuk's time to the end of all things. The end is not just the end of the kingdom of Judah but the end of the world. Then God's church will suffer as never before, and as never before the just will have to live by faith. That end time will be the time of Jacob's troubles, the days when the man of sin, of whom Nebuchadnezzar was only an image, will be revealed. Then the church will be scattered as it was at the fall of Jerusalem. It will be a time, when if it were possible, even the elect will perish. In those days, too, the just shall live by

faith, enduring to the end, watching and waiting for the coming of the everlasting kingdom of God.

The tarrying and not tarrying, therefore, have reference to the vision's ongoing fulfillment. In Habakkuk's days, the vision would tarry for only a short time and then the Babylonians would come. That would not be the end of its tarrying. It would tarry again until the coming of Christ, and then through His obedience and sacrifice the righteousness that belongs to the just by faith would be provided and their patient waiting rewarded.

The vision is still tarrying, waiting for everyone who belongs to Christ to be justified and to live by faith. It will continue to tarry and not tarry until those days of the end arrive, so much like the days of Babylon's coming to Judah. It will tarry until every one of God's elect is justified, but in the meantime will not tarry, always hurrying to the end of all things. It will tarry while the just live for the last time by faith, watching for the soon coming of Christ and the eternal justifying of God's own, but all the while it will be panting for the end. And those who are justified will continue to read Habakkuk's words and continue to run in the way of God's commandments. They will do so until the vision is finished forever. The vision, though tarrying for them, hastens to its appointed end, while they, believing in God, live by faith in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hastening unto the day of God (II Pet. 3:11, 12).

Hebrews 10:36-38, quoting Habakkuk 2:4, tell us that living by faith, the just will exercise their souls in patience, will do the will of God, and will receive the promise, for "yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry." Just as the Old Testament fulfillment of Habakkuk's vision would not tarry, neither will the New Testament fulfillment. He is near, even at the door, and when He comes, the just shall live forever with Him.

That need for justifying faith is more and more evident as we near the end. The church and believers in the church are few in number, a minority, like the 7,000 in the days of Ahab. They are despised and ridiculed by the world and often persecuted. They live in societies that do not tolerate Christianity, though those societies tolerate everything else and speak of discrimination as the greatest of all evils. Believers are what Paul calls "the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things" (I Cor. 4:13).

They must know, therefore, that despised by men, they are acceptable to God; condemned by men, they are righteous in God's sight, and not the filth of the world but the salt of the earth to Him, justified by faith in Christ, "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people" (I Pet. 2:9).

They must continue to live by that justifying faith

¹ Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, pp. 65, 66.

in a world that approves of and legalizes every kind of abomination, a world that is full of temptations and trials. They must raise their children, do their work, build their homes according to the Word of God, rejecting the thinking and the philosophies of the ungodly. They must be holy in a world that has filled the cup of iniquity. They can do that only by faith in Him who justifies them.

They must live by faith when the abomination that makes desolate stands in the holy place and when the time comes to flee to the mountains and dens of the earth. Only their faith will sustain them when they must give up everything, even their lives, for Christ's sake. And because their faith is the gift of God and not a work of their own, it will survive those most evil of times that are coming. Not only *must* they live by faith, they *shall* live by faith.

What a comfort it is that in God's Word to Habakkuk the vision pants, runs, hastens to the end. The times are always difficult for God's people, especially the end times, but all things hasten to their appointed end. And what an end that will be, when all unrighteousness is destroyed forever, when God's people are delivered forever from their enemies, and when after living their lives by faith and not by sight they see the things which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man to understand (I Cor. 2), when they see His face.

Hebrews 11 records the examples of those who lived by faith in the Old Testament. Believing, they saved

their households, were translated from this world to the next, offered acceptable sacrifice, lived as pilgrims and strangers, counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, and perished not with those who believe not. So it will be always, and always the vision tarries for them while at the same time rushing on to the end and not tarrying. Surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, we too read and run with patience the race that is set before us looking to Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

Habakkuk, bringing his concerns and perplexity to God, expected to be reproof (vs. 1). The reproof, if it can even be called a reproof, is mild indeed, as gentle and loving as a father's reproof of his children when the child has hardly erred. It is much more of comfort than of a reproof, more of a call to faith than a correction. Habakkuk had cast his cares and those of the faithful in Judah upon God and had left them there, and God answers those cares with the great gospel truth of justification.

That truth answers all cares, for it is the truth that there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, no condemnation when the whole world comes under the judgment of God. It is foundational to the truth that nothing can be laid to the charge of God's elect, for it is God who justifies. All things must work together for their good and nothing can separate them from the love of God. It is the truth that Christ died and is risen again and is ascended to the right hand of His Father.



Pillar and ground of truth

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

The Council of Constantinople (553): Evaluation

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2022, p. 106

The last article noted the meeting of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, and its main decisions. This article concludes our examination of that council.

Was the council sympathetic to the Monophysites?

I find the Fifth Ecumenical Council the most difficult to evaluate. Yes, it opposed the teachings of some who said that Christ has two natures and, therefore, two persons. And yes, it defended the decisions of Chalcedon.

But was it sympathetic to the Monophysitists who taught that Christ has only one nature? Philip Schaff

suggests that the council's renunciation of the opposite error was a partial victory for the Monophysite cause.¹ But Nick Needham points out that the council did indeed make a significant decision against the Monophysite position.²

It seems to me that the council tried to appease the

1 Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1910), 3:771.

2 Nick Needham, *2000 Years of Christ's Power* (Fearn: Ross-shire, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2016), 2:376.

Monophysites by insisting that the error directly opposite of theirs was an error, but that the council gave the Monophysites no support or ammunition for their own cause. The empress may not have liked the outcome, but the emperor viewed the council as a good step toward imperial unity.

Nor did the Monophysites view the council as a step in their direction. They separated from the Eastern church and remain separate until the present. In Syria and Turkey, they have been known as the Jacobites; in Egypt, as the Coptic Orthodox Church.

Did the church in the west acknowledge this council?

By 553 the idea that the Bishop of Rome was the first among bishops was firmly entrenched. He was the final authority, even over councils. The pope considered it his task to ratify the decisions of council, apart from which they would be of none effect. Initially, Pope Vigilius did not ratify the council's decisions. The emperor responded by banishing him, after which the pope decided that he would ratify them after all. Then the emperor permitted Vigilius to return to Rome. On the way, he died. His successor, Pelagius I, also ratified the decisions of the council.

