

# The Standard Bearer

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## Take no thought for your life

Rev. Matthew DeBoer

## My heart desires thy peace: Confronting spousal abuse

Prof. Brian Huizinga

## Redemption

Rev. Joseph Holstege

## The Belgic Confession and missions

Rev. Daniel Kleyn

## A prayer for pastors

Rev. William Langerak



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## Meditation

Rev. Matthew DeBoer, pastor of Edgerton PRC in Edgerton, Minnesota

# Take no thought for your life

**Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?...**

**Matthew 6:25-32**

The text speaks of something we all struggle with, worry. We get anxious about many things, including our physical needs. In Matthew 6:25, Jesus tells us not to worry, saying, “Take no thought for your life.” As planting season begins, may this passage remind us to trust in our heavenly Father to supply our needs and lead us to pray more and more.

### Our great struggle

To take thought for your life is to worry about your earthly existence. To live, we need food, drink, and clothing, things that verse 25 mentions. To take thought for your life is to be anxious about getting those things that you need to survive.

In this text Jesus implies that His disciples then, and we His children today, often do worry. He states, “And why take ye thought for raiment?” (v. 28). The future is uncertain to us, and we easily become anxious about our daily needs being met. Often, worry begins with a “what if” question. Older people might worry, “*What if I still do not have enough money to retire next year? I cannot work much longer, but I still have all these medical expenses to pay.*” Parents might worry, “*What if tuition or the church budget increases? What if I lose my job?*” Young people might think, “*What if I do not perform well enough on this test to get into college and acquire the scholarships I need?*” Or, “*What if I do not get a good enough paying job in my desired field?*”

In Matthew 6, Jesus especially speaks of a worry concerning things we need, but we also sometimes worry about obtaining things we do not need but simply want to have. Many of us have a high standard of living today. In the midst of financial difficulties, we can become anxious that we will have to move out of the nice house for which we worked hard, or worry that we will not be able to afford the annual trip that the family anticipates.

When we worry, Satan rejoices, because worrying is a

sin that leads to many other sins. Worry has long tentacles that reach into many other parts of our lives. One of the main sins it leads to is covetousness. Parents, being worried about paying tuition, can think, “I wish I had money like the neighbors.” Worry also breeds anger and irritability. Imagine a father looking at the checkbook and thinking, “There is no way we will be able to pay all this tuition.” He is bothered. He is not in control. Just then, his son comes in and asks about getting a certain toy and he snaps, “No,” and begins to rant. Worry can also lead to picking up shifts on the Sabbath Day. It may result in a student cheating on a test. When we worry, Satan claps.

Worry is a problem for us, and the text gives us the root of the problem: little faith. After talking about worry over clothing in verses 28-29, Jesus says in verse 30, “Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?”

What is “little faith?” Faith is a bond by which we, God’s people, are united to Christ. Faith becomes an activity in the child of God. Being united to Christ, we believe God’s Word. We believe God is Almighty and thus able to give us all we need physically and spiritually. We believe He is our Father for Jesus’ sake and willing to give us all we need. Sometimes, however, we have “little faith,” meaning that we are not strong in our activity of faith. We still have faith. We are still connected to Christ, and that connection never breaks. Yet, we are small in our belief that God’s Word is true. We are little in our trust in God the Father Almighty to supply all our needs. We face a huge medical expense and we begin to doubt God, thinking, “*What if I will not have enough?*”

When we have little faith, we worry. We worry about getting necessities. We worry about getting things that are not necessities, failing to trust that God knows best what we need and provides what we need. When we have little faith, the Devil smiles.

Christ tells us that the root of our anxiety is little faith, and we ought to be thankful that He makes this known. If you are feeling sick, you want to get to the root of the problem. The problem cannot be fixed until the doctor gets to the root of the issue. The Great Phy-

sician has brought us to the root of our worrying, and He leads us in combating it.

### **Our difficult calling**

When calling us to take no thought for our lives, Jesus gives several reasons why we must not worry about receiving the things we need. What He says shows how foolish worrying is.

First, Christ teaches that since God gives us life and a body, He certainly can and will provide necessary food and clothing. Verse 25 says, “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” God provides us with the great gifts of life and a body. Thus, He surely can and will give us the lesser gifts, food and drink, for as long as He has planned for us to live here on earth.

Second, Christ instructs that if God provides for birds and grass, He certainly will provide for us, His precious children. Verse 26 says, “Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Are ye not much better than they?” The birds do not have our advantages. They cannot plant crops in a field and then store food in barns or freezers. Yet, they do not worry about where their next meal will come from. The Lord provides for them. In verses 28-30, Jesus points to the grass, indicating that we do not see the lilies of the field making extra effort to have beautiful clothes, but God clothes them so that they look more glorious than King Solomon in all his royal attire. Birds and grass are of small value. Birds are not God’s children. Grass and lilies are around for a short time, and then serve as fuel for an oven (v. 30). In contrast to birds and grass, we are God’s sons and daughters. Jesus calls God our heavenly Father (v. 26). By nature, Satan is the father of us sinners, but God sent His only begotten Son to pay for our sins so that we might be in His holy family. If God provides for birds and grass, which are of small value, how much more will He care for you, His blood-bought sons and daughters?

Third, regarding the folly of worrying, Jesus teaches that it is a waste of time and energy. Verse 27 says, “Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature?” Can you make yourself taller by worrying? Of course, not! Worrying achieves nothing. Often, when we get anxious, we think of many possible outcomes that will never occur, and even if they do happen, there is nothing we can do about it. Worrying only brings misery.

Last, Jesus explains in verse 32 that we must not worry because God knows our needs and is able and willing to provide as our heavenly Father. He says, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these

things.” God knows every need of every one of His children at every moment. Jesus calls Him “heavenly” to remind us that He is far above us earthly creatures in power, and thus has the strength to give us what He knows we need. Christ adds the term “Father” to remind us that He not only can supply our every need, but He wills to do so.

Seeing the truth about worry, we must not take thought for our lives, but instead trust in our Father. We are not to limit Him like the Israelites did when wandering through the wilderness, thinking, “Our problems are too great!” When somebody comes to us during our struggles and reminds us that God will provide, we must not say to ourselves, “They do not really know my situation.” Instead, in the midst of difficult circumstances and temptations to worry, we ought to reflect on the birds and lilies, and say to ourselves, “Our heavenly Father feeds and clothes them, and are not we much better than they?” We ought to remind ourselves, “Worry is a waste of time!” We must remember that God is our heavenly Father who knows our needs and is able and willing to provide for us for Jesus’ sake. And so we must trust in Him.

A beautiful way to express trust in God for all our needs is by praying that He would provide. May we pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” regularly. May we pray this petition when we sit down for a meal and whenever we start to feel anxious.

Prayer is a wonderful gift. God gives us what we need in the way of prayer. He has determined in eternity to supply all our needs. He has determined to provide our needs in the way of us asking for His provision. He also calms our fears as we pray. We know this from experience. We pray, “Heavenly Father, give us this day what we need,” and we experience peace. That name, “heavenly Father,” reminds us that He is able and willing to provide!

### **Our only strength**

We will never trust in the Lord and pray in our own strength. Left to ourselves, we will worry. Farmers will become anxious about their crops. All of us will worry about having enough and even worry about having things we do not need.

We “take no thought” for our lives only by God’s power. He is our “heavenly Father.” By Christ’s Spirit, He strengthens us, His children He sees in Christ, to trust in Him to supply all our needs. He moves us to trust in Him more and more through the Word. By His might, let us take no thought for our lives, but instead look to Him, regularly praying, “Heavenly Father, supply our needs.”



## 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: Confronting spousal abuse

If we desire peace in the church, then we desire peace in our homes, for the church is made up of our homes. That is, the church is like a big square, made up of many smaller squares representing our homes. In some of those homes live single individuals, whether younger saints or older ones. In other of those homes live friends, roommates. However, in most of those homes live a man and his wife, and usually children as well. How can there be peace in the church—the big square, if there is war in our homes—the smaller squares?

If peace in the church means that brethren dwell in blessed accord as they walk together in the Lord's way of truth and holiness, then the husband and wife must also walk in that way in their marriage and home. One of the most disturbing attacks against the holiness and unity of the home today is what has come to be called "spousal abuse," or "domestic abuse," or even "intimate partner violence." The reality of spousal abuse is no new thing, but an old evil of unholy war in the home. Spousal abuse seems to be more prevalent today than ever, or at least, it is being acknowledged as a problem, reported, exposed, and addressed today more than ever before. Our desire for peace in the church must include a fervent desire for God's grace to make us faithful in confronting spousal abuse.

### The problem

Spousal abuse is a problem. I do not employ the noun "problem" in its weakest sense, in which case one might think of a petty annoyance like a chattering wiper blade or an unresponsive key on a laptop keyboard. Rather, I use the term "problem" in the weightiest sense of *sin*. Spousal abuse is sin against God and the neighbor. It is an inexcusable pattern of murderous behavior in which the abuser, as a self-serving and controlling oppressor, intentionally perpetrates many forms of violence against the spouse. Therefore, spousal abuse is a very serious problem that must be detested, confronted, and rooted out. Our prayer is that where this sin-problem is manifested, God Himself will transform the abuser's heart and life by a wonder of grace, and then cause the miserable marriage to flourish.

Spousal abuse is a male problem. Spousal abuse is not perpetrated exclusively by males. There is such a thing as a controlling, manipulative, deceptive, and demeaning wife who may not be as ruthless, bloody, and overtly immoral as Jezebel of old but still possesses her spirit. Marriage to such a woman is not bliss but misery. Nevertheless, both in the broader culture and in the church, spousal abuse is mainly a male problem. Usually it is the man who abuses his wife.

Spousal abuse is a church problem. That is to say, spousal abuse, like sexual abuse, is not only a problem up and down our city streets, but up and down too many of our church pews. Too many women in the church (and *one* is too many) are subjected to treachery at the hands of a husband who publicly promised to love and maintain his wife as long as they both shall live. Indeed, we live in perilous times in which "men," even men of the *church*, "shall be lovers of their own selves" (II Tim. 3:2) so that instead of nourishing and cherishing their wives in love, they despise and oppress this good gift from God.

Spousal abuse is a deceptive problem. What you usually *see* is a pious-looking man who gives friendly greetings and hearty hand-shakes, and can hold a good theological conversation. But that is not what you *get* in his heart and home. In his home there may be yelling, screaming, violent outbursts, pushing, shoving, slapping, grabbing, degrading insults, ridicule, forced participation in unwanted acts, and perhaps even threats with a loaded handgun. Yet, what makes spousal abuse such a *deceptive* problem is that it exists across a spectrum and consists of so much more than such overt elements. It is much more complex and sometimes subtle. In the home and marriage there is a relentless drive for control and many tactics to obtain and maintain control. There is manipulation, intimidation, punishment by 'silent treatment,' constant blame-shifting, guilt-trips, humiliation, tightly restricted Internet or cell phone use, isolation from friends and family who are sources of support, and the leveraging of children to form a coalition of support around their father. One or all of the following are often present as well: por-

nography, drunkenness, and drugs. Then all the way down in the stone-cold heart are found idolatry, pride, a sense of entitlement, selfishness, and an insatiable desire to maintain the control obtained. You see, in spousal abuse, you get much more than what you first see.

Spousal abuse is a heart problem in the abuser. The abuser will deflect blame. When he is held accountable for his sinful behavior, he will blame his environment or his circumstances, but chiefly he will blame his wife and claim she is responsible for his violent behavior. In an abusive relationship what must be targeted and what must change is the man, and not merely his behavior, but his heart.

Spousal abuse in the church is a problem that is particularly provoking to God because it projects great wickedness on His Christ. God designed marriage to be an intimate one-flesh relationship of love that pictures in a dim way Christ's love for His bride, the church. In marriage, the husband must be a man of understanding who gives honor to his wife as the weaker vessel, and who reflects the loving headship, sacrificial service, wise leadership, abiding faithfulness, and tender consolation of Christ. Our wives should see Christ in us, daily. It is bad enough that all of us husbands miss that high mark, daily. We need our Savior's blood and Spirit. But it is even worse when the man who is supposed to picture Christ does just the opposite of Christ. Would Christ come and murder one of the women for whom He died? Yet, that is the picture of Christ that an abuser paints in his home, over the course of time, and with greater clarity and definition. He who is supposed to reflect the unmerited and tender love of Christ instead shows murderous hatred. What a horrible and terrifying distortion of the gospel!

## The response

Our response to spousal abuse must be to look up to the God of all grace. We need God. Without God, all our efforts are vanity, and in our folly we will turn big problems into bigger ones. When the Spirit gives you and me a desire for Jerusalem's peace, that same Spirit also gives us an earnest desire for God's grace so that we can be faithful in this daunting, wretched, and sensitive matter of spousal abuse.

Abusers need the grace of godly sorrow that works repentance to salvation. Victims need the grace of God's fatherly countenance shining upon them. We *all* need grace. We need grace to learn about this sin so that we know what we are confronting. We need grace to preach and teach against it in the service of teaching true, Christ-like marital love. We need grace to humble ourselves in examining our own hearts and lives. We

need grace to call abusers to genuine repentance and to remove them from the church through Christian discipline if necessary. We need grace to love, support, and protect the distressed women who are victims of this sin, including the children of their troubled homes. We need grace to provide victims with guidance in what a God-pleasing, biblically faithful life looks like in what is presently a miserable marriage relationship. We need grace to keep supporting and praying for our officebearers as they face tremendous challenges in these difficult cases. We need grace to be more faithful in rearing our children and preparing them for a God-glorifying marriage.

While all of these points could be developed, I want to call special attention to two matters specifically. First, we need to be prepared and well informed so that we can confront spousal abuse in a biblically faithful way when it appears. We need a level of education, for standing behind good, intentional action is always knowledge and understanding. We have resources today as never before as this terrible subject is coming to light and being studied. Speeches have been given, and articles and books have been written that are helpful for understanding such things as the dynamics of abuse and the trauma it inflicts, what a proper Christian response to this evil looks like, and how to provide care for victims.<sup>1</sup> Others have navigated these dark and treacherous waters of spousal abuse, and have even made mistakes and learned from them. Now we can learn from those who have gone before us as we examine all things prayerfully in the light of Scripture and our confessions, seeking to be faithful to God.

Church members, and officebearers in particular, must be equipped to identify an abusive relationship so that they know how to deal with the abusive husband and how to help the weary wife who has been battered by an array of oppressive words and actions, and reduced to a spiritual skeleton with little flesh and life remaining. Often the wife is disoriented, and does not even fully understand her situation and how tightly her husband has control of her. It would be good for elders if they did not put off reading and studying until they have a concrete case, but to read and study now. With knowledge we will be more prepared, and may even be able to see evidences of the domineering oppression to which we were previously blind.

In the past year or so, I have been struck by something as I have preached around in various churches. While sitting in the consistory room with the elders

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<sup>1</sup> One can consult the website [www.havenofmercypr.org](http://www.havenofmercypr.org) for a compilation of resources dealing with sexual and spousal abuse.

and deacons prior to the worship service, I have noticed something I do not recall seeing before. In several churches, I have seen books on sexual and spousal abuse sitting on the consistory room table. This tells me our men are taking this problem to heart and seeking to learn together.

Second, may this great evil of spousal abuse press upon us more deeply our solemn calling toward the children God has given to us. Let us redouble our efforts in training them diligently in God's way of marriage, and even more fundamentally, in God's way of personal godliness, so that when they grow old and marry, they will not depart from that way and be abusive. As if the calling to fulfill our baptismal vows were not serious and urgent enough! Altogether apart from the reality of spousal abuse, training our covenant children is our solemn calling from *God!* This is our part in the covenant! This is the proof of our love for God! This is the grateful life unto which Christ has saved us and for which He equips us by His Spirit! This is our enormous labor of love for our children in and over against a godless world! This is our privilege for only a little while when our sons and daughters are young! Yet, the present evil of spousal abuse makes this calling even more urgent.

For the peace and unity of the church, let us beseech God for His grace so that we may have sons who will be godly men, loving husbands, wise fathers, and faithful friends—not abusers. God forbid, but should we ever have a son who grows up to look like the tyrant Satan and not our gracious Lord, let the blame be with him, and not us because we failed to teach him. May God make us faithful and then graciously bless our efforts for Christ's sake, so that, as we walk in the way of faithfulness, we may be spared all this grief and sorrow and instead see our children in happy and holy marriages that reflect *the* marriage.

The reality of spousal abuse should make every God-fearing father think more carefully about the example he is giving to his children in how to treat fe-

males, particularly a girlfriend and wife. Let us be committed to being better examples to our sons, not merely by what we avoid, but particularly by being a positive reflection of the love and holiness of God in Christ.

Then in all our instruction in the church, home, and school, there are many angles from which to approach the nurturing of our children. Think and pray about the passages found below, and how to explain and apply them carefully and practically to children and young people, so that they will be prepared for a holy life in God's covenant, and, if God wills, prepared to be godly spouses in marriage. Always remember to aim at their heart, and to get to the heart of the gospel. May Christ the King of the church give us what we need, little square by little square.

- Marriage passages such as Ephesians 5:22-33.
- The Family Psalms (127-128).
- I Corinthians 13 and the description of true love.
- Romans 1:29-32 as a catalogue of sins to detest and put off.
- The Psalms and owning up to our own personal sins (Ps. 32, 51).
- Galatians 5:16-26 and the works of the flesh v. the fruits of the Spirit.
- Passages like Exodus 34:6-7 declaring the character of God.
- Matthew 5-7 and the characteristics of the citizens of Jesus' kingdom.
- Passages like Philippians 2:1-8 revealing the mind of Christ.
- Descriptions of God's church and love for her in the Psalter, such as #s 134, 237, 349, 368, 379.
- Lord's Days 34-44 of the Heidelberg Catechism on the Ten Commandments.
- Qualifications for holding church office (I Tim. 3:1ff., Titus 1:6-9).

## Correction

A reader raised a question with me about a statement in my January 15, 2023 *Standard Bearer* article, the fifth installment in *Antinomians? Without a Doubt*. The statement in question concerns my quote and interpretation of what Calvin says in his commentary on Zechariah 8:15-16. The quote from Calvin reads:

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 to obedience by his Spirit (5:216).