Two points are worthy of note. One is that Vigilius' repeated changing of his mind on this issue makes one wonder if the apostles were so wishy-washy. The second is that it took an emperor to convince this "successor of the apostles" to ratify the council, whereas no emperor could change the mind of any of the apostles, when they knew their doctrine was that of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Even though the Christian church in the West rec-

ognized this as an ecumenical council, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Heinrich Bullinger readily acknowledge the weight of the first four councils; Luther calls them the "four great principal councils" (*Luther's Works* 41:52). Calvin indicated that some of the later councils also manifested "clear tokens of insight, doctrine, and prudence" (*Institutes* 4.9.8). But neither Luther or Calvin, at least in their principal works, make any reference to the Fifth Ecumenical Council.

For its ratification of the Creed of Chalcedon and emphasis that Christ is one in person we can appreciate the council's work.

Did the council put the matter to rest?

Not completely. Some might fault the Council for this. But, in fact, no one ecclesiastical assembly will ever speak the last word such that the church no longer needs to develop in her understanding of truth. In addition, the reason why a council does not put a matter to rest might be that some refuse to accept the verdict of the council, or abide by its decisions. Again, new heresies or old heresies in new guise keep cropping up.

These comments are relevant here. The Fifth Ecumenical Council upheld the decision of the fourth, that Christ was one person in two natures. But discussion continued. Christ might have two natures, but does He have one basic energy, or activity, that unites them? And does He have one will? These are the questions that arose. That they arose gives weight to the argument that the Fifth Ecumenical Council did not completely put the doctrinal matter to rest, and that a sixth ecumenical council would need to be called.



Taking heed to the doctrine

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Antinomians? Without a doubt (5)

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2022, p. 109.

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.

Matthew 7:12

Introduction

We are at present demonstrating that the theology of the Reformed Protestant Churches (RPC) is antinomian. This is not merely the tendency of their teaching, but is the position that they openly embrace. Antinomianism has bedeviled the

Reformed faith since the time of the Reformers and, before them, was a threat to the apostolic gospel of justification by faith alone. The charge that they are promoting the age-old error, albeit cosmetically refurbished, ought to be clear to the discerning Reformed Christian.

The leaders of the RPC view the charge of antinomianism as a badge of honor, as though the charge itself is a clear testimony to their orthodoxy. It is certainly true that not everyone down through history who has been charged with holding the tenets of antinomianism has in fact been guilty of antinomianism. The PRC have had this charge wrongly leveled against them from the time of their inception nearly one hundred years ago. Especially on account of our teaching of sovereign, particular grace and rejection of the well-meant gospel offer, we have been stigmatized with the labels of hyper-Calvinism and antinomianism. It does not, however, follow that though *some* are wrongly accused of antinomianism that *all* who are charged with the error are falsely maligned. No more does it follow that since *some* who preach the law of God are legalists, teaching that our good works merit with God, that *all* who call for strict obedience to God's law are necessarily legalists. In some instances, those who are charged with antinomianism do indeed embrace the theology of the antinomians. And that, sadly, is the case with the RPC.

Our focus at present is the error taught by the RPC's leaders that forgiveness takes place prior to repentance. This is the so-called God-first theology that the leaders of the RPC are promoting. We have seen that this teaching contradicts Scripture and the Reformed confessions. In the preceding article, we began to compare this view to the teaching of John Calvin, focusing on what he has written in the *Institutes*. If ever there was a God-first theologian, it was John Calvin. But in reference after reference, we saw that in his *Institutes* Calvin clearly teaches that God's forgiveness of our sins *follows upon* God-worked repentance. Although God has eternally decreed our forgiveness, as well as our repentance, and although the basis for that forgiveness is grounded in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's decree is realized in time. This is the order that He has determined in time that His forgiveness follows upon our repentance.

With the present article, we turn our attention to what Calvin has written on the relation between repentance and forgiveness in his commentaries. Calvin published commentaries on nearly every book of the Bible. In the nature of the case, it will be necessary for us to be selective in our references to what he teaches in his commentaries. After consulting his commentaries, it will be seen that Calvin's teaching there is consistent with what he teaches in his *Institutes*.

Calvin's Old Testament commentaries: The Psalms

Psalm 32 finds its occasion in David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. Calvin begins his exposition by pointing out that some men are so blinded by hypocrisy and pride "that they are not at all anxious in seeking forgiveness, [though] all acknowledge that they need forgiveness." "This confession," Calvin goes on to say, "that all need forgiveness, because no man is perfect, and that then only is it well with us when God pardons our sins, nature itself extorts even from wicked men" (1:522). It ought to be clear that the "seeking forgiveness" and the "need [of] forgiveness" of which David speaks precede the time "when God [actually] pardons our sins."

Commenting on the phrase in Psalm 32:5, "I have acknowledged my sin unto thee," Calvin says that David describes his misery, "in order to show to all the ready way of obtaining the happiness of which he makes mention." That happiness is the happiness of forgiveness, as Calvin makes plain when he adds that David's "only relief was unfeignedly to condemn himself before God, and humbly to flee to him to crave his forgiveness" (1:530). Calvin goes on to say that "when the sinner willingly betakes himself to God, building his hope for salvation not on stubbornness or hypocrisy, but on supplication for pardon," he receives from God the forgiveness of his sins. David "promised and assured himself of pardon through the mercy of God, in order that terror might not prevent him from making a free and an ingenuous [straightforward, frank] confession of his sins" (1:531). David, therefore, made "known his own guilt, that being self-condemned, he might as a suppliant obtain pardon" (1:531).

In his exposition of Psalm 32, Calvin is concerned to guard against the evil of teaching that our repentance and confession of sin earn God's forgiveness. This dread error Calvin repudiates. In the quote at the end of the preceding paragraph, Calvin does not say that "*because* he is a suppliant," he should obtain pardon, as though his act of confessing his sins merited God's forgiveness. Rather, he says that "as a suppliant" he might obtain pardon. We might rightly paraphrase David's teaching by saying that "in the way of repentance and confession, God forgave David's sin." On this same note, Calvin concludes his exposition of Psalm 32:5, by saying "that as often as the sinner presents himself at the throne of mercy, with ingenuous confession, he will find reconciliation with God awaiting him." "Should any infer from this that repentance and confession are the cause of obtaining grace, the answer is easy; namely, that David is not speaking here of the cause but of the manner in which the sinner becomes reconciled to

God.” Thus, “it is not admitted that everything which is necessarily connected with pardon is to be reckoned amongst its causes.... David obtained pardon by his confession, not because he merited it by the mere act of confession” (1:531-2).