My commentary on Calvin's statement was: "Our repentance anticipates God's mercy," that is,

God's mercy to forgive our sins follows upon our repentance.

It appeared to this reader that Calvin says that our repentance *does not* anticipate God's mercy, while my commentary indicated that according to Calvin our repentance *does* anticipate God's mercy. Calvin's statement that "[o]ur repentance anticipates God's mercy" should not have been used to support what I wrote, since Calvin appears to be saying that "[o]ur repentance anticipates God's mercy" is an incorrect way to express the relationship between our repentance and God's mercy.

I checked my notes and outline of the article. For some reason, when writing the article, I misconstrued my notes and should have re-read the quote. What I

intended to focus on was the first part of the quote, that God cannot be intreated by us except we begin to repent. That is the point, too, of my bracketed statement which underscores the "cannot," that "God *cannot* be intreated by us, except we begin to repent." And then I intended to say something to the effect that our repentance does not merit forgiveness, for, as Calvin goes on to say, our repentance does not anticipate God's mercy as though it did merit God's forgiveness.

Lesson learned: stick to my notes and outline!

Thanks to the brother for bringing this to my attention and for giving me the opportunity to correct my mistake.

—Prof. R. Cammenga



## Search the Scriptures

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

### Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith (9)

## Five woes against Babylon (cont.)

Previous article in this series: March 1, 2023, p. 250.

### Habakkuk 2:5-20

In the last article we looked at Habakkuk's third woe against Babylon (2:12-14) and saw that though Babylon was just coming to power and would soon dominate the nations, its might and conquests were all vanity: "Behold, is it not of the LORD of hosts that the people shall labour in the very fire, and the people shall weary themselves for very vanity?" All the labor of their conquests, their building projects, their political system were put forth in the middle of the fires that would destroy them, their city and their kingdom, and they only wearied themselves with all they accomplished. So the vanity of Babylon's accomplishments, and of all human accomplishments is evident. Nothing is left of great Babylon but a few mounds where some clay bricks and an occasional treasure are excavated by archaeologists.

Their accomplishments were also vain because God's kingdom was coming and would endure forever: "For the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea" (Hab. 2:14). The stone cut out without hands would break in pieces and destroy the iron, the clay, the brass, the silver, and the gold and would become a great mountain that

would fill the whole earth (Dan. 2:31-45). Worse for them, Babylon's might and glory would be used by God for the coming of His kingdom.

The Jews of Habakkuk's time would see the coming of God's kingdom when those who knew the Lord returned from captivity, when the world also saw that God was the true God, the God of His people. There would be a further fulfillment of Habakkuk's prophecy in the subsequent centuries with the dispersion of Judaism through the known world. The establishment of synagogues, the translation of the Old Testament into Greek, and the conversion of many Gentiles to Judaism (proselytes) would begin to fill the earth with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD.

This prophecy continues to be fulfilled in the spread of the gospel to all nations: "For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." It will have its final fulfillment in the new heavens and earth when the present nations will be destroyed and we shall see God face to face in the face of Jesus Christ and know even as we are known (I Cor. 13:12). The third woe, then, is like the fifth, for it looks ahead not just to Babylon's



destruction but to that notable day when the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ and He reigns forever (Rev. 11:15).

Thus Babylon's attainments would be for the coming of God's eternal kingdom. God would use Babylon to chastise and purify His people and to reestablish His kingdom, first in Judah, then in all nations of the world, and finally in the new heavens and earth.

Those who look for a fulfillment of Habakkuk 2:14 in a future millennial kingdom are wrong. An earthly fulfillment of the knowledge of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea would mean that there will be none left who do not know the Lord, none unsaved, and Scripture gives us no reason to believe that will happen short of eternity, though it begins here and now.

The fourth woe (2:15-17) condemns Babylon's drunkenness and fornication. It is notable that drunkenness is mentioned again (cf. 2:5). Most make the passage an allegory or metaphor (cf. also Jer. 51:5). Calvin says,

This is the reason for the metaphor; for the Babylonian king, when he thirsted for the blood of men, and also for wealth and kingdoms, led into the same kind of madness many other kings; for he could not have succeeded except he had allured the favour of many others, and deceived them with vain expectations. As a person who gives himself up to drinking wishes to leave associates, so Habakkuk lays the same thing to the charge of the king of Babylon; for being himself addicted to insatiable avarice, he procured associates to be as it were his guests, and quaffed wine to them, that is, excited their cupidity, that they might join him in his wars; for each hoped for a part of the spoil after victory. Since, then, he had thus blinded many kings, they are said to have been inebriated by him.<sup>1</sup>

In light of Revelation 17 and 18 where Mystery Babylon's drunkenness and fornication are spiritual, there is no reason to disagree with Calvin (17:2, 6; 18:3). Nevertheless, in light of Daniel 5 a literal interpretation is also possible, for Babylon fell to the Persians the very night that her king in his drunken folly had brought out the vessels of God's house to put to his own wicked use.

In Revelation 17 and 18, two chapters we will be examining in another article, the allegory or metaphor goes beyond what Calvin says. The drunkenness is not only physical drunkenness, nor even only the drunkenness of covetousness and lust for power, but Babylon is drunken with the blood of God's people in Judah, her

fornication likewise spiritual, the worshiping of other gods and going after them. The man, then, who stands for Babylon and whom Habakkuk is describing, the man of verse 5, not only obtains his wealth by dishonesty and violence, not only uses his wealth to build his house on high, but fills his house with debauchery. It is almost a rule in history that the greater the house, the greater its wickedness.

The result of Babylon's sins will be shame, described in terms of man stripped naked: "Thou art filled with shame for glory: drink thou also, and let thy foreskin be uncovered" (2:16). And, like a drunken man wallowing in his own vomit, Babylon would vomit up all it swallowed: "And I will punish Bel [Babylon's god, RHH] in Babylon, and I will bring forth out of his mouth that which he hath swallowed up: and the nations shall not flow together any more unto him: yea, the wall of Babylon shall fall" (Jer. 51:44). Babylon will not only be drunken with the blood of God's people but that cup will become in Babylon's hand the cup of the Lord's fury, the cause of her vomiting and nakedness. The God of vengeance would be Babylon's cupbearer to its everlasting shame.

There is no reason to pass over a literal interpretation of the prophet's words, for the Babylonians, led captive by the Persians, would be left naked and covered with their own filth. Nevertheless, that is not the main thing, but rather the words of Revelation 18:5, 6, "For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works: in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double."

Babylon would be punished for its violence, especially its violence against Judah. Most commentators understand verse 17 to be a reference to Judah. The violence of Lebanon, then, is the violence done to Lebanon, and Lebanon and its beasts are a reference to the land of Judah to which Lebanon was the northern entrance, as well as the provider of timber for the house of God and the other houses of Jerusalem. That is Calvin's understanding:

By *Libanus* then we are to understand either Judea or the temple; for Libanus [Lebanon, RHH], as it is well known, was not far from the temple; and it is elsewhere found in the same sense. But if any extends this to the land of Judea, the meaning will be the same; there will be but little or no difference as to the subject that is handled. *Because the violence then of Libanus shall overwhelm thee.*<sup>2</sup>

1 *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 113.

2 *Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, p. 119.

That Lebanon stands for the temple or for the land of Judah is not strange. Isaiah 37:4 and Jeremiah 22:6, 23 use the same language, and it is difficult to understand why else Lebanon would be mentioned here. Guilty of violence against God's people, Babylon—land, city and citizens—would suffer accordingly.

The fifth and final woe, verses 18-20, is in a different format than the others and begins not with woe, but with a question about idolatry: "What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?" The question is put in an unusual way. The Word of God does not ask whether the worshiper of idols profits from his idolatry but whether the image itself profits, the graven image from the fact that someone made it, and the molten image, though a teacher of lies, that men trust in it. The question is put that way to show that idols are dumb: "Behold, it is laid over with gold and silver, and there is no breath at all in the midst of it" (2:19). Psalm 115 describes this also: "They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat" (vv. 5-7).

No profit in idolatry, yet Babylon was guilty of gross idolatry and Nebuchadnezzar's great image of God was only a small part of his idolatry. He was named for one of his gods as was Belshazzar after him, the gods mentioned in Isaiah 46:1, "Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, their idols were upon the beasts, and upon the cattle: your carriages were heavy loaden; they are a burden to the weary beast." As he admitted, Daniel too had been renamed for one of his idols; Daniel "whose name was Belteshazzar, according to the name of my god" (Dan. 4:8).

The night that Babylon was conquered by the Persians, Belshazzar showed the truth of what the Word of God had prophesied through Habakkuk: "Then they brought the golden vessels that were taken out of the temple of the house of God which was at Jerusalem; and the king, and his princes, his wives, and his concubines, drank in them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold, and of silver, of brass, of iron, of wood, and of stone" (Dan. 5:3, 4).

That night Belshazzar and his kingdom showed that the idols they worshiped and in which they trusted were of no help or profit, for "in that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old" (Dan. 5:30, 31). He also learned that night,

though the lesson was brief and fatal, that "the LORD is in his holy temple." He had it written on the walls of his palace by the fingers of man's hand, "MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (Dan. 5:26-28).

In interpreting the handwriting on Belshazzar's wall, Daniel reminded him of how his father had learned the truth that the most High rules in the kingdoms of men, that the LORD is in His holy temple:

O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou, and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified (Dan. 5:18-23).

Psalm 115:4-11 sum up the matter for us:

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of men's hands. They have mouths, but they speak not: eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not: They have hands, but they handle not: feet have they, but they walk not: neither speak they through their throat. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them. O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. O house of Aaron, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield. Ye that fear the LORD, trust in the LORD: he is their help and their shield.

"The LORD is in his holy temple indeed!"



## A word fitly spoken

Rev. Joseph Holstege, pastor of Zion PRC in Jenison, Michigan

# Redemption

It may be one of the most misused words in the English language. An athlete has an amazing comeback, though everyone said his sporting days were over. A singer comes out with a new hit single, long after she was written off as old news. A CEO climbs back to the top after suffering a setback. And the news headlines flash—so-and-so has ‘redeemed’ himself! So goes the legacy of a foundational concept in the Christian faith when it is subjected to the eroding winds of pop-culture.

The basic flaw in the popular usage of this term is the misidentification of what the word actually means. Redemption is not mere recovery after a setback. Redemption is not regaining popularity after having lost it. Redemption is the paying of a fee.

All first-time parents in Israel went through the ritual of redemption, if their baby was a boy. Firstborn sons belonged to the Lord, who spared their lives in the Passover. “Therefore,” the fathers of Israel were taught to say, “I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem” (Ex. 13:15). This redemption was the payment of five shekels to exempt the firstborn sons from serving like the Levites, which fee was paid to Moses, who “gave the money of them that were redeemed unto Aaron and to his sons, according to the word of the LORD” (Num. 3:51).

A redemption fee could also be paid to buy back the land of inheritance, if that land was lost in hard times. The plot of land in Canaan was much more than personal property. It was the portion of an Israelite family in the Lord and His covenant. So, if your brother has lost part of his portion, “ye shall grant a redemption for the land” (Lev. 25:24). If the brother is too poor to make the payment himself, “and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold” (Lev. 25:25).

If that law sounds familiar to you, it is probably because it is the central plot device in the book of Ruth. That story beautifully illustrates how the effects of redemption could extend far beyond the dirt of Elimelech’s plot of land. The willingness of Boaz to redeem the land was his willingness to redeem

Ruth as his wife (Ruth 4:4, 6, 9, 10). And the redemption of Ruth was the redemption of Naomi, who was now no longer bitter Mara (Ruth 1:20), but a smiling grandmother to a child not of her flesh and blood (Ruth 4:16). And that child, of course, is the ancestor of Jesus Christ, “who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption” (I Cor. 1:30; also, Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 18).

In the fullness of time, He came from God, to take the form of a servant, to live under the law, “to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal. 4:5). Those who were watching knew Him, though He appeared no different from other children, for they were those “who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38). The price of redemption he paid was far more than a few shekels, and cannot be measured in silver and gold (HC, Q&A 34). It is rather “through his blood” that “we have redemption” (Eph. 1:7; Col. 1:14) “that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance” (Heb. 9:15).

The high price of redemption is due to the terrible cost of sin. It is always out of the depths of the knowledge of sin that the child of God cries. But let him cry in hope, “for with the LORD there is mercy, and with him is plenteous redemption. And he shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities” (Ps. 130:7, 8). Let him cry also in confidence, knowing the will of God in the cross of Jesus is “effectually [to] redeem out of every people, tribe, nation, and language all those, and those only, who were from eternity chosen to salvation and given to Him by the Father” (Canons of Dordt, II, 8). Let him cry as an adult, or even as a little child, who has been baptized into the church, “since redemption from sin by the blood of Christ...is promised to them no less than to the adult” (HC, Q&A 74).

Such a payment accomplishes far more than release from the debt of sin, however. Its effects ultimately are the extension of peace like a river over the whole world. The creature that now groans and travails under the

curse waits earnestly for the day of deliverance. “And not only they, but...we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for...the redemption of our body” (Rom. 8:23). “Being justified freely...through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” we have peace with God in our souls today (Rom. 3:24, 5:1). But with Job we also look death in the face and confess, “I know that my redeemer liveth...and...in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:25, 26).

All this ought to tell us what it is that this payment purchases. It purchases our souls from the curse of death due to sin (Ps. 49: 8). It obtains for us the right to live as sons and daughters of the most high God in His covenant of grace (Ps. 111:9). It is the foundation of the church, which is called steadfastly to love and faithfully to serve their Redeemer, “who as a bridegroom for

his bride, laid down his life for them upon the cross” (Canons II, 9). It is the ground of all our comfort in life and death, “that I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Savior Jesus Christ” (HC, Q&A 1).

So, Christian, live boldly for the Lord, “who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Tit. 2:14). “And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption” (Eph. 4:30). When you walk through the waters, do not be concerned about the churning waves. When you pass through the fire, do not be alarmed by the burning flames. “Fear not,” says your God, “for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine” (Is. 43:1).



## Believing and confessing

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, rector and professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

# Of Jesus Christ, true God and man, the only Savior of the world

## (Second Helvetic Confession, 11b)

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2023, p. 155.

### The Divine Nature of Christ Is Not Passible, and the Human Nature Is Not Everywhere.

Therefore, we do not in any way teach that the divine nature in Christ has suffered or that Christ according to His human nature is still in this world and thus is everywhere. For neither do we think or teach that the body of Christ ceased to be a true body after His glorification, or was deified, and deified in such a way that it laid aside its properties as regards body and soul, and changed entirely into a divine nature and began to be merely one substance.

Bullinger’s purpose in this eleventh chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) is to state and defend biblical, Reformed Christology, that is, the true doctrine concerning Jesus Christ, “the only Savior of the world.” In this paragraph and the two that follow, he is particularly concerned to *distinguish* clearly between the divine and human natures—to warn against their confusion. The truth that Jesus Christ is the Savior

of the world depends on the truth that He is true God and true man. There is the closest possible connection between who the Savior is and what He does. If He is not “true God”—*fully* God—and at the same time “true man”—*fully* man—neither can He be “the only Savior of the world.” If He is not fully God, He cannot bear the wrath of God nor deliver us from the power of the Devil—the power of *the Devil!* And if He is not fully man, then He cannot be the representative of us men nor as our substitute endure what we sinful men deserve to endure.

Reformed Christology is anchored in the Christology of the early church. The Christology of the SHC is only a restatement and application of the Christology of the Creed of Chalcedon (AD 451). Bullinger has his eye especially on what is known as the Chalcedonian Definition, that Christ Jesus is “to be acknowledged in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather

the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one person....” Two natures in one person. Two distinct and distinguishable natures united in one person. Two natures that remain two natures, although they are united in the one person of the Son of God.

Therefore, on the one hand, the Reformed “do not in any way teach that the divine nature in Christ has suffered.” This is the Reformed doctrine of God’s *impassibility*, identified by some Reformed theologians as a distinct attribute of God. God cannot endure pain or experience suffering. He cannot experience emotions as humans do, which cause them emotional suffering, such as disappointment, regret, a broken heart, or a change of mind. Scripture does contain anthropopathisms, that is, words and phrases that contain the attribution of human emotions, human feelings, or human passions to God. God is said to repent (Gen. 6:6) and to grieve (Eph. 4:30). In reality, however, God does not repent or grieve as we humans do.

In this paragraph, the SHC applies the impassibility of God to Christ. Since Christ is God, He is not passible in His divine nature. The Son of God suffered *in the human nature*, all His lifetime and especially on the cross. But “we do not in any way teach that the divine nature in Christ has suffered.” The seriousness of such a teaching is that it is fundamentally a denial of the human nature and our Savior’s deity.

At the same time, it is not either the case “that Christ according to His human nature is still in this world and thus is everywhere present.” In this statement, Bullinger is addressing the error of the Lutherans. In order to maintain their distinctive view of the Lord’s Supper and the continued presence of the body and blood of Christ everywhere in the world—the ubiquity of Christ’s human nature—so that Christ’s human nature could be “in, under, and around the bread and the wine of the Lord’s Supper,” the Lutherans taught that at His ascension the human nature of Christ took on divine virtues. This they consider to be part of the glory that Christ received at the time of His exaltation: “Christ according to His human nature is still in this world and thus is everywhere.” Bullinger and the Reformed rejected this false teaching of the Lutherans, charging that this view amounted to the teaching that at the ascension Christ’s human nature was deified and therefore ceased to be a real human nature. No human being is or can be everywhere present. Christ’s human nature was exalted, but it was not deified. This truth is crucial to what is coming in the SHC by way of polemics.

Bullinger’s conclusion? “For neither do we think or teach that the body of Christ ceased to be a true body after His glorification, or was deified, and deified in

such a way that it laid aside its properties as regards body and soul, and changed entirely into a divine nature and began to be merely one substance.” This is biblical and confessional Christology.