If it were not the case that forgiveness follows upon repentance, if instead we were eternally forgiven, there would be no real concern over the question whether our repentance merits God’s forgiveness. If forgiveness is eternal, whereas repentance takes place in time, it ought to be clear that our repentance could never merit forgiveness. It would be a non-issue. But the very fact that this is a real danger, that there is the strong possibility that some would conclude that our repentance earns God’s forgiveness, arises out of the fact that forgiveness follows repentance. Otherwise the concern makes no sense.

The other well-known penitential Psalm is Psalm 51, which has the same historical background as Psalm 32. Commenting on the third verse, Calvin asserts that “we will never seriously apply to God for pardon, until we have obtained such a view of our sins as inspires us with fear.” And “the more easily satisfied we are under our sins, the more do we provoke God to punish them with severity, and if we really desire absolution [forgiveness] from his hand, we must do more than confess our guilt in words” (2:284-5). Those who desire forgiveness must confess their sins from the heart.

Psalm 51:9 relates the plea of the sinner to God: “Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities.” Says Calvin that “it by no means follows that a person may not be assured of the favour of God, and yet show great earnestness and importunity in praying for pardon.” In fact, says Calvin, since “pardon [is] the first thing we should pray for, it is plain that there is no inconsistency in having a persuasion of the grace of God and yet proceeding to supplicate his forgiveness” (2:297). Since pardon is something for which we are to pray, pardon being “the first thing we should pray for,” it follows that pardon follows upon our praying for it. And that means that we are not pardoned (forgiven) in eternity, but in time following upon the Christian’s prayer for pardon.

Once again, this in no way implies that our repentance earns forgiveness. That is made clear, Calvin teaches, by the plea in Psalm 51:10, “Create in me a clean heart, O God.” “By employing the term *create*, he expresses his persuasion that nothing less than a miracle could effect his reformation, and emphatically declares that repentance is the gift of God” (2:298). The very fact that the psalmist prays, “Create in me a clean heart,” harks back to God’s miraculous work of creation in the beginning. As God alone brought all things into being,

and the creature did not bring itself into being—contrary to the damnable lie of the evolutionists—so does God miraculously work repentance in the hearts of His people. That is no less the work and gift of God as was the creative work of God in the beginning.

Calvin’s Old Testament commentaries: The minor prophets

In his commentaries on the minor prophets, Calvin has a great deal to say about the relation between repentance and forgiveness. This is undoubtedly due to the fact that the minor prophets issued repeated calls to wayward Israel to repent. This is the case with the prophet Joel in chapter 2, verses 12-14:

Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning. And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil. Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him; even a meat offering and a drink offering unto the LORD your God?

In his exposition of this very familiar passage, Calvin says that the awful threats pronounced by the prophet were not intended merely to terrify the people, “but on the contrary, to encourage them to repentance; which he could not do without offering to them the hope of pardon.” “Men cannot be restored to the right way, except they entertain a hope of God’s mercy.... Hence the Prophet now represents God as propitious and merciful, that he might thus kindly allure the people to repentance” (2:55). Calvin goes on to speak of God’s indulgence toward Israel, “since he left a hope of pardon to a people so obstinate and almost past recovery” (2:57). Since God “allures the people to repentance” with a “hope of pardon,” pardon follows and is future relative to repentance. That is always the nature of hope.

Calvin continues: “Then follows the promise of pardon, ‘For he is propitious [gracious] and merciful.’ We have already said that repentance is preached in vain, except men entertain a hope of salvation.” He adds that,

whenever the Prophets were anxious to effect anything by their doctrine, while exhorting the people to repentance, they joined to the invitation “Come,” the second part, “Ye shall not come in vain.” This “Come,” comprehends all exhortations to repentance; “Ye shall not come in vain,” includes this testimony respecting God’s grace, that He will never reject miserable sinners, provided they return to him with the heart.... Hence, whenever Scripture exhorts us to repentance, let us learn to join this second part, “God invites us not in vain.” If then we return to him, he will be instantly inclined

to grant forgiveness; for he wills not that miserable men should labour in vain or be tormented. (2:60).

Calvin concludes this section of his exposition in this way:

As though the Prophet says, “Though ye think that it is all over with you as to your salvation, and ye deserve to be rejected by God, yet ye ought not to continue in this state; rather entertain a hope of pardon.” This is what the Prophet had in view; he throws in no doubt, so as to make the sinner uncertain, whether or not he could obtain pardon. (2:63-4).

Commenting on Zechariah 8:14-15, Calvin again establishes the relation between repentance and forgiveness—the proper order of these works of God’s grace:

And hence we may gather a general truth—that God cannot be intreated by us [notice, *cannot*], except we begin to repent; not that our repentance anticipates God’s mercy, for the question here is not, what man of himself and of his own inclination can do; as the object of Zechariah is only to teach us, that when God designs to forgive us, he changes our hearts and turns us to obedience by his Spirit (5:216).

“Our repentance anticipates God’s mercy,” that is, God’s mercy to forgive our sins follows upon our repentance.

Finally, I call attention to what Calvin says in expounding Malachi 3:7, “Even from the days of your fa-

thers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?” Calvin says that God “exhorts them to repentance, and kindly addresses them, and declares that he would be propitious and reconcileable to them, if they repented.” He calls attention to the fact that elsewhere he has pointed out “that all exhortations [to repentance] would be in vain without a hope of pardon.... This course the Prophet now pursues, when in the person of God himself he promises pardon, provided the Jews repent.” And he adds that

the Papists very foolishly conclude that repentance is in the power of man’s free-will. But God requires what is above our strength; and yet there is no reason why we should complain that there is a too heavy burden laid on us; for he regards not what we can do, or what our ability admits, but what we owe to him and what our duty requires (5:582-3).

It is foolish to conclude that the call to repentance and the teaching that forgiveness follows upon repentance mean repentance is a work of man or, worse still, to conclude that repentance is a work of man that earns God’s forgiveness. This is foolish, not only because it does not follow logically; but it is foolish because it contradicts the clear teaching of God’s Word.



Ministering to the saints

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A culture of compassionate care (2) God’s covenant

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2022, p. 19.

In our last article we saw that the church must have a culture of compassionate care. Saints minister to fellow saints in the service of Christ. Thus we want the church to be a place where we faithfully and lovingly care for the needs of one another.

If we will understand rightly the spiritual relationships we are to have in the church, we must begin with God. This is true because our understanding of reality must always begin with God. This is what John Calvin wrote long ago, “It is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating Him to scrutinize himself.”¹ If we do not begin with

God, then our understanding of compassionate care will begin with a skewed perspective of self and what others ought to provide according to my own standard. Any standard that begins with me will always be wrong. We must begin by looking at God!

First and foremost, a ministry of caring for each other compassionately reflects the God who cares compassionately for His people. The basis for this compassionate care is God’s covenant. There are many books on how the members of the church are to care for each other, but many of them neglect this covenant basis. It is good for us to go back to covenant basics before looking forward to what these relationships look like.

The covenant, as revealed throughout Scripture, is the relationship of love and fellowship that God sovereignly establishes with His elect people in Jesus Christ. The

1 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 37.

covenant is not only a doctrine to be understood, but it is an abiding relationship of friendship and fellowship we have with our God through Jesus Christ. It is not enough to call the covenant a relationship between God and His people, because there are many different kinds of relationships in life: an earning relationship like between an employer and employee; or the justice relationship between a prisoner and judge; or a relationship between friends. The first two are much different than the latter. Our relationship with God is friendship and fellowship. James 2:23 identifies the relationship Abraham had with God: “and he was called the Friend of God.” Just as this was Abraham’s relationship with God, so also it is the relationship that the spiritual seed of Abraham have with their God. For this reason, Scripture uses many different pictures to describe this deep, abiding relationship of love we have with God. He is our Father and we are His children (Rom. 8). He is our Bridegroom and we, as the church, are His bride (Hos. 2).

A study of God’s covenant in Scripture shows how rich and deep it is, which must then be applied to our personal relationships within the church. This relationship of love is based on the relationship God has in Himself. The three persons of the Holy Trinity live a perfect relationship of eternal love in the bond of perfectness (Col. 3:14). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit know each other intimately and fully. They never fight or disagree. Instead, they are one, as Jesus said in John 17:21, where He prays for the church, “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee....”

For the glory of His name, the God who is love in Himself (I John 4:8) has determined to bring His sinful, elect people into a relationship of love and fellowship in which these people know and experience the blessings of this love. God so loved His people that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life (John 3:16). What manner of love the Father has bestowed on us that we should be called the sons of God (I John 3:1)!

Although there are many different aspects to this covenant, we want to focus on the perfect compassionate care of God in this relationship. Throughout our lives, no matter how dark and lonely our way is, we do experience perfect compassionate care in the relationship we have with our heavenly Father. Biblical words and phrases that help us understand His compassionate care are these: “with us,” “comfort,” and “admonish.”

The beautiful scriptural preposition of the covenant is “with.” In His unconditional love, God is with us. He is with us as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death (Ps. 23:4). When we pass through the waters and the fires of the sufferings of this life, God prom-

ises, “I will be with thee” (Is. 43:2). Because the Lord is with us, we have nothing to fear. We have nothing to fear because absolutely nothing can separate us from His love (Rom. 8). Not only is God *with* us, but He is *in* us. God dwells in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who takes up residence in all of God’s people. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit (I Cor. 6:19). The Lord is so *with* us that He is *in* us. Amazing!

The everywhere-present God, our Father, who is in us by the Spirit is *always* with us. He promises never to leave us or forsake us. He is with us in the sorrows of the valley, the river, and the fire of hardship and suffering. He is with us in the joys of a wedding, a birth, an adoption, a baptism, a confession of faith, and a sinner repenting. He is with us while He chastens us.

Our Father’s unfailing presence with us is unconditional. It does not depend on what we do. Although we lose the sense of God’s favor when we sin, this does not mean He departs from His people. This does not mean He cuts off the relationship or we lose the fellowship He establishes, maintains, and perfects. We lose the *experience* of God’s favor and love when we continue in our sin, which is contrary to His holy Being and will. Yet, He is a God who remains with us. His presence with us in love is not dependent on what we do. The more we learn of God’s covenant love the more marvelous it is.

What does this mean for our fellowship with each other within the church? In stark contrast to the cancel culture of our day, we do not simply cancel from our lives people we judge to be toxic. There is a time to sever close ties when a church uses the key of Christian discipline to excommunicate a member (see I Cor. 5). But we do not individually cancel a relationship with those who hurt us. We are to reflect the unconditional love of Jehovah God in our relationships, even when we are sinned against. This is Jesus’ point in the Sermon on the Mount, “But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you; that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 6:44, 45). Loving those who sin against us is one of the ways we reflect the Father’s love for us.

Remember the other words that express this relationship of fellowship: comfort and admonish. The New Testament word that can be translated either *comfort* or *admonish* means literally “to come alongside.” In the sufferings and struggles of this life our Father comes alongside us. Notice the beautiful covenant language. Picture a dejected son sitting on the side of his bed with his head buried in his hands and tears streaming down his face. Mom and dad are on each side of him with their arms around him to console him. This is the idea

of coming alongside in love. When the sufferings of this life overwhelm us, we are never alone. Even when no one else sees our tears, we are not alone. Our heavenly Father sees us.

He comes alongside us in His Word and Spirit to comfort and console us. This is what Paul says in II Corinthians 1:3-5, “Blessed be the God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort; who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.” In our suffering and tribulation, God comforts us—He comes alongside us to console our troubled souls. Chiefly, our God comforts our troubled souls by declaring His love for us, which is seen most fully in the work of Jesus Christ. When we sin and repent of our sin, He comforts with Christ’s finished work. When we endure suffering, He comforts us with the assurance of His unchanging goodness. He is a God who never withholds any good thing from His people (Ps. 84:11).

We reflect the covenant comfort God gives to us by coming alongside others to comfort them in their sorrows and trials. As parents, we comfort our children when they hurt. In our marriages, one spouse brings encouragement and comfort when the other is down. In the church, we have many opportunities to love each other and come alongside each other with comforting words from Scripture.

When we sin against others and God, He comes alongside us to admonish us. This admonishment is also done in love. Admonishment may include chastisement, which yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness (Heb. 12). He

comes alongside us to warn us of the way of sin, as He warned the people of Israel through Moses in the book of Deuteronomy. If we question Him in wrong ways like Job did, God comes and reminds us that He is God (see Job 38, as God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind). He comes alongside us to admonish for the sake of strengthening our faith and turning us from sin.

This is the way our relationships in family and church should be. Parents, grandparents, and teachers warn their children of sin. When those children live in sin, parents and/or teachers admonish them, calling them to repentance. Children are called to confess their sin and turn from it in the power of the Holy Spirit. Within the church, we should do this with one another. There should be a freedom to address sin with each other and a readiness to hear this.