#### The sects.

Hence we by no means approve of or accept the strained, confused and obscure subtleties of Schwenkfeldt and of similar sophists with their self-contradictory arguments; neither are we Schwenkfeldians.

Topping the list, in fact the only one on the list of heretics and sects at this point in the SHC, is Kaspar Schwenkfeldt (1489-1561) and the Schwenkfeldians. Schwenkfeldt was born into a wealthy noble family in Silesia during the early Reformation era. At the time, Silesia was primarily under German influence, though in later history it would also come under Polish and Czechoslovakian influence.

Schwenkfeldt was a well-educated man who dabbled as a physician, theologian, writer, naturalist, and preacher. He came to embrace Reformation principles through the influence of Andreas Karlstadt and Thomas Munster. We do not want to judge the man by the company that he kept, as the unbelieving leaders of the Jews condemned Jesus because “he eateth and drinketh with publicans and sinners [harlots]” (Mark 16:11). Nonetheless, Karlstadt and Munster did have a negative influence on Schwenkfeldt, whose movement is classified with the Radical Reformation, and especially the pietistic and spiritualist branch.

Schwenkfeldt was a serious student of the Bible and wrote volumes of meditations, as well as random reflections on Scripture. He was especially distraught over the divisions among the Reformers and attempted to craft a middle way that would settle the Protestant disputes over the sacraments. He corresponded with a number of Reformers, particularly Luther. Luther was cordial in his treatment of Schwenkfeldt and this undoubtedly motivated him to journey to Wittenberg for a face-to-face meeting with the German Reformer. The meeting did not go well. Though similar in certain respects to Luther’s sacramental doctrine, Schwenkfeldt’s view departed from Luther’s teaching at several key points. He left Wittenberg disappointed by Luther’s rejection of his view.

In what he described as a “visitation of God,” the truth of Christ’s presence in the Lord’s Supper was revealed to Schwenkfeldt. He believed that Jesus’ flesh was increasingly divinized during His lifetime. This made it possible for God to resurrect and glorify Jesus

at His own right hand. According to Schwenkfeldt, it is the divinized flesh of Jesus on which the believer feeds in the Lord's Supper. The divinized flesh of Jesus received in the sacrament grows like a grain of mustard seed in the child of God so that daily he is more and more transformed into the image of Christ.

Because of the divisions he saw among Christians, Schwenkfeldt was eventually led to dispense with the administration of the sacrament of the Lord's Supper among his followers. He could take this drastic step because of his view that physical and spiritual things are incompatible. The physical is swallowed up by the spiritual. It is the spiritual, not the physical that matters. His followers did not celebrate the sacrament for centuries after his death.

Schwenkfeldt's basic error was confusion and fusion of Christ's natures. His teaching that the human nature of Christ was divinized contradicts Chalcedonian orthodoxy: "without confusion, without change, without division, without separation." He failed to uphold

the prescription of Chalcedon: "the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union." To be sure, Christ's human nature was exalted, but it was emphatically the *human nature* that was exalted. And even in His exaltation, Christ's human nature remains a human nature, albeit exalted. The human is not and cannot be divinized. The human remains human and the divine remains divine.

After the Thirty Years' War in 1648, the number of Schwenkfeldt's followers diminished. Some eventually found refuge in the lands owned by Count Nicolaus von Zinzendorf (1700-1760), the German pietist and bishop in the Moravian Church. Zinzendorf offered protection and religious toleration for those who fled persecution, including the followers of Schwenkfeldt. Eventually a good number of Schwenkfeldians came to America and settled in the lands owned by William Penn (1644-1718), the advocate of religious freedom and a vocal opponent of slavery. There are still today a handful of surviving Schwenkfelder congregations in Pennsylvania.



## Go ye into all the world

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# The Belgic Confession and missions (3)

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2022, p. 135.

The Belgic Confession has been accused of being irrelevant for or even detrimental to mission work. But this is not true. As we noticed in our previous articles, the creed's significance for missions is evident from the history that surrounded its writing. One of the reasons it was produced and published was so that it might give a sound witness to the earthly rulers of that day (who were Roman Catholic), as well as to the Roman Catholic Church itself, of the truths of the gospel. On account of the apostate condition of the Romish Church and of Roman Catholic rulers, the Reformers realized they were surrounded by opportunities for mission work. The Belgic Confession was intended and used in order to proclaim and spread God's truth. This in itself gives it a missionary flavor.

However, the missionary flavor and character of the

Belgic Confession is also evident from the actual content of the creed. Instead, therefore, of being detrimental to missions, the creed aids and guides the church in its missionary labors. It does so because the creed is a faithful summary of Scripture, which speaks of missions. Thus, the content of the creed is also missionary in character. There are many instances of this throughout the Belgic Confession, both explicit and implicit. We will now consider some of them.

## Article 2: By what means God is made known unto us

Although God reveals Himself to all men by means of His "creation, preservation and government of the universe," that revelation of God is insufficient for

salvation. God therefore “makes Himself more clearly and fully known to us by His holy and divine Word.” This revelation of God is indispensable for salvation. The written Word sets forth all that is “necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.” God gives in Scripture all that the church needs in order to know God rightly. The Scripture contains the saving revelation of God. It contains what one must know and believe unto salvation.

As we know from Scripture, and as is also stated in Article 24 of the Belgic Confession, in order for the elect to come to a saving faith in Christ, the written Word of God must be preached. It is the preaching of the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). Thus, the fact that Article 2 mentions the necessity of the Word for our salvation means, in the context of the rest of the creed, that the article also has in view the teaching of that written Word. This in turn implies the necessity of preaching.

The necessity of the preaching is also implied by the article teaching that there is only one truth and only one way of salvation. The thinking of many today is that the truth can be found in every religion, and that salvation is possible through every kind of religion and belief. But the confession rejects such thinking when it points out that the only saving revelation of God is the revelation He gives in His holy and divine Word. There is no revelation of God and no salvation to be found in any other religion, nor in or through the writings of their leaders. God reveals Himself as our Savior in Christ only through His written and inspired Word.

This implies that the unbelieving world needs to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ as it is contained in the holy and inspired Word of God. And the only way this will happen is through the gospel being taught and preached throughout the world by means of missions.

We see that already in this its second article the Belgic Confession establishes, by implication, the need for the church to be engaged in missions.

### **Article 3: The written Word of God**

### **Article 7: The sufficiency of the holy Scriptures to be the only rule of faith**

The subject of these articles is the doctrine of Scripture. The truth set forth is that the Bible is not the word of men, but the Word of God. We therefore “call such writings holy and divine Scriptures.” No other writings have the same authority or value. Only the Scriptures “fully contain the will of God, and...whatsoever man ought to believe unto salvation is sufficiently taught therein.” Since it is necessary for salvation (as Article 7

points out) that one come to know and believe what the Scriptures contain, then once again the implication is that the Word needs to be proclaimed to all.

It is obvious, therefore, that the “holy and divine Scriptures” must be the content of the preaching. The Word of God must be preached, not the words of men. The preaching is to be governed by what Article 7 mentions, namely, that “it is unlawful for any one, though an apostle, to teach otherwise than we are now taught in the Holy Scriptures.” The preacher and missionary may not “add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God.” The Word (the canonical books listed in Article 4) must always and only be the content of the preaching.

More specifically, the Scriptures contain “the will of God” concerning salvation (Art. 7). The preaching must reflect this. The missionary must preach the will of God, the good news of His purpose to save His church in Christ. He is not to preach the will or words of man, but only the will of God. With a view to salvation, unbelievers must be brought to a knowledge of God’s counsel of salvation as that is contained in and revealed through His Word.

If these Scriptures and the preaching of them is so necessary for salvation, we can also say that the Scriptures need to be made available to people in their own language, and then also proclaimed to them in that language. Without this, those who are the objects of mission work would be unable to understand the Scriptures, and therefore also unable to come to a right and saving knowledge of God and His truth.

These articles concerning Scripture not only indicate the need for mission work, but also show us a few aspects of how mission work ought to be done.

### **Article 10: Jesus Christ is true and eternal God**

The BC’s confession concerning Jesus Christ stands over against the errors of those (both then and still today) who deny His eternal Sonship and divinity. The Confession reasserts the orthodox doctrine that was hammered out by the early New Testament church and which is contained in the Ecumenical Creeds (Nicene, Chalcedon, Athanasian). Jesus Christ is the eternal Son of God, and thus fully divine. He is the “true, eternal, and almighty God, whom we invoke, worship, and serve.”

This has clear implications for mission work. First of all, if these things were not true of Jesus Christ, if He were not divine, the church would not have a message of salvation to proclaim. Jesus Christ must be God’s eternal Son and God Himself in order to be the Mediator and in order to obtain salvation for His church. If

He is not, then the church is void of any good news to proclaim.

Secondly, the content of the gospel and thus the content of the worldwide preaching of that gospel must be the Jesus Christ of the Scriptures. He must be proclaimed as the eternal Son of God and thus as the only Mediator between God and man. Missionary preaching must speak against all those (the cults, and also the Arminians) who have corrupted the truth concerning Jesus Christ. The preaching must declare that only the Christ of the Scriptures saves.

### Article 15: Original sin

This article states that “original sin is extended to all mankind.” Everyone sinned when Adam sinned, and

everyone fell with him. Sin is universal, which means that sin is present in every man, woman, and child in the world. The article even specifies that “infants themselves are infected [with sin] even in their mother’s womb.” By nature (apart from grace), everyone is totally depraved and in bondage to sin.

These doctrines are part of the gospel that must be proclaimed to all mankind. The elect among all nations must hear concerning their natural state and thus of their need of God’s Son as their Savior. With a view to the salvation of the elect, and knowing that they are present in all the world, the reality of universal sin implies the need for universal preaching of the gospel.

(to be continued)



## Strength of youth

Rev. Ryan Barnhill, pastor of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

## Battling the devil (3)

## Preparing for war

Previous article in this series: December 15, 2022, p. 139

Know, young person, that you are in a spiritual warfare in which enemies oppose you and seek your destruction. Sleeping and waking, eating and drinking, sitting and standing, texting and surfing, talking and listening, working and vacationing—in all your life, the battle is real.

Know, too, that one of the foes that watches to ruin the church and all its members is the Devil. He is a wicked spiritual being who is an enemy of God, the church, and every good thing. He is a fallen angel and a murderer. His history goes all the way back to a proud revolt in heaven at the beginning. Both the Old and New Testaments record his evil works. He desires to devour souls. He works in a calculated way to make sure that what he does is as effective as possible, and his plans have deception as their goal.

Now what?

Do you set the *Standard Bearer* on the coffee table and resume your everyday life, little impacted by all of this? Do you say merely, “Nice information here about warfare and the Devil...I learned a few things. Now, what’s for dinner?”

I pray not, young reader.

A respectable Commander-in-Chief of the United States, upon receiving intelligence of threats against the nation, will not clasp his hands behind his head, cross his legs on the oval office desk, and say, “Thanks for the information! What’s next on the agenda for today?” No! He sits up straight, and asks, “How can we *prepare* for this?” And that is the question *you* must ask after reading about this spiritual warfare against the Devil: how can I *prepare*?

The Bible answers this question in Ephesians 6: “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth...and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace” (vv. 14a, 15). These are two *preparatory* pieces of armor for the Christian soldier.

A brief overview of Ephesians 6:10ff. is in order. This section concerns the armor of God. The apostle, in speaking of armor, draws from something in the ancient world that his readers would readily understand: a Roman soldier with physical armor. Ephesians 6, though, does not refer to physical armor, but to spiritual armor for spiritual battle. That armor is described as a com-



plete set in these verses. Also, it is the armor of *God*: it has its source in Him or is from Him: He planned it, prepared it, and provides it. Furthermore, the order given to Christian soldiers is, “Put on the whole armour of God...take unto you the whole armour of God” (vv. 11, 13); “be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might” (v. 10). The reason for putting on the whole armor of God is the reality of warfare against the Devil (v. 11) and his hosts (v. 12). The purpose for putting on the whole armor of God is expressed in verses 11 and 13: “that ye may be able to stand”; “that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.”

As far as the armor goes, some of it is to prepare for war, some of it is for defense, and one piece of it is for offence. This time, we will consider two parts of the armor designed to *prepare* the soldier for battle against the Devil and his hosts: the belt and footwear. Preparation is important! Later in this series, we will study those parts of the armor that relate to defense and offense.

### Belt: Ephesians 6:14a

The word “girt” in Ephesians 6:14 has the meaning of putting around oneself a girdle or belt. The Roman soldier had around his loins, or around the hips, a belt made of tough leather that was usually decorated. This girdle was important because it tucked up the soldier’s free-flowing tunic, so that the tunic would not hinder him during combat. The belt was vital also because it was



foundational for the other parts of armor: both the breastplate and the scabbard for the sword were connected to the belt. The soldier encircled the middle of his body with this belt (girded his loins), and it served as necessary *preparation* for battle.

Drawing from this reality, the apostle is referring in Ephesians 6:14a to the belt that we call truth. Truth is the expression of what is reality. The Old Testament word has the idea of firmness,

certainty: truth is that which is firm or certain. God is truth. Christ is truth. That God is merciful, gracious, good, and just—that is truth. That God has created all things in six, twenty-four-hour days, and also upholds and governs what He has made—that is truth. That Jesus Christ died for those whom the Father gave Him from eternity—that is truth. That Christ arose the third day and the grave is empty—that is truth. In the Old Testament, God revealed this truth, for example, through dreams, visions, and prophets. When Christ was on earth, He spoke and taught truth. Today, we have the truth in written form: the Bible, God’s Word. When this Bible is faithfully proclaimed, that is the preaching of the truth.

So important is this belt (truth), because the one who has it on is “tucked in”—ready for spiritual battle and free to maneuver in an unhindered way. This belt is vital also because it is foundational for the other pieces of spiritual equipment, such as the breastplate of righteousness and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Truth is first, and truth is basic! In sum: the belt (truth) readies the Christian soldier for war!

This belt we put on: “*having your loins girt about with truth*” (v. 14). By nature, we are spiritual look-a-likes of the Devil: darkness-dwelling, deception-loving, and truth-hating people, in bondage to the lie. Of ourselves, we are not a speck different than the world that despises truth and embraces the lie with all its might and being (isn’t the evidence of this in the world all around us?). But Christ was nailed to the tree for us. The Spirit of the crucified and risen Christ, the Spirit of truth, works in us. By the Spirit’s operation, we know, love, and confess the truth. This girding, putting on, or encircling ourselves with the truth is a spiritual activity that is always a fruit of God’s grace working in us.

You gird yourself with the truth in young people’s society. This happens when you faithfully study the material before the meeting and then learn from one another at the meeting. Little, if any, belt-tightening takes place when no one comes prepared and when everyone sits around the table like stone statues. Young people, we pastors know how talkative and energetic you can be: we observe you in hallways and at basketball games. Come to young people’s society prepared and ready to engage the material!

Encircling yourself with truth will occur in your daily devotions. First thing in the morning, don’t fumble around with sleepy fingers for your phone—rather, wake up, and reach *first for your Bible*. Don’t retire to your bedroom so late at night that sleep tugs at your eyes, making meaningful meditation upon Christ’s words of

love almost impossible—rather, *block out time for devotions*. Take time every day to savor and digest the honey-sweet words of Scripture.

Wearing the belt is necessary preparation for battle against the adversary. Satan, remember, works in a calculated way to make sure that what he does is as effective as he can make it, and he aims at deceiving you. *So subtly* he twists the truth. *So slyly* he tempts us to believe lies about marriage, sex, trials we face, God's love, and divinely ordained authority. *So craftily* he tempts us to be one-sided in any given situation, not taking into account all the biblical principles that apply. But having the belt (truth) on, you are prepared for his temptations and attacks. And having this belt on, you stand!

### Footwear: Ephesians 6:15

In Ephesians 6:15, the apostle is again drawing from the idea of a Roman soldier. The soldier's feet were shod (tied or bound under) with a special kind of sandal. Compared to footwear today, you should not think of flip-flops worn to the beach, but rather the thicker sandals we wear with a weaving of straps over and around the foot. The soldier's footwear had tacks studded on the bottom—something like the bottom of soccer cleats, except that the studs at the bottom of the soldier's sandals were made of a harder material like brass. This footwear gave the fighter mobility: just enough flex to move quickly and fight on the battlefield. The sandals also proved essential for traction: the studs dug into the ground, anchoring the soldier during marching or combat. Thus, the footwear was the soldier's readiness to march and fight against the enemy.

The Christian soldier has footwear, too, and Ephesians 6:15 identifies it this way: "And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." That's a loaded phrase! Let's briefly break it down.

*Peace*. Peace is a state of harmony, calm, or serenity. Peace is the absence of warfare. The triune God is a God of peace eternally. Within Him is perfect harmony. God has determined to make His people partakers of this peace. Peace is not something you and God hammer out at a bargaining table. Rather, peace is from God alone: remember, it is the armor of God (Eph. 6:11). The fact that peace is not from us is underscored by the fact of who we are by nature: foes of God, rebels against Him, red-hot in enmity toward Him. That there is peace for us at all is a wonder, and how thankful we ought to be!

*Gospel* of peace. The word "gospel" means good news. The content of the good news is Jesus Christ.

The good news is that the only begotten Son of God assumed flesh, suffered all His life and especially at the cross for elect sinners, arose from the dead, ascended into heaven, and will come back one day to consummate the kingdom. This gospel is the gospel of peace, or the gospel characterized by peace. In what sense?

Upon Christ was loaded the guilt of our sin, and He entered obediently into the depths of God's wrath, suffered all the way to the end, and by His blood has reconciled us to God! We have fellowship with God! And there is a peace, a real serenity, in that. Also, this good news that God has in Christ established peace for His people is something that is *proclaimed in the preaching*. The proclamation of the forgiveness of sins, for the sake of what Christ has done, is at the very heart of the preaching—sitting under this, the believer has the inward peace of being right with God.

*Preparation* of the gospel of peace. This preparation is a preparedness or readiness: preparedness for action in battle; readiness quickly to turn this way and that way and to stand stabilized on the battlefield. This preparedness *comes from* the gospel of peace.

What does this look like in your life?

You have committed a certain sin. You have confessed that transgression to the Lord and He has forgiven you for Christ's sake. But weeks, months, or a couple years later, a sight, smell, or person you talk to reminds you of what you did. Satan seizes the occasion to throw the sin in your face, trying to convince you that it is not forgiven. Having the footwear strapped on, you are ready (a readiness that comes from the gospel of peace) for Satan's accusation, and can say, "I have been forgiven by God of this sin in my life, and Satan's accusation is a lie!"

Or, perhaps there are trials in your life as a young person: trials with grades, with friends, or in your family. Satan tempts you to interpret these hardships to mean that God is punishing you in His wrath. With the footwear fastened to your feet, you are prepared (a preparedness that comes from the gospel of peace) for the Devil's lie and you can say, "God has graciously pardoned my sins, I am right with God in Christ alone, all things work together for my good, and nothing shall separate me from God's love in Christ!"

The belt and footwear. Essentials in the battle. Are you prepared, soldier?

Next time, Lord willing, we will consider the armor of God that relates to defense in the battle.



## Guest article

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan

# A prayer for pastors

*This article was first written by the author for the PR Scholarship Committee when he was a seminary student and was published in the February 2003 Beacon Lights. With the permission of the magazine, we reprint this article, as relevant now as it was then.*

An intriguing question has been raised by the 2002 Protestant Reformed Scholarship Committee: “Why isn’t the position of minister desired by more young people?” This question supposes two things: 1) That the number of young people who desire this ‘position’ is inadequate; 2) That more young people would desire the ministry if something changed in our behavior, either as parents or young people.

The simple fact of the matter is that we do not know if the current number of young people who desire the ministry is adequate or not. This might seem to be the case, given the number of vacancies in Protestant Reformed Churches, growing mission fields, and expected retirements. Neither do we know why more young people do not desire the offices. Certainly, many factors might contribute to the suggested deficiency in the number of young people who desire the ministry: a general lack of spirituality in the churches, increasing worldliness among our young people, or a diminishing respect for the minister among parents that infects the children, to suggest a few.

The Lord of the harvest and the great Shepherd, however, does know these things. He knows all things—both our needs and what is necessary for the provision of them. That is why we are commanded to be often in prayer, making our requests known unto Him and seeking His will in all things. With the firm conviction in our hearts that we receive what we need, even as we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, we should first bring our concern for ministers before our Lord. With this in mind, we humbly offer the following prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven, we petition Thee as the Lord of the harvest and the great Shepherd, whose field and flock extends to the ends of the earth and throughout history. Lord and Shepherd, give unto Thy church gardeners to labor among the crop and pastors to tend Thy flock. We need them.

We need caretakers because of who we are. In Thy

great wisdom Thou hast created Thy people as tender plants, sown as tiny seed that must grow unto the day of harvest. We develop only by Thy continual care through means of faithful gardeners. If not tended, we will die in this dry and thirsty land. Our hard hearts must be cultivated, the seed sown, our thirsty faith watered, and our growth nourished. The young shoots among us must be shaded from the oppressive heat. Dead growth must be cut off and choking weeds pulled out. O Lord, in Thy mercy, grant unto us caretakers to man the plow, disseminate the seed, water the roots, protect the buds, and wield the pruning hook—all by Thy Word. Grant us such men lest we languish.

Thou hast made us as sheep dependent upon loving shepherds. We require shelter from the storm of controversy, warmth from the bitter winds of false doctrine, and sustenance for our spiritual development. We cannot find the green pastures and still waters on our own, but must be led there by one who knows the way. And when led there, we do not remain but wander off on our own, looking for richer fields, tastier drink, and prettier barns. We are easily fooled by false prophets dressed as sheep, and our little lambs skip through the meadows oblivious to the hungry eyes peering from the thickets. Our wounds need bandages and our diseases medicine. The burdened require tender affection. O Lord, give us pastors to feed Thy flock, who work under Thee, the great Shepherd, to gather the lambs in their arms and hug them tight to their bosom, and to gently lead the mothers with their little ones. We need such men lest we be scattered, devoured, or starve.

Keep us from hirelings, those miserable scoundrels, who do not love us tender plants and fractious sheep, but ambitiously pursue their own glory; who do not nurture Thy people, but are the occasion for uproar and schism. Save us from the calloused hands of pompous shepherds who are no part of the flock themselves, but only use us for their own gain; who shear the sheep, and feed them noxious plants and turbid water; who run when the wolf comes; who allow the lost to starve, the cold to shiver, and the injured to fend for themselves. Lord, keep us from such men.

We petition Thee, our Father, because Thou alone art able to provide us with true pastors. We are instructed that they must possess certain gifts to do their work. Besides the required natural abilities, they must be blameless, not self-willed, not soon angry, no winebibber, brawler, or one greedy for gain. They must love hospitality and good men, be sober, just, holy, temperate, and hold fast the faithful Word—able by sound doctrine to exhort and convince the gainsayers. Who has ever seen such a man, except Thou hast by Thy grace fashioned, set aside, and sustained him for Thy church? We pray unto Thee, to work mightily by Thy Spirit to instill such gifts into men as future ministers of the Word.

They must be developed through covenantal instruction by God-fearing parents and diligent nurture by their spiritual mother, the church. Only Thou art able to provide for such training. Grant that we who are parents be faithful in the rearing of our children, and train them in the way that they must go, believing that any of our young men may be called by Thee to be ministers of the gospel. May we eagerly support covenantal education and the seminary of our churches, not merely monetarily, but chiefly with prayer. Grant that Thy church always have pastors to nourish its young, from which comes our future shepherds.

We petition Thee, O Father, because Thou alone art able to bring young men to a conscious realization of this calling to the ministry. We know that Thou dost give unto every man his work, but grant that those whom Thou hast chosen may know in their hearts that they have been called to be pastors. They must know,

for they are entrusted with the most serious of duties—duties from which they would otherwise shrink: the perfecting of the saints, the work of the ministry, and the edifying of the body of Christ till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Work by Thy Spirit, that men receive such a call in the depths of their soul, and respond by dedicating their lives to such a noble calling.

We know, O Lord, that Thou hast always provided for our needs, both as individuals and as churches. We are concerned that we have enough pastors to do the work that seems so evident to us. Let it not be that we are withheld ministers because we have not petitioned Thee our God. Let it not be because we do not feel the need. Let it not be because of our pride. We confess that we often think we are great oaks which can survive on our own. We look at our roots and think them planted deeply enough—scarcely meditating on how they got there and upon what water they drink. Our wispy branches seem like mighty boughs that no wind could ever shake. We rather like the weeds from time to time, and the dead branches seem useful. As sheep, we often bite the hand that feeds us or cut the pastor as he tends to our wounds. When lost, we run farther away. But all this is precisely why we need pastors—servants who love us exactly because we are tender plants and stubborn sheep. Give unto us pastors who love Thy people, and who are called and equipped to work in Thy fields. We need them, O Lord. Amen.



## Bring the books...

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

*The following book is reviewed by Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois.*

*Strange New World: How Thinkers and Activists Redefined Identity and Sparked the Sexual Revolution* by Carl R. Trueman. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 204 pages, paperback.

The author of this book was formerly a professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, but in 2018 he resigned that post to take up a position as professor of biblical and religious studies at

Grove City College. In 2020, he wrote a scholarly, 400+ page book entitled *The Rise and Triumph of the Modern Self: Cultural Amnesia, Expressive Individualism, and the Road to Sexual Revolution*. *Strange New World* is a condensed version of that larger work, intended for a broader audience.

Trueman's thesis is that there have been several massive shifts in the thinking of Western culture that have produced the "strange new world" in which we find

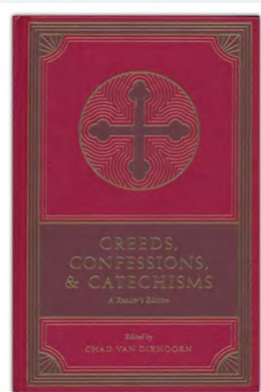
ourselves today. The first step relates to a shift in the “self” or “identity” of modern man. Rather than one’s thoughts and feelings being brought into line with objective reality, now man’s thoughts and feelings become the source and standard of truth (called “expressive individualism”). Remaining true to these inner feelings at all costs is promoted as true authenticity. The second step in the process is the sexualizing of the self. One’s sexuality becomes *the* defining characteristic of his identity. And, rather than it being a given that a biological male was a boy who would grow up to be a man, a husband, and a father, now every person has to engage in a quest to discover their “gender identity” and “sexual orientation” based on their inner thoughts and feelings. The third step in this process is that the sexualized self is no longer a personal matter but is politicized, that is, society actively seeks to suppress anything that does not promote this new thinking but instead protects and promotes the new, sexualized self.

Trueman traces the origins and development of this cultural shift through the thought of men like René Descartes and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (chapter 2), G. W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (chapter 3), and Sigmund Freud and Wilhelm Reich (chapter 4). He explains the impact of technology, the collapse of the nuclear family and the church, the advent of the birth control pill and pornography, and the development of critical theories (chapter 5). In a chilling chapter (chapter 7), Trueman ties these different threads together by

showing how they have given rise to the sexual revolution. Among the many important points he makes in the chapter, Trueman exposes how the transgender movement is incompatible with the ideologies of homosexuality and feminism, even though they have allied themselves together. The politicizing of this new way of thinking has led to attacks on the freedoms of religion and speech (chapter 8).

In the final chapter of the book (chapter 9), Trueman offers suggestions for how the church and individual Christians ought to respond to this strange new world. He says we must acknowledge the church’s complicity in this movement, we must make the local church the strongest community to which we belong, we must preach and teach the whole counsel of God, we must be shaped through biblical worship, we must appreciate natural law and the theology of the body, and we must neither despair nor be optimistic but hunger for the coming of Christ.

This book not only is helpful in understanding our present culture but also in understanding how we arrived here. I would encourage all ages to read it, including young people studying in university. I learned more from Trueman about the thinking of men like Rousseau, Hegel, Marx, and Nietzsche than I ever did in several college courses in philosophy. The argumentation is at times a bit dense, but Trueman has the ability to simplify and summarize well. I trust most readers will find it eye-opening. I certainly did.



## Bring the books...

*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, MI.*

*Creeds, Confessions, and Catechisms: A Reader's Edition*, edited by Chad Van Dixhoorn. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2022. 479 pages. Hardcover. \$29.99.

Books containing the church’s creeds are readily available. Some are very simple, such as the back of our Psalter and the “Three Forms of Unity” booklet. Others are expansive, such as Philip Schaaf’s three-volume edition *The Creeds of Christendom* and the four volumes entitled *Reformed Confessions of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries in English Translation*, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr.

Chad Van Dixhoorn, professor of church history at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia, provides a volume that is neither overly simple nor expansive. It contains thirteen creeds, confessions, and catechisms, each introduced with historical notes. The creeds in the book are the short ecumenical creeds that begin with “I believe.” The confessions are the longer Protestant confessions. (Van Dixhoorn explains more fully the distinc-

tion between creeds and confessions in his introduction.) The catechisms are those documents that present truth in question and answer form. The book concludes with a subject index and a Scripture index.

Here are several reasons why a Reformed reader might be interested in this book.

It contains every confession to which he or she subscribes: the four Ecumenical creeds (Apostles', Nicene, Athanasian, and Chalcedon), and the three Reformed creeds.

It contains other confessions of the main branches of Protestantism. This includes the Presbyterian standards (the Westminster Confession of Faith, and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms). It also includes the Lutheran Augsburg Confession, the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles, and the London Baptist Confession (the latter is the confession of Particular, or Calvinistic, Baptists). Reading these creeds, one can see both where the main branches of Protestantism agree, and where they disagree.

The historical notes help the reader understand the context in which these creeds and confessions were written.

The documents are presented in a very readable fash-

ion. Some of the words are simpler than in the translation that is commonly used in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Also, some long sentences are broken into several shorter sentences.

The translation of the Three Forms of Unity is that used in the Christian Reformed Church, copyrighted 1987. As is the CRC's practice, the Rejection of Errors section is included in the Canons of Dort. This reviewer was pleased to see that Q&A 80 of the Heidelberg Catechism appears without any footnote or apology. Canons 1:17 is rightly translated "godly parents ought not to doubt." Canons 3-4:8 reads that God calls His people "seriously." The translation is not wrong, but one should consult a commentary for guidance to understand the meaning rightly.<sup>1</sup>

The book is an attractive presentation of historical documents, some of which set forth the conviction of Reformed believers. Whether you read this book or not, believers, *read and know your confessions!*

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<sup>1</sup> For example, see Martyn McGeown, *Grace and Assurance: The Message of the Canons of Dort* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2018), 230-35.



## News from our churches

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

### PRC news (denominational and congregational)

In the most recent minister call news as of this writing (Feb. 27), we can report the following:

- Rev. N. Decker (Grandville-MI PRC) declined the calls he had received from Georgetown (MI) PRC and from Loveland (CO) PRC (Feb.19).
- Rev. J. Maatman (SE-Grand Rapids, MI PRC) received the call from Hudsonville (MI) PRC (Feb. 19). On that same Sunday he also received the call from Hosanna PRC (Edmonton, AB).
- Also on February 19, Rev. M. Kortus (Hope PRC-Redlands, CA) received the call to Doon (IA) PRC.
- Rev. S. Regnerus (Lynden-WA PRC) accepted the call to Hull PRC on February 26.
- First PRC-Grand Rapids, MI voted February 26 to call Rev. J. Holstege (Zion PRC, Jenison-MI) from a

trio that included Prof. R. Cammenga (PRC Seminary) and Rev. N. Decker (Grandville-MI PRC).

With the need of ministers in front of us again (and PR Christian School teachers!), this notice deserves attention here too: "Future Teachers and Ministers: Information for the 2023 PR Scholarship Fund essay competition is now available. Please email [prcscholarship@gmail.com](mailto:prcscholarship@gmail.com) to receive the essay topics and submission requirements. Completed essays must be submitted by May 12th."

### Special congregational notices

Calvary PRC (Hull, IA) is hosting a conference (free!) on the Biblical Principles of Marriage and Parenting on March 24 and 25. On Friday night (6:30-8:30 p.m.) the

focus will be on marriage; Saturday's (8:45 A.M.–1:00 P.M.) sessions will focus on parenting. With all the pressures on our marriages and families in these times, this event looks to be a worthwhile investment of your time. May the Lord richly bless it—for His glory and for the attenders' good!

Loveland (CO) PRC's members are being encouraged to attend a special lecture hosted by the Council on Friday, March 24. Prof. R. Dykstra is scheduled to speak on "Sexual Abuse in the Church of Jesus Christ."

Even though this event took place last month in Grandville PRC (her women's fellowship group), it is one that warms my bibliophile heart and is mentioned as a possible activity in other PR congregations (including among you men!): *We are starting the year off with a coffee and book exchange at...house on Tuesday, February 21, at 9:30 A.M. Plan to bring two books that you recommend reading with your name written inside them! We will have index cards for you to fill out with your information and the book title on them. The person who "checks" out your book will sign their name to the index card for you to keep, so you know who has your book. Books will be returned via church mailbox. Kids are welcome to come and play during the coffee!*

Immanuel PRC's bulletin (Alberta, Canada) recently noted that a new piano had been delivered for use in the sanctuary. The members were encouraged to "admire" the piano at their convenience, while the children...well, the parents were instructed to watch them lest their admiration become a little too much.

### **Evangelism/Mission news**

The PRC Domestic Mission Committee is planning a special Evangelism and Missions Conference for the evenings of May 4 and 5 at Trinity PRC (Hudsonville, MI). According to the advance announcement they sent out, they "plan to have speeches and discussion groups about timely topics related to home missions and personal evangelism." They also informed the PR membership to "keep an eye out for more information coming soon in your church bulletins and newsletters." We hope you have marked your calendars and are preparing to attend.

### **Young People events/fundraisers**

The Hull (IA) PRC Young People's Society hosted a soup supper on March 6 at the Hull Community Building.

Byron Center PRC's young people are holding another "Joyful Praise with One Accord" event for PRYP Convention fundraising on Saturday, March 18, at 7

P.M. in Byron Center PRC. An enjoyable night of music is being planned that will include the male quartet One Accord. Refreshments plan to be served afterwards. Sounds like a great night—get out and support these young people and the musicians!

And, speaking of the PRYP's Convention, don't forget to pay attention to Grandville PRC's bulletin and social media notices about registration (all this month!) and more for this year's convention at Lake Williamson in Carlinville, Illinois, August 7-11. Here are those web addresses for the communications: Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/prconvention/>) or Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/prconvention>) and for more frequent updates visit the website at <https://prconvention.com/>.



Lynden PRC's Young People's Society always has interesting subjects for her special discussion times—and inviting notices in the bulletin to prepare for participating. Here's a recent one that grabbed my attention:

In that first creation week, "the morning stars sang together" (Job 38:7). In the new creation of heaven, the saints sing the song of the Lamb! (Rev. 15:3-4). And in between, God's people have always been a singing people—singing songs of worship, praise, thanksgiving, and also mourning. Why has God determined singing to be so important? What actually goes on when we sing—in worship and with one another? What songs should we sing? We'll talk about these questions and more as we begin discussion tonight on what the Bible says about singing. Discussion sheets were handed out last week. Come prepared for another good discussion!

Wingham PRC's (Ontario, Canada) young people hosted a church skate in the afternoon of March 4 at the Howick Arena. The first hour was just for skating while the second hour was for hockey—not surprising at all—they are Canadians, after all! Coffee and donuts were also provided. We hope all had fun—and shins and teeth were protected!

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## Announcements

### 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](mailto:ricknoorman@gmail.com), or call 616-453-5048; or Mr. John DeVries, Education Committee, at [westmichiganrealestate@gmail.com](mailto:westmichiganrealestate@gmail.com) for more information.

### PRC Synod 2023

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2023, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Doug Mingerink Sr.  
([dougi@mingerink.com](mailto:dougi@mingerink.com))  
or mail to the same at  
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