We should want marriages, parent-child relationships, and friendships where comforting and admonishing happen regularly. Do you have this? We should desire meaningful relationships in which the focus of the relationship is growing in faith and godliness. We want this because this reflects the most meaningful relationship we have in this life and in the life to come: our relationship of fellowship and love with God. When the glory and beauty of God’s covenant love shine upon us, we want to reflect it. As the moon reflects the light of the sun, so also we reflect the light and beauty of God’s covenant love in our relationships. It is only a reflection. And our reflection is dim because of sin. But it is a reflection nonetheless.

To this reflection we will turn next time by considering what it means to have meaningful relationships in home and church.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Mr. Dan Kuiper, science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and member of Hope PRC in Walker, Michigan

Ask now the beasts: Spring peepers and freezing point depression

Belgic Confession, Article 2 teaches that the creation is an elegant book that leads us to contemplate the wondrous works of God. This is a reflection of the truth taught in Job 12:7-9: “But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto

thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the LORD hath wrought this?” Since God is pleased to reveal Himself in the creation, and the whole earth declares God’s glory, it is good for the child of God to ponder and marvel at the things that the Lord has made.

In particular, God’s tender mercies and sovereign care are displayed in the creation. These attributes are

especially evident as we consider how God upholds animals through even the harshest weather. During the winter, temperatures plummet well below freezing in the northern half of the United States. In such cases, we can be thankful for the homes God has given and for means to heat our homes. But what about animals that must remain outdoors? How do they survive the plummeting temperatures? We can be sure that God, “after He created all things, did not forsake them, or give them up to fortune or chance, but that He rules and governs them according to His holy will” (BC, Art. 13). God, in many marvelous ways, provides for the safety and survival of even the smallest of animals through the winter months.

Spring peepers

One of the most fascinating examples of this is the spring peeper. Spring peepers are delicate, one-inch long frogs that belong to a group known as “chorus frogs.” These frogs live in the eastern United States and are best known for their near-deafening calls. Travel to the forests of northern Michigan in the spring and throughout the night your ears will be filled with the calls of these tiny frogs. During the winter, spring peepers burrow into soft mud near ponds or settle under logs and leaf litter on the forest floor, then enter a state of inactivity.

During this stage of inactivity, spring peepers freeze nearly solid. Like all frogs, spring peepers are ectotherms. Ectotherms are organisms that depend on the external environment to maintain body temperature. Their body temperature, therefore, can vary significantly depending on the outside temperature. As temperatures plummet, so will their body temperature. Up to two-thirds of the water in their bodies can freeze, sometimes for days at a time. The drop in their body temperature also causes their hearts to completely stop beating. Yet, they are alive. When warmth returns in the spring, these frogs will come out of this dormant state and once again form a powerful chorus that fills the night with songs of praise to the Creator.

One important factor that allows these frogs to survive the freezing of water in their bodies is the ability to prevent this freezing from taking place inside their cells. Cells contain important organelles needed for proper cell function. Such organelles include the nucleus and mitochondria. The nucleus contains the DNA that gives instructions for all the activities of the cell while the mitochondria produce the energy needed for cell function. If ice forms *within cells*, the jagged edge of ice crystals will damage these organelles and

result in cell death. When many cells within an organ die, the organ fails and ultimately the organism itself dies. Thus, it is important that any freezing that occurs be limited to the fluids *outside of cells* (known as the extracellular fluid).

Freezing point depression

The spring peeper must increase the concentration of dissolved substances inside its cells to prevent freezing from taking place there. In its liquid phase, water molecules move rapidly and randomly past one another. When water transitions to its solid phase (ice), its molecules take on a very ordered, crystal lattice structure. Pure water makes this transition at 32°F (0°C), which is its freezing point. However, when a substance is dissolved in water (for example, salt), the freezing point will decrease since the dissolved particles interfere with the ability of water to form this crystal lattice structure. The decrease in freezing point caused by dissolving a substance in water is referred to as freezing point depression. This concept is commonly used to melt ice from the roadway in the winter. The salt spread onto the road dissolves into the thin layer of water at the surface of ice, decreasing its freezing point. This saltwater mixture will remain liquid at a lower temperature, and ice is eliminated from the road surface.

A couple things about freezing point depression are worth noting. First, salt is not the only substance that can dissolve in water and lower its freezing point. Any substance that dissolves in water will do the trick. An example of one such substance is sugar. Second, the degree to which freezing point decreases depends on the amount of substance dissolved. Add a small amount of salt (or sugar) to water and its freezing point will decrease only a little below 32°F. Add more salt to water and its freezing point decreases further, though there is a limit, which explains why in some cases it can become too cold for salt to be effective at melting ice.

The property of freezing point depression is one of the means used by God to preserve the life of spring peepers through the winter. The inside of a spring peeper’s cells contain dissolved sugars and electrolytes (salts). Most of the year the concentration of these dissolved substances is not very high. Therefore, the freezing point of water inside the spring peeper’s cells is “naturally” around 31°F (just one degree below water’s freezing point). The mud and leaf litter (along with fallen snow) that spring peepers inhabit in the winter help insulate their bodies so they do not face the full force of the winter cold. However, these loca-

tions can still experience temperatures as low as 21°F, well below the temperature at which the water inside their cells would normally freeze and damage the organelles. Therefore, spring peepers must have a means to further decrease the freezing point of water in their cells.

The decrease in freezing point is accomplished by flooding the organs with a sugar called glucose. The liver of a spring peeper is filled with glycogen, which is a molecule made of long chains of glucose. These frogs build up large quantities of this molecule throughout the year. When their body temperature drops in the winter, spring peepers break glycogen into its individual glucose molecules and disperse them to organs throughout the body. The glucose functions in two ways to increase concentration of dissolved particles within the cells. First, a large amount of this glucose enters the extracellular space outside the cells. The high concentration of sugar outside the cells draws water out of the cells in a process called osmosis. Much of this water is converted to ice crystals by special proteins in the extracellular space. Interestingly, the ice in the extracellular fluid plays a role in insulating the cells. Second, some of the glucose released by the liver is pumped into the cells. The combination of water leaving the cells and extra dissolved sugars being pumped into the cells results in a decrease in freezing point sufficient to allow spring peepers to endure temperatures of 21°F (and sometimes lower) without the water inside their cells freezing. This is vital to their survival.

God's tender mercies

The cold of winter is a bitter and deadly force. It seems impossible that such a tiny, fragile frog is able to survive such conditions. In Psalm 147:17, the psalmist asks the rhetorical question, "Who can stand before [God's] cold?" The clear answer is that none are able to stand according to their own strength. Left to themselves, all creatures would perish in the face of such powerful cold. And yet, year after year, spring peepers, along with many other creatures, survive the dreaded winter. The only explanation for their survival is that God is able to provide spring peepers what they are not able to provide for themselves. In His wisdom and by His power, God has ordained and maintains the property

of freezing point depression for the protection of this small frog. At God's voice, glucose molecules are released from the frog's liver. Not a single ice crystal forms apart from His command. These frogs remain in a near lifeless state through the winter. They toil not! Yet God, by His power, cares for them and preserves their lives.

As the spring peeper depends upon God to supply what it needs for the preservation of its life, so must the child of God. This is true of our physical needs. All that we need for the body comes from God. When these needs are supplied, we must give thanks to God alone for His provision. In a greater sense, this is true of our spiritual needs. We are sinners, dead in sin by nature. As God's children, we acknowledge that our best works are as filthy rags before the holiness of God and we confess we have no power to deliver ourselves from the misery of our sin. Therefore, we rejoice in the knowledge that God's mercy is towards us, His dear children. He has provided for us through Jesus Christ. The blood of our Savior has been shed to cover our sins. Our souls have been redeemed! We were dead in sins, "but God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he

loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ" (Eph. 2:4-5). Oh, what a Savior! On account of His suffering and death, we are not consumed.

God, who has saved us, is faithful. His mercies are new every morning (Lam. 3:23), they endure forever (Ps. 136), and "his tender mercies are over all his works" (Ps. 145:9). He who is able to provide for

the spring peeper in the harshest of conditions is able to preserve His people through the greatest of afflictions. He sees, hears, and knows all things. In His mercy, God directs every detail of the creation for the salvation and preservation of His people. Nothing can separate us from His love.

As we ponder these things, may we give thanks for the mercy of our God by which He upholds the creatures of the earth and preserves us, body and soul. "My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD; and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever" (Ps. 145:21). If we should fail to praise Him for His sovereign care, all of creation, even the smallest of beasts, will still praise Him. Glory be to God!

The cold of winter is a bitter and deadly force. It seems impossible that such a tiny, fragile frog is able to survive such conditions. ...Left to themselves, all creatures would perish in the face of such powerful cold. And yet, year after year, spring peepers, along with many other creatures, survive the dreaded winter. The only explanation for their survival is that God is able to provide spring peepers what they are not able to provide for themselves.



Strength of youth

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor of the Hope PRC in Walker, Michigan

A conversation about believing

What is true faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

(Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, Q&A 21)

We believe that, to attain the true knowledge of this great mystery, the Holy Ghost kindleth in our hearts an upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ, with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him....

(Belgic Confession, Art. 22)

Below is a conversation between a father and son that should not be fictional.

The car ride home from church that evening was extremely quiet. It was not the same, uncomfortable kind of silence as last Sunday on the way to church after mom and dad's morning spat. On the way home tonight, there was a holy kind of hush. The slight frown on father's face meant that there was something on his mind after the sermon. As the hum of the closing garage door replaced the sound of the car's engine, father turned to his teenager before exiting the vehicle and gently indicated there was something that he wanted to talk about that evening.

Father: Son, I'm afraid I have been neglecting a duty of mine.

Son: I'm not sure what you mean. I think you're a pretty good dad.

Father: Well, I heard something very convicting today—that God requires me as a father to seek the conversion of my children. I'm supposed to call you to repent and believe. I don't think I have ever done that—not clearly and faithfully, at least.

Son: Have I done something wrong?

Father: No, no. I mean, yes and no. There is no spe-

cific sin I have in mind. But yes, you have done plenty of wrong, as I have, and I don't think I have clearly and faithfully called you to repent and *believe* in the Lord Jesus Christ. Especially the believing part.... I don't think I have called you to faith.

Son: But Dad, I don't see the purpose of that. I already have faith.

Father: Son, what do you mean when you say, "I already *have* faith?"

Son: Faith is a bond, Dad. I learned that in catechism not that long ago. Jesus is like a tree, and we are like a dead branch, and God gives us faith by joining us to Himself. I have faith because I am joined to Jesus and am part of the covenant.

Father: You have been taught well, son. I am thankful for the good, doctrinal instruction God has provided for you in our churches. And yes, it is true that faith is indeed such a bond or union to Jesus Christ. But do you think faith is more than that?

Son: I'm not sure what you mean. Faith is a gift....

Father: Maybe this is a better way to ask the question: "Do you personally and with your heart believe in Jesus alone for all of salvation?" You see, son, I have only recently come to better understand this myself. When the Bible speaks of faith, it most often speaks of faith as a conscious activity. Faith isn't just something you have, or that a church has. It's an activity of *your* individual soul. You must actually believe in Jesus and fervently cling to Him alone for every blessing of salvation.

Son: (after a brief silence) Yes, I think I believe. I work hard at school. I don't cuss like some of the other kids. I go to church. I do pretty well in catechism. And I remember the doctrines pretty well. In fact, in comparison to even the young people that go to the Reformed church down the street, I hear that we young people in our churches know quite a bit more about the Bible and the Reformed faith, and....

Father: Hold on a minute! Let me stop you there. I want you to notice something very important. I asked you about faith, and do you know what you told me about? You talked about your works. Don't misunder-

stand me—I am so thankful that you behave yourself and learn your catechism. Please don't stop. But believing, you see, is to look away from your works, as good as they may seem. The believer will certainly do good works, but don't mix up believing and working. To believe is not actually doing anything. To believe is to know and trust Jesus alone for your forgiveness, for God's favor, for all your salvation including the very strength to live a holy life.... It's simply to rest in Jesus. Do you believe in Jesus?

Son: Yes, but all this is sounding a little Arminian to me. Are you saying that I have to believe in order to be saved?

Father: Son, it is not Arminian to say, "If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved." Romans 10:9 says that. That does not mean that you believe of your own free will. Now *that* would be Arminian. It also does not mean that believing itself determines your salvation or contributes anything to salvation. *Don't trust in your believing.* Trust Jesus alone. But it *does* mean that only those whom God gives believing hearts are saved and will be saved in the end.

Son: That makes sense to me. God has given me a bond of faith, not only, but also a believing heart.

Father: I'm glad to hear that. But now I want to ask another question. Do you know the difference between believing doctrine and believing in Jesus?

Son: Don't they go hand in hand?

Father: Of course, they do. You are right. There is a liberal movement today that would have you imagine that you can believe in Jesus and not hold to true doctrine. You have probably been warned about that in catechism. In the church world today, faith becomes some good feeling at the sound of Jesus' name put to a good tune. But many who claim to believe don't actually know *who* Jesus is because they disdain doctrine.

Son: Yeah, that's right. In catechism class the other day, I remember the minister saying, "If you don't know the doctrines of Jesus, how can you know who the true Jesus really is? There are many false Christs today, and many who despise doctrine don't truly know who Jesus is even if they like to say His name." I think the Heidelberg Catechism says, too, "Faith is a certain *knowledge*."

Father: Very good. But now, to help us get back to my question, can you remember more about that quote from the Heidelberg Catechism? "True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His word, but..."

Son: "...also an assured confidence, which the Holy Spirit works by the gospel in my heart."

Father: Yes. Notice that the emphasis is on the assured confidence or personal trust in Jesus. And that brings up a danger I am concerned about in our Reformed circles. I knew a young man once—extremely smart. Boy, he had a brain, a powerful brain. The grey matter up in his head could remember everything. He read all kinds of books. He read the Bible. He read books on Reformed theology. He went to a Reformed church and confessed his faith. He knew doctrine better than anyone I know. But everything was up there in the head, and nothing sank down into the heart. A few months after he graduated from seminary, he declared himself an atheist. Remember what the book of James says: "Devils also believe and tremble." Faith is not anti-intellectual, but it is more than mere head knowledge. Do you remember that hymn I taught you?

Son: Which one?

Father: "Rock of Ages." Augustus Toplady sure knew what faith was. "Nothing in my hands I bring...."

Father and Son (in unison): "... Simply to the cross I cling. Naked, come to thee for dress. Helpless, look to thee for grace. Foul, I to the fountain fly. Wash me, Savior, or I die!"

Father: You see, to believe is not only to know *about* Jesus Christ. It is consciously to cling to Him with your heart. The Belgic Confession says it is to embrace Jesus Christ, seeking nothing more besides Him for salvation. Faith abandons all human effort to gain God's favor and rests in His mercy for Jesus' sake. So, son, back to what I began with tonight. I have neglected my duty to call you to faith. Would you be opposed to having this conversation with me more regularly?

Son: No, I'm not opposed to it. But I'm not sure why that is necessary. I already do believe in Jesus.

Father: I think it's still important. We all need to be called to trust in Jesus again and again. One reason is that you and I have a sinful nature. That sinful nature not only wants to sin all the time, but that sinful nature constantly tempts us to rely on something else instead of or besides Jesus. After you fall into sin, how does that old man in you tempt you to deal with your sin?

Son: Deny it, give excuses, blame someone else....

Father: Exactly. And along with that self-defense is self-righteousness. We look to our past works and convince ourselves that we aren't that bad. We try to "make up" for our sin with something good. So after we sin, we must be reminded: repent and *believe*. Turn not to works to cover sin and calm the conscience, but to Jesus only. Here is another question: When you know you need to improve and make progress in your battle against your besetting sin, how does your old man tempt you to do battle?

Son: I'm not sure.

Father: He says, "Try harder and do more!"

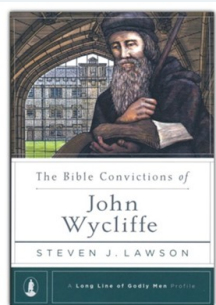
Son: What's wrong with that? Am I not supposed to try harder and do more to fight and flee sin?

Father: It's not *what* the old man says all the time, but what he *doesn't* say. If you know your besetting sin, listening to that old man who tells you to try harder will lead to you falling flat on your face. You have then relied on your own effort for a holy life. The Christian life of sanctification will include effort, but first, always first, it is resting in Jesus by faith. It is first trusting in His finished work. It is first trusting in His Spirit to equip you. And only then, while you trust, do battle. *Live by faith.*

Son: I think I get your point, Dad. You are saying that every day, and as much as possible, every moment of the day, my eye must be on Jesus. Whether it's for forgiveness or for sanctification, I must always look to Jesus. That's living by faith.

Father: Yes. And since our faith is so weak and we are constantly distracted from Jesus, whether by sinful works or good works, we need regularly the reminder to believe in Jesus.

Father God: "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (II Cor. 13:5a).



Bring the books...

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

The following book is reviewed by Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Bible Convictions of John Wycliffe, by Steven J. Lawson. Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2021. 212 pages. Hardcover, Pp xvi + 208. Hardcover. \$17.00.

This book is the thirteenth, and latest, in Ligonier's "A Long Line of Godly Men Profile" series. Each man who is featured played a pivotal role in European or American church history. These books are all about 200 pages long, but the pages are short. In other words, any of these books would be easy reads for many high school and even junior high students.

John Wycliffe (1328-1384) lived in England during the medieval era. In that day, apart from some dissenting groups, Rome was the only church. Few Bibles existed, and those that did were in Latin. The printing press had not yet been invented. One of Wycliffe's great accomplishments was to translate the Latin Vulgate into English, so that any literate Englishmen could read the Bible in his own language.

But did you know that Wycliffe was also one of the first men to teach that the earthly authority of the king was distinct from the pope's spiritual authority, and that the people could oust ungodly civil and spiritual leaders? Or that the authority of Scripture alone is determinative? Or that Christ was the only head of the church, and the pope had no claim to that honor? And that he denied that Christ was bodily present in the

mass? He did all of this almost 150 years before Luther and Zwingli opposed Rome!

The first chapter of this book gives a basic overview of Wycliffe's life. The second develops his doctrine of Scripture (his view of what the Bible is, especially emphasizing *sola Scriptura*), and his resolve to explain it according to its plain meaning. He was convinced that a wrong view of Scripture was the root of all Rome's errors.

Chapter three demonstrates that Wycliffe's theology was orthodox. This is striking: in a day in which Rome's errors prevailed, Wycliffe taught the main points of what would later be known as the five points of Calvinism. In a few areas he fell short of the Reformers: he did not oppose purgatory, and did not clearly teach the doctrine of justification by faith alone. To be clear, he did not deny justification by faith alone, but he never formulated the doctrine. He did teach that faith was God's gift and a necessary part of salvation. Rather than faulting Wycliffe for falling short in these areas, we should be amazed that God raised a man in the mid-fourteenth century who saw the truth as clearly as he did, and opposed so many of Rome's teachings and practices!

The next chapter is an overview of Wycliffe's main writings. Chapter five focuses on his preaching, including his view of what preaching is, why it is important,

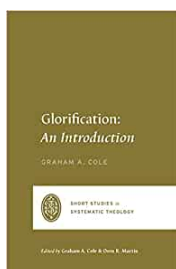
how it should be done, and the necessity of having converted preachers. Chapter six is devoted to his work of Bible translation. The last chapter treats his legacy. That legacy included the rise of the Lollard movement that promoted Wycliffe's teachings. It also included the spread of Wycliffe's ideas to Europe through John Hus in Bohemia. And it included suffering. Rome did not persecute Wycliffe while he was alive, but after he died, his bones were dug up so that they could be burned. But

those who defended his ideas suffered. Rome would not tolerate opposition.

Until Martin Luther. Rome did not tolerate Luther, but she could not destroy him. He would develop Wycliffe's ideas, and the religious world would be changed forever.

The book is informative and succinct. It encourages us to be like Wycliffe in that we understand the importance of God's Word for all of life.

The following book is reviewed by Rev. David J. Engelsma, former editor of the *Standard Bearer*, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, and member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan.



Glorification: An Introduction, by Graham A. Cole. Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway, 2022. Pp. 138. \$16.99 soft.

Glorification is part of a series of succinct explanations of fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith. The treatment is always thorough, if brief. Generally, the books are sound. These

characteristics make the series especially useful to the layman and theological student.

Although directed, presumably, to the largely Arminian “evangelical” audience, this volume takes issue with the Arminian doctrine of foreknowledge. Cole contends that sinners are unable “to respond to the gospel unless God acts sovereignly toward them.” Hence, “divine foreknowledge is informed by divine determination” (54). Likewise, the author “affirm[s] the eternal security of the children of God.” Only this truth confesses a “glorious salvation” (116). In defense of faith’s origin in election, Cole appeals to John 10 (54).

The special worth of the book is that it gives biblical and spiritual content to theological glory, as in the “glory of God” and the “glory of the child of God.” This content of glory, the author derives from several outstanding passages of Scripture, including Psalm 19; Exodus 24; Isaiah 6; John 1; Mark 9; Acts 9; Revelation 21; and more. All glory is God’s. “Glory is not an attribute of God.... Rather glory...is a descriptor that summarizes the attributes of God” (38). In a wonder of grace, He shares His glory with humans—not all humans, but only those in union with Christ Jesus. “The startling biblical truth is that this [glorious] God shares his glory with us” (14).

Abundantly referenced, the book quotes a magnificent description of the coming glory of the Christian by

a little known French Protestant named Simon Goulart (1543-1628).

The eternal and blessed life with God in heaven, accompanied by rest and unspeakable glory, is the goal of the faith of Christians. This is the harbor of their hope, the refuge of all their desires, the crown of their consolation that they will certainly enjoy, having escaped from the travails of this miserable and fleeting earthly life, indeed from death itself. They will receive in heaven...glorified bodies, healed of all evils, no longer afflicted by sin, ignorance, errors, illness, sadness, worry, fear, anguish, or enemies. They will be delivered from all pain and suffering. They will enjoy fully and completely the Lord their God, the fountain and inexhaustible treasure of all good things, who will pour out on them all his goodness, his infinite joy, with which he will satisfy all their thoughts and desires.... The eternal Father will disclose his burning and unspeakable love for them.... This is the goal on which our gaze should be fixed throughout our earthly pilgrimage.... This is the home that we long for, amidst the banishments, the weariness, the dangerous fears of this valley of misery and the shadow of death...(93, 94).

Herman Bavinck receives his due in this exposition of glory.

Abraham Kuyper influences the author to speculate that the impressive cultural achievements of mankind, appropriately purified, will enhance the new world (100).

A short review does not imply a work of limited worth. The book is a rare study of a vitally important truth of the gospel and of salvation. The Christian is called to live to the glory of God. His present honor is his beginning to possess the glory of God in Jesus Christ by the Spirit. His motivation in all his Christian life is one day fully to share in this glory.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express our Christian sympathy to Steven and Terri De Vries, Erika and Bryan Kiel and children, and Matt and Kalista De Vries and children in the death of **Marvin DeVries**, a father, grandfather, and great grandfather. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:2).

Rev. D. Lee, President

Tom Verbeek, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Consistory and the congregation of Edgerton PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Irene Gunnink in the loss of her husband; Shela Gunnink, Jeff Gunnink, Dan Gunnink, and Jill Fennema and their families in the loss of their father and grandfather, **Mr. Glenn (Corky) Gunnink**. May they find comfort in God's Word: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Matthew DeBoer, President

Chester Hunter, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express our Christian sympathy to Sarah and Doug Vlietstra and their children Caleb and Emma in the death of Sarah's father, **Glenn (Corky) Gunnink**. "For this God is our, God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death" (Psalm 48:14).

Rev. D. Lee, President

Tom Verbeek, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express our Christian sympathy to Doug and Sarah Vlietstra and their children Caleb and Emma in the death of fellow member and Doug's father **Clarence Vlietstra**. "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believeth thou this?" (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. D. Lee, President

Tom Verbeek, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Consistory and the congregation of Edgerton PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to the Bleyenbergh family of our congregation, following the passing of their brother, brother-in-law, and uncle, **Mr. Arvin Bleyenbergh**. May they find comfort in God's Word, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Matt DeBoer, President

Chester Hunter, Clerk

Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving to our heavenly Father, we honor our parents **Gerald and Bonnie Kuiper** as they celebrate their 60th anniversary on January 24, 2023. Our God has faithfully been with them throughout the years of their marriage, and we have been greatly blessed to be part of their family. Our prayer is that God may continue to sustain and bless them. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them" (Psalm 103:17, 18).

Jerry and Beth Kuiper

Doug and Pam Dyksra

Jim and Karen Daling

Matt and Tami Kuiper

Tim and Annette Kuiper

Andy and Kim Kuiper

David and Kelly Kuiper

24 grandchildren

2 great-grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan

Announcements continued

Teacher needed

Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI is accepting applications from members of the Protestant Reformed Churches for teaching positions in the 2023-24 school year. There is a particular need in the areas of English, Social Studies, Health, and Physical Education but applications will be accepted from those with secondary certification in other subject areas. Those who are interested in these positions are encouraged to contact Mr. Rick Noorman, Administrator at ricknoorman@gmail.com or call 616-453-5048 or Mr. John DeVries, Education Committee, at westmichiganrealestate@gmail.com for more information.



Coming March 2023

rfpa.org

Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2023-2024 academic year should make application at the March 16, 2023 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

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

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 16 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

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

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

Classis West

Classis West will meet in regular session on Wednesday, March 1, 2023, at 8:30 A.M., in the Lynden Protestant Reformed Church, Lynden, Washington. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by January 30, 2023. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Lynden's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk