

THE STANDARD BEARER

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MEDITATION

JEHOVAH'S GOODNESS

The Lord is good to all.....but all
the wicked will He destroy.

Ps. 145: 9a, 20b.

Emphatically, according to the Hebrew original, the poet, who is the inspired author of this psalm, puts it: "Good is Jehovah".

The Lord is goodness essentially.

Apart from any relation to His creatures, conceived all by Himself, in Himself, for Himself, as the absolutely Self-existent, Self-sufficient, Independent One, the Lord is good. His essence is goodness, His eternally adorable Divine Being is only good. Could we enter into the amazing profundity and explore the fathomless depths of His infinite Being, the deepest depths of the incomprehensible divine essence would reveal nothing but goodness.

He is the Light and there is no darkness in Him. He is Truth, Righteousness, Holiness, Purity, Love, Grace, Mercy and Eternal Life, and there is no Lie, Unrighteousness, Defilement, Corruption and Death in Him.

He is Summum Bonum, the Highest Good, not in a mere superlative sense, not in a sense that would compare Him with other goods or goodnesses, that might perhaps be conceived as existing next to Him though in a far inferior degree; but in the sense that He is the Sole Good, that there is no good apart from Him or without Him.

He is the ultimate and absolute criterion of all good. He is no good in the sense that He himself has a certain standard of goodness that might be applied to Him, but Himself is the only Standard of all that is called good.

He is good because He is God.

Very perfection in all His adorable virtues.....

Good is Jehovah!

This cover is from the first Standard Bearer ever published, in October 1924.

A similar format was used from October 1924 to January 1927. The editorial staff consisted of three ministers, with layman G. Van Beek serving as managing editor (see the masthead above; can you spot the spelling error?). The Christian Reformed Church was at this time stirred by debates over common grace. The adoption of the doctrine by the CRC Synod of 1924 led to the 1925 formation of the Protestant Christian Reformed Churches, later to be renamed the Protestant Reformed Churches in America.

God He lives from everlasting to everlasting the perfect life of Infinite goodness in and thru Himself. Never there arises from the unfathomable depths of His perfect Essence the slightest thought that is not good, perfect, true. Never the faintest thrill of imperfection there is in the Will of Jehovah. Never the most imperceptible discord there is in His divine feeling. Never there is the tiniest ripple of evil on the stream of life flowing from His divine heart.

No shadow of darkness ever bedims the light of life, perfect and infinite, of the Divine Family. Father, Son and Holy Ghost, each eternally subsisting in the unchangeable Essence of limitless goodness, thinking in the Perfect Mind, willing with the Perfect Will are living in absolute Self-sufficiency an uninterrupted divine life of purest goodness, dwelling in a Light that is never in any wise bedimmed.

Yea, good is Jehovah!

Everlastingly, solely, unchangeably good!

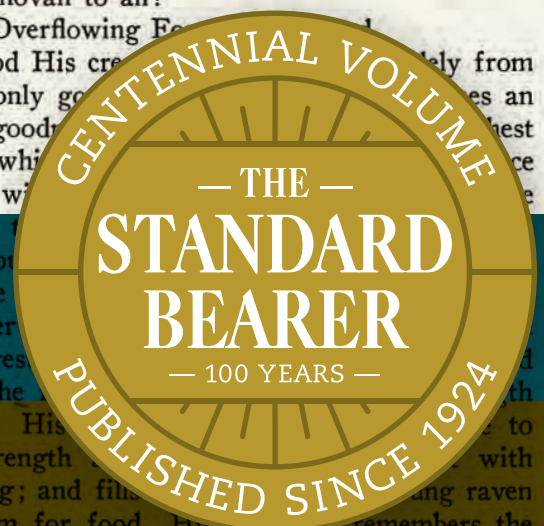
Because the Lord is good, the absolute good in Himself He is also good to all His creatures.

Good is Jehovah to all!

He is the Overflowing Fount of Goodness.

All the good His creatures receive flows from Him and is only good because it flows from Him. His attitude of goodness is not a mere sentimentality, but a benevolence which is the source of all blessing upon all the world.

His goodness is like the silver lustre of the sun, His goodness decks the gold, day after day, the field with pure gold, and clothes the earth with His majesty. His goodness is like the powerful wing; and fills the world with His goodness. He remembers the fields with golden grain. His goodness made the lower than the angels, adds keenness to his strength to his arm and fills his heart with goodness.



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Meditation

Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965) was the first editor of the *Standard Bearer*. This meditation was published in the first year of the *SB*, vol. 1, no. 8 (May 1925).

Compassionate remembrance

For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.

Psalms 103:14

What fervent love and tender compassion glows in this poetic expression of Father's attitude toward His children in the world!

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him. For he knoweth our frame, he remembereth that we are dust."

The Lord never forgets the weakness and frailty of our frame. And mindful of our frailty, He is always compassionate and deals with us in delicate tenderness, always careful never to overburden, always filled with tender mercy and sympathizing with us as we bear our burdens.

Man, in merciless oblivion, is sometimes forgetful of the frame of the dumb animal he employs his burden to carry or his load to draw. He will pile up a burden far too heavy in comparison with the strength of his beast and drive it with lashing whip accompanied by angry oaths over rough and well-nigh impassable roads to the place of destination.

Or cruel Pharaohs, forgetful of and without compassion with the weak frame of their toiling slaves, require of them a task well-nigh impossible to perform.

Or man himself, oblivious of the weakness and frailty of his own frame, forgetting that he is but dust and tender as the flower of the field, incessantly toils and labors, till he succumbs, weary and exhausted, a wreck, physically and mentally.

Not so is the Lord with regard to those that fear Him....

He is not hard and cruel, but tender-hearted and merciful over them. Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For their Father is He and His children are they. With a love, deep and constant and eternal as His own heart, He loved them, adopted them, redeemed them, transformed them. And with a compassion as profound and fervent and constant as His love, He remembers their infirmities, is mindful of their weaknesses, acquaints Himself with their griefs and sorrows, and with a tender heart He considers their

sufferings and afflictions, longing for their final deliverance and hastening to their redemption. Nor is He forgetful of the frailty of their frame. He remembereth that they are dust. For Himself made them. Out of the dust He formed them. And dust they are, He knows. And in all His dealings with them, in every way in which He leadeth them, with a view to all the tasks He requires of them, and regarding all the burdens He makes them to bear, He constantly remembers that they are dust-children, tender and delicate, limited in strength, easily overburdened, needy and weak and soon overcome, as the tender grass and the flower of the field....

Dust-children He made them and never He forgets. And loving them, He is filled with compassion and tender mercy for His children in the dust. And in this mindful tenderheartedness, He treats them delicately, gently, never overburdening their frame.

What fervent compassion!

Bless the Lord, O, my soul!

Father remembers in mercy that we are dust!

What blessed knowledge!

Experience would often seem so different and so contrary to this blessed assurance from our heavenly Father. Our weak frame, originating in the dust, oft seems cruelly overburdened with loads of grief and affliction; and not infrequently it seems to break down accidentally, crushed by a weight it was not calculated to bear. And it would appear as if the Lord forgot, either of what dust-material He formed us or to be merciful over His children.

Did it never seem so to you? When burning fever consumed the life of your darling, tender and frail, and wrecked its delicate frame, as the blasting breath of a hot wind causes the gentle flower to wither and die; or when a dearly beloved mother, whose love and care seemed indispensable, was suddenly snatched from the midst of her family that could not spare her, by the cruel hand of him that rideth the Pale Horse; or when constant pain and suffering is your lot, continually leading you along the edge of the grave, yet never mercifully guiding you into it, so that it becomes your daily supplication: "How

long, Lord?”—did it never seem as if the Lord had forgotten that He had made us out of the dust or without mercy burdened us with loads we were never formed to bear? Was He not oblivious of the delicate frame of your baby? Did He not forget mercy when mother was made to succumb? Is He not forgetful of your continual burden of suffering and woe?

Or, again, how often are not the enemies of His children made to triumph over them! How fearfully dark is the night of their suffering, when they are killed all the day long and led as sheep to the slaughter! How are they chased over the earth, filled with reproach, cast into holes and dungeons, beaten with many stripes, burnt at the stake or sawn asunder, cruelly tortured to death. They are made to pass through fire and through water many times. And the plaintive song often rises from their souls, oppressed with grief and enveloped in darkness:

I asked in fear and bitterness,
Will God forsake me in distress?
Shall I His promise faithless find?
Has God forgotten to be kind?
Has He in anger hopelessly
Removed His love and grace from me?

[Psalter #210, stanza 4]

Yet, like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. And He knoweth our frame and remembereth that we are dust.

He never forgets.

Never a load of sickness and pain breaks the dust-frame of His children because He was forgetful of its frailty and overburdened it. Never it breaks accidentally. When it does break, it is only because He came to break it. And when He does come to break that dust-frame, He does so in His mercy and compassion, because He knew that thus it were best.

Never a load of grief and pain, of sorrow and distress, of tribulation and persecution He makes His children to bear, but He mercifully remembers that the bearing frame is dust. And when the load becomes too heavy for mere dust-children to carry, yet must be borne, He adds grace to dust and mercifully makes His strength perfect in weakness. And, oh, what wonders are accomplished when the strength of His marvelous grace is made to sustain the frailty of human dust! Then the Lord's dust-formed children pass through the fire and it does not burn them; then floods submerge them, yet they are not drowned; then the night of tribulation can be frightfully dark, yet they rejoice; then suffering day by day may be their lot and may wreck their mortal frame, yet they sing:

Though I am weak, God is most high
And on His goodness I rely;
Of all His wonders I will tell,
And on His deeds my thoughts shall dwell.

[Psalter #210, stanza 5]

For He remembereth that we are dust. And in eternal love and paternal pity He sustains our frame by the wonderful power of His all-sufficient grace.

Blessed assurance and all-comprehensive comfort, to know that for the sake of Christ our Savior, this God, is our God and merciful Father. Always remembering, always compassionate, always dealing tenderly, leading gently, sustaining powerfully; our God in prosperity and adversity, our God in health and sickness, our God in life and death, our God forever and ever....

Bless the Lord, O, my soul!

Neither is this all.

He remembers in mercy and pitieth His children not only *while* they are dust, but also *because* they are. The very fact that they are dust is the object of His compassion.

Of dust He formed them. He never forgets.

From the dust He called the first man Adam and He made him a living soul. And because he was formed from the dust, they are limited by the dust, stoop toward the earth earthy. And all God's children in the earth bear the image of the earthy. They have an eye of dust and see but earthy things; they have an earthy ear and hear but earthy sounds; they have an earthy tongue and speak but earthy language; they possess an earthy frame and live in earthy dependence, an earthy life. Formed from the dust, they are limited by the dust, stoop toward the dust and return to the dust. God's dust-children bear the image of the earthy....

Yet, in everlasting lovingkindness He predestined them for heavenly glory. He ordained that they should be conformed according to the image of His Son. In His unfathomable love He willed that they should be children of the dust and bear the image of the earthy but for a while, in order then to bear the image of the heavenly, to possess an heavenly frame, to see heavenly beauties, to be charmed by heavenly music, to speak a heavenly language, and to be clothed with heavenly glory.

Such is the purpose of the love wherewith He loved them.

And while they are still dwelling in the dust, and still bear the image of the earthy, He began to realize in them the purpose of that everlasting love by instilling into their hearts the first drop of that heavenly child-life through the Spirit and grace of the risen Lord, the Lord

of heaven, the second Adam, the quickening Spirit. In principle they have become children of heaven and they are quickened unto a new hope. Yet, they are still dwelling in the dust. The heavenly things they long to see they see not as yet; the heavenly things they like to hear, they hear only in hope; the heavenly tongue with which they yearn to speak, they know not as yet; the heavenly glory with which they hope to be clothed is still hidden in a cloak of dust....

Children of heaven, they still dwell in the dust [so that] the full manifestation of that heavenly life is hidden in and the full expression of that life is hampered by their dust-made frame....

But the Lord knoweth their frame. He remembereth that they are dust as yet. Neither does He forget His purpose. For the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting over those that fear Him.

In that everlasting mercy He pities His children while they dwell in the dust.

And that unfathomable mercy cannot rest till He shall have delivered His children from their dust, weak, mortal, earthy, and corruptible, and made them partakers of the image of the heavenly, in heavenly frame, in power and honor, immortal, incorruptible, glorious.

Then they shall no more see as in a glass darkly, but face to face. Then they shall know as they are known and no more in part. Then they shall walk with Him and talk with Him, rejoice with Him, and reign with Him, and in His everlasting temple they shall see the beauties of the Lord, in perfected covenant-communion.

Everlasting friendship!

H.H.

Editor's notes

As you can tell by the 'retro' cover of this issue, we are celebrating the Lord's preservation of the *Standard Bearer* and the RFPA. With this issue we begin the 100th volume of the magazine! Beginning our celebration now already reminds me of what an old minister told me when asked how old he was. "I'm in my 80th year," he said. Of course, he was 79 years old and had not yet reached his 80th birthday. But he was in his 80th year. Beginning with this issue the *Standard Bearer* lives in its 100th year. Next October 1 (2024), if the Lord tarries and permits, we will celebrate our 100th birthday.

From now till then we will be reflecting on the almost 100 years of publishing a written testimony to the Reformed and biblical faith as represented by the Protestant Reformed Churches in America. The magazine's covers will reflect different eras of the *SB*. More importantly, we hope to reprint some old articles from the early years of our history and to reflect on the place of the magazine in the past. Editors will express our resolve for the future.

As usual, the new volume year brings changes in writers. As a missionary, Rev. D. Kleyn formerly wrote about missions; now he begins to help readers "Search the Scriptures." Prof. D. Kuiper, who teaches Bible interpretation (called "Hermeneutics") at the PRC seminary, will write about it in "Pillar and Ground of the Truth." Happily, four new writers have been added to the staff. Mrs. Sarah Mowery (Loveland, CO, PRC) well-known and appreciated by those who have read her wonderful book reviews in *Perspectives in Covenant*

Education magazine, will write for "When Thou Sittest in Thine House." Mr. Tom Cammenga, member and former elder at Faith PRC (Jenison, MI), will write for the same rubric. Tom is a father and grandfather; he and his wife Cherie care for their special needs son, Travis. In "Church and State," two attorneys will join Mr. Brian VanEngen. Welcome to Mr. Martin DeVries, Esq., (Randolph, WI, PRC) and Mr. Nathan Vis, Esq., (Cornerstone PRC, IN)!

In this issue, the undersigned will begin his last series of editorials. In June, I informed the *SB* staff that if they reappointed me as editor, I was willing to serve for one more year, after which another editor would need to be appointed. With this volume, I begin my 20th year as one of three editors. Recently, two younger men were appointed by the staff as co-editors to replace my colleagues with whom I labored since 2004. Some of those years were smooth, others very turbulent as we produced the magazine through the storm and then schism in the PRCA. By God's grace we labored with one mind and purpose to maintain the witness. With thanks to God, the magazine survives into its 100th year. May the Lord provide faithful and capable editors and writers for many years to come.

The Reformed Free Publishing Association, publisher of the *Standard Bearer*, has informed us that an increase in subscription price is necessary:

In the past year the costs for printing the *Standard Bearer* have risen 30%. As a result...the [RFPA's] Board decided to raise the rates for US subscriptions from \$33/year to \$37/year and for international subscriptions from \$46/year to \$52/year. The e-subscription only will increase to \$22/year. The Board realizes this is a large increase, but it only covers 1/2 of the actual increase in costs. These changes will be effective with the new volume year.

God has been good to us. May He use the *Standard Bearer* to be a blessing to you. Please tell others about it if you have profited from it. Perhaps give a gift subscription to a friend or acquaintance. Some families wonder what to do for Christmas giving when everyone has so much. Good books are a great idea. Why not a magazine subscription—to the *SB*!



Editorial

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

The *Standard Bearer*: Loving service of the church

The *Standard Bearer* exists for Christ's church. Our writers labor for the magazine because they love the church too. You read our magazine most likely because you also love the church.

Exactly 99 years ago (October 1, 1924), the men of the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) began production of the *Standard Bearer*, because they loved the church, which they saw in mortal danger. Love drove them to organize the association—in the service of, but 'free' from official oversight of, the church. The magazine would be written for no other reason than the well-being of their church. Love for the church would not allow the men quickly to leave her. They would work until their writings, in God's good pleasure, either corrected their mother or (the last thing they wanted) brought about their ouster from her fellowship.

If you peruse the first volumes of the *Standard Bearer*, you will see that.¹ In 1924 love manifested itself in warning the church of her departure from Scripture's teaching of sovereign grace, in calling the church to hold fast the traditions of the Reformed faith and, later, in calling to separate from her for her errors. "The Latest Ecclesiastical Strife," "Striving Against Your Mother," "Misinformation from Abroad," "A 'Christian' Church to Weep Over," were some of the articles' titles in the early years.² Rev. Hoeksema began a long series of ar-

ticles about the false teachings in the "Three Points of Common Grace." Rev. Ophoff wrote "A Declaration" explaining why he also would be part of the staff. Others added their voices. Soon it would become obvious to the writers that the church they loved would not be corrected. Yet the news article inviting to the "Field Day" (1925) still said, "...of the Protesting Christian Reformed Churches." The writers loved their church.

I trust that I speak for all the writers in 2023 when I say that we write because we have the same love for our Lord's precious church. We love the PRCA. We love the PRCA's sisters and friends. We love the true church in all the world. Therefore, we write. Still today, although the RFPA is a *parachurch* organization (*along side* the church, but not the *church*) the RFPA's goal is the edification of the church and never merely individual Christians apart from the church's institute.

It is good to be clear about what we mean. We love the church, our church, not just the *concept* church. There is a difference. For example, it is possible (but wrong) to love the concept 'covenant,' which love then is expressed by writing about, explaining, and defending the truth of the covenant but not by living the life of the covenant with God and God's people. Likewise, it is possible to love the concept 'church' without loving any particular church or churches by living in them and doing them good. *Standard Bearer* writers love the church, live in and for her, and write with the aim of building her up—the PRCA and other churches worldwide.

1 The RFPA is getting closer, but is still 15 volume years away from making available all the old issues with the click of a button. As of this writing, you can find online the issues from the present back to 1938, but not earlier. Yet.

2 Some are my translations of the Dutch.

I love my own denomination, the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, the denomination of which I am a member and servant as a seminary professor. I love Hudsonville (MI) PRCA, the congregation where my family's membership has been for almost 30 years. I love all the congregations, large and small, of the PRCA. I write for them. And not only for them, but for all those who read the magazine and love Christ's church in the PRCA and elsewhere. May God use our magazine for the good of all of you.

Why I love the church can be explained by many things. Probably the best explanation is that God used my Christian upbringing in a very small church in California to instill it in me. In the church, among the saints, our family blessed Jehovah. From my youth, although my parents never spoke the words, "You must love the church," their life did. In 1948, my father moved from Minnesota to Redlands at age 19 to teach in the PRC parents' small Christian school, until they lost the school in the schism of 1953. Shortly thereafter, he often served on consistory, reading sermons in our vacancies and teaching catechism. He served on the school's board. He never called our attention to it, but we noticed it. With all the other men of the congregation, he gave how many Saturdays of donated labor to construct a new sanctuary; and that, only shortly after they did the same thing to build the Christian school—with their own hands. Probably the most striking testimony of that love to a young man growing up with five siblings in a small house on a 50-foot lot was when Dad declined promotions to more lucrative positions in the State Highway department. Why? "It would require us to move to Sacramento, and Redlands is where our church is." Dad and Mom loved the church. What young person would not notice this display of love?

I love the church because she is my mother. God is my Father, and His church is my mother, as Christians have said since Augustine. The church's preaching nurtured me in the faith, even when I did not always listen or appreciate it. In catechism, she taught me the wondrous love of Jesus. She searched me out when I wandered. In her bosom was nurtured the wife the Lord provided me, and then our children, and now our grandchildren. I love her and all her members and officebearers.

I love her because Jesus loves her and commands me to have the same affection and offer the same sacrifice for her good. "The church *He* loveth well." Thus, so do I.

There are plenty of reasons not to love the church. That is, with a certain flawed idea of love as a warm feeling.

With that definition, there are good reasons for my wife not to love me, too. Thankfully, Christian wives look beyond our weaknesses and sins to the work of Christ in us. They also hear Christ's call to love their husbands, not by always having warm feelings toward them, but by seeking their good and sacrificing themselves to accomplish their good. Whether I have a warm feeling toward the church depends on what aspect of the church I am looking at. With some things I am disgusted. With others I am frustrated. At times, assemblies' decisions disturb me. The behavior of some members is discouraging to say the least. And while the fault in these attitudes is mine, the sins and weaknesses are real. But I want to look beyond the church's weaknesses, see what God sees in the church, and love her not first by feeling warm toward her but by giving myself to her—a flawed and at times very weak body.

The church is imperfect. Officebearers are but men. Assemblies make mistakes. Members are sinful.

But our sinful natures feed on these thoughts. So we let them grow into bitterness against the church, into hypercritical attitudes that bleed down into our children. If we are not careful, soon we entertain thoughts about leaving her for another. Not because the new church has so many less flaws, but because of disgust with the church God put us in. Such is our disgust that we may be willing to swallow camels while we strain out other evils, even if they are larger than gnats. Maybe we leave the church altogether.

We can be helped by Calvin, who learned from Augustine, who learned from Cyprian, all of whom spoke from the experience of living in a sinful church. Here's Calvin:

...Augustine argues against the Donatists: that individual laymen, if they see vices not diligently enough corrected by the council of elders, should not therefore at once depart from the church; and that the pastors themselves, if they cannot cleanse all that needs correction according to their hearts' desire, should not for that reason resign their ministry or disturb the entire church with unaccustomed rigor.... "He who diligently ponders these things," Augustine says, "neither neglects severe discipline in the maintenance of unity, nor by intemperate correction breaks the bond of fellowship." ...From this point he [Augustine] concludes with Cyprian: "Let a man mercifully correct what he can; let him patiently bear what he cannot correct, and groan and sorrow over it with love."³

³ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. 2 (4.12.11). Ford L. Battles, ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1238-39.

I love the church in the way a man loves his family. At times, he sees so many weaknesses and shortcomings that he may be tempted to reject them. But he looks beyond their flaws, many of which are his own, and loves them with the genuine love of God. He wants their good; he plans to carry out their good; and, fighting against every bad feeling he has towards them, he *dies* doing them good because God calls him to do so.

I love the church. With God's grace, I look beyond the weaknesses of the members, the flaws of the office-bearers, the mistakes of the assemblies—most of which I find in myself and perhaps are even because of me—and ask some questions: Does my church manifest the marks of the true church? Is the pure gospel preached here? Are the sacraments properly administered here? Is Christian discipline exercised in punishing of sin? They are. In my church and churches, do I find members with the marks of Christians: they believe Christ, avoid sin, follow the right, love God and their neighbor, turn neither to the right nor left, crucify their flesh with its works, and fight against their remaining infirmities, taking refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ? I do. And I love them.

The *Standard Bearer* exists for the sake of the church and her members.

There are many things a magazine can do for the church, which this magazine wishes to do until the Lord returns. For old and young. In the service of orthodox teaching, sound church government, pure and spiritual worship, holiness of life, the church's witness to the world, and her hope for the world to come. Week after week, even when discouragements pile up. Year after year, when we pray the Lord speed His return. We will write when we are crying, "O wherefore hast Thou cast us off, O God, our God of old?" And we will pray, when we see the ruin foes have wrought, "Remember Thy inheritance, Thy church, redeemed by grace; Remember Zion's mount profaned, Thy ancient dwellingplace."

By God's grace, and with the love of Jesus Christ in our hearts, the *Standard Bearer* authors will continue to write for your good. Even when it is "not songs but sighs" that belong to us, we will write.

May our good God keep the PRCA, and all other true churches of Christ in the world.

We love you. But more importantly: "God thy Maker loves thee well; He has chosen Thee, most precious, He delights in Thee to dwell..." (Psalter #237). I love the church.



Search the Scriptures

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

Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith (13) God's judgment and salvation (3)

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2023, p. 493.

God came from Teman, and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise. And his brightness was as the light; he had horns coming out of his hand: and there was the hiding of his power. Before him went the pestilence, and burning coals went forth at his feet. He stood, and measured the earth: he beheld, and drove asunder the nations; and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow: his ways are everlasting.

Habakkuk 3:3-6

In chapter 3:2, as we have seen, Habakkuk prays that God will continue His incomprehensible work of saving

His people through chastisement for their sins: "revive thy work in the midst of the years." He prays that in sending the horrors of the Babylonian conquest, God will make Himself known, even in the coming of the Babylonians, as the covenant God of His people: "in the midst of the years make known." He prays, remembering God's works and ways in ancient times, that God will in wrath remember mercy, even while severely chastising His people as He did in the past.

In 3:3-15 Habakkuk remembers those ancient ways, seeing in them a pattern of God's works for all time. The coming of Babylon will be no different, not really, from God's dealing with Israel in the wilderness: different people and different circumstances, to be sure, but

the same God of the covenant working out in the same mysterious ways His eternal purpose to receive His people as His own into that land, where the knowledge of the glory of the Lord will fill the earth as the waters cover the sea (chap. 2:14).

Verse 3a makes reference to Teman and Mount Paran. Mount Paran, following Deuteronomy 33:2, is a reference to Mount Sinai, which was near or in the wilderness of Paran (Num. 10:12). Teman is a reference to Edom (Gen. 36:15; Jer. 49:7, 20), since Esau had a grandson named Teman and his name is often used as a synonym for Edom. The two names more or less define the area of Israel's wilderness wanderings. God was with Israel in the wilderness and that great truth marks the first occurrence of the word "selah."

The word translated "from" in the KJV is a word that means "among," and that is the emphasis of verse 3. The verse could be translated "God came among (them) at Teman, and the Holy One among (them) at Mount Paran." If the translation of the KJV is retained, the verse still traces Israel's wilderness wandering and God's presence with them through their journeys. The idea then is not that God came *to* them from Teman and Mount Paran, but *with* them. God was among His people even during those difficult years, which were often years of murmuring, rebellion, and judgment.

The second part of verse 3 really belongs with what follows, a description of the glory, the power, the wrath, and the justice of God, all revealed repeatedly in the story of Israel's wanderings.

Verses 3b through 7 tell that story, but with a focus not on the people and what happened to them, but on the presence of God Himself.

Verse 3b speaks of His glory in terms of brightness and light. The brightness of His glory at Sinai was such that Moses' face shone after forty days with God in the mountain, shone so brightly that he had to cover his face with a veil. Exodus 24:17 says "And the sight of the glory of the LORD was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel." It was so bright they did not want to stay at the mount but asked Moses to go and speak to God on their behalf. "And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake" (Heb. 12:21).

God revealed His glory in the cloud of glory, the Shekinah, that followed or led Israel through the wilderness, always a symbol of God's glorious presence, a light to Israel, but darkness to the Egyptians at the Red Sea. Isaiah 52:12, also a reference to Israel's departure from Egypt and entrance into the wilderness, says, "For ye shall not go out with haste, nor go by flight: for the LORD will go before you; and the God of Israel will be

your rereward." Both Isaiah and Habakkuk see in the glorious presence of God the promise that He will always be among His people, as in the wilderness.

So obvious was His presence that "the earth was full of his praise." The nations, Egypt, Amalek, Edom, Moab, the Amorites, and the Canaanites were afraid, not of Israel but of Him. Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, came to meet Israel in the wilderness because he had "heard of all that God had done for Moses, and for Israel his people, and that the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt" (Ex. 18:1). When Israel finally entered Canaan, Rahab told the spies, "I know that the LORD hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt; and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed" (Josh. 2:9, 10).

Habakkuk was thinking of those things when he wrote verse 3. Verse 4 continues the thought. Horns are always a symbol of power in Scripture (Ps. 75:1), and Habakkuk speaks of horns coming out of God's hand to remind Israel and us that He whose hand plagued Egypt, divided the sea, made a way in the wilderness, defeated Amalek, gave manna and water, and gave them the land, was the almighty Savior of His people. Egypt to Canaan is the story of those hands and their power.

Habakkuk confesses in the same breath that what Israel saw in the wilderness, what Judah would see in the coming of the Babylonians, was only a small display of God's power: "there was the hiding of his power." He was thinking, we may be sure, of what Moses saw at Sinai when God made His glory pass by Moses, hiding Moses in a crack in the rock and covering the crack with His hand. Job, too, had confessed long before: "Lo, these are parts of his ways: but how little a portion is heard of him? but the thunder of his power who can understand?" (Job 26:14). Habakkuk's point is that God is able to use the wicked Babylonians for the salvation of His people and, having used them, to hold them accountable and bring upon them the judgments described in chapter 2:5-20.

What a truth for us when heresies arise in the church, when the church comes under the just chastisement of God, when He uses wicked men to chastise His people, when all things seem to be against them. Habakkuk's words are for the end times, too, times more evil than Habakkuk faced. When Antichrist comes, when the church is persecuted as never before and scattered, when it seems as though faith is not to be found on the earth, then too God will reveal His hand and it will

have horns coming out of it, horns to push and destroy the nations and to save His people. Even then what we will see will be but the hiding of His power, for He is the Almighty.

Habakkuk 3:5 describes God's judgments in the wilderness. The reference to pestilence is to the plagues that God sent on Israel four times in the wilderness (Num. 11:33; 14:37; 16:46-49; 25:8, 9). The reference to burning coals is to the fire that burned at Kibroth and twice at Kadesh (Num. 11:1; 16:35; 26:10). It may even be a reference to the plague of fiery serpents in the wilderness (Num. 21:6-8). God's own appearance at Sinai was fiery and Deuteronomy 33:2 describes the law as fiery. Whatever the specific references in Israel's history, the verse speaks of God's coming in judgment, as He will come again at the end of the world through Him whose feet are like burning brass (Rev. 1:15).

Pestilence and fire may also be the judgments God visited on Egypt and on the heathen nations, but Habakkuk is comparing the predicted coming of Babylon and God's use of them to the times of chastisement in the wilderness. He wants it to be evident that in those chastisements, both past and future, God is faithful to His covenant and His promises, and sovereignly uses those chastisements for the good of His covenant people. Israel's past history was the pattern for what lay ahead and the great events of the past would help Habakkuk and Israel to see present and future events more clearly.

Verse 6 we take as a reference to Israel's deliverance from Egypt and entrance into the land of Canaan. Then the nations were driven asunder and a place made among them for His people. Then, too, He measured the earth and found in it room for the people of His covenant. Even the mountains and hills could not stand in the way of His coming and power. He smashed the mountains and the hills sank at His coming, so verse 6 says literally.

Thus always does Scripture describe the coming of the Lord. Isaiah 40:4, 5, says: "Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it." Isaiah is describing God's coming as the God of His people. No wonder, then, that Isaiah's words are quoted in reference to the coming of Christ and His forerunner (Luke 3:5).

But God always comes in judgment when He comes for the salvation of His people. Zion is redeemed with judgment (Is. 1:27), and judgment always begins at the house of God (I Pet. 4:17). Judgment must begin at the

house of God because God's people are themselves sinful and their sins must be dealt with in the righteousness and justice of God. That judgment, however, is always visited on someone else on their behalf, and so in wrath He remembers mercy, pouring out His wrath on the Son of His love, while showing mercy to those who deserve wrath and eternal punishment.

Also in reference to the coming of the Babylonians and God's use of them to chastise His people, Isaiah says: "When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence" (64:3). Psalm 65:5 echoes the words of the prophets: "By terrible things in righteousness wilt thou answer us, O God of our salvation; who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth, and of them that are afar off upon the sea." So it was when Israel came out of Egypt and forty years later entered the land of Canaan. Then God came as the God of His people and scattered the nations on their behalf. But never did He overlook the sins of His people, visiting them always in righteousness.

All this looks forward to the coming of Christ, when God in His righteousness came as Judge. Then, too, He drove asunder the nations, bringing on them His just judgment for the murder of His Son. Then too He visited the sins of His people by terrible things in righteousness, pouring all the terrors of His just judgment against sin on His Son. There, at the cross, where His Son died, He in wrath remembered mercy, as never before and never again.

This looks forward also to the end, when God will once more drive asunder the nations. Then too God will chastise His people once more through another coming of Babylon. By terrible things in righteousness, He will answer once again Habakkuk's prayer against the sins of God's people. We see, if we have any sight at all, the rightness of Habakkuk's prayer in 1:1-4. But then too in wrath God will remember mercy, such mercy as eye has not seen or ear heard or entered into the heart of man to imagine.

That is the point of the closing words of verse 6, "his ways are everlasting." In the wilderness, at Golgotha, now in His dealing with His church, and finally when the end comes, His ways are always the same. Always He reveals Himself a righteous Judge and as one too pure of eyes to behold evil (1:3). Never does He overlook or ignore sin. Always He punishes sin to the uttermost of His just judgments. Never does it go unpunished. Always too He remembers mercy, and in judgment and righteousness shows Himself to be the God of the covenant who keeps covenant with His people, never casting them off.

What a day it will be when once more He causes the mountains to flow down like water, the perpetual hills to bow, when in wrath, He remembers mercy, drives asunder the nations, measures the earth, and finds in

the new heavens and earth an everlasting place for His people. Then, and then only, will Habakkuk's prayer be answered and his song sung as it ought to be.



Taking heed to the doctrine

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The *ordo salutis* (4):

Conversion: Turned so that we turn

Previous article in this series: June 2023, p. 398.

I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus; Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn thou me, and I shall be turned; for thou art the LORD my God. Surely after that I was turned, I repented; and after that I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh: I was ashamed, yea, even confounded, because I did bear the reproach of my youth.

Jeremiah 31:18-19

A turning

In the *ordo salutis*, the logical sequence in which the Holy Spirit applies the benefits of salvation decreed by God in election and purchased by Christ on the cross, the third step is *conversion*. Conversion is God's work of turning us from sin to Him. Logically, conversion follows regeneration and calling. When the Spirit begins to apply salvation, the sinner is dead in trespasses and sins; therefore, his first need is life, which God gives in regeneration. That life must come to conscious expression; therefore, the regenerated, now living sinner is called by God with His powerful voice out of darkness into light. In calling us, God addresses us in the depth of our souls: "Come to me." Then, we who are spiritually alive and conscious must be moved to spiritual activity, that is, God turns us from sin to obedience.

Conversion, like each of the steps in the *ordo salutis*, is God's work: we are the ones who are turned, while God is the One who turns us; or to express it differently, we do not turn ourselves. The prophet describes that beautifully in Jeremiah 31:18-19 where Ephraim, or the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, is groaning. "I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself" (v. 18), says the prophet. Why is Ephraim bemoaning himself? "I was chastised," he says, "as a bullock unac-

customed to the yoke" (v. 18). Ephraim views himself as an untamed beast needing discipline to teach him proper behavior; therefore, exile is chastisement designed to correct him. Such a heavy rod of discipline is necessary because of Ephraim's stubbornness or obstinacy, for just as a stubborn bullock cannot turn, so a foolish sinner cannot convert himself. A great work is necessary to turn Ephraim from sin, which is why he prays: "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned" (v. 18) and "After that I was turned, I repented" (v. 19). That is Ephraim's confession: he did not turn or convert himself, but God turned or converted him.

A spiritual turning

Conversion is a spiritual turning. That must be so, first, because it is a work of the Holy Spirit, who alone has access to the deep recesses of the heart. Only the divine Spirit can work inwardly, so that we are turned from sin to God. Only the omnipotent Spirit can renew our wills, so that we desire to please God. Only the irresistible Spirit can change our hearts, so that we begin to live unto God. Second, conversion is an inward work of the Holy Spirit. In conversion God does not merely turn us away from some bad habits so that we "turn over a new leaf." In conversion God does not merely cause us to adopt new practices. Conversion is the turning of our heart: "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned." "Turn me in the center of my being, whence are the issues of my life. Turn my mind, my will, my affections. Turn me so that what I once loved (sin) I now hate. Turn me so that what I once hated (God, Christ, righteousness, and holiness) I now love."

That is conversion.

An activating turning

It is at this point in our salvation that we become

active. Our activity is not our part in salvation or our contribution to salvation, but it is the fruit of God's saving work in us. Before this, we were not active: in regeneration we were passive; in calling we were passive, but in conversion we became active. That is because we are not mindless automatons, unthinking puppets or "senseless stocks and blocks" (Canons III/IV.16). God turns us so that we turn, so that we turn willingly and consciously. God wills that in our salvation we experience that turning, not that we are forcibly turned against our will. God, we read in Canons III/IV.16, "[does not] take away [our] will, neither does violence thereto."

Our turning consists in our repentance, which is both the gift of God and our activity. The relationship is this: we repent *because* God gives us the gift of repentance. That is clearly the teaching of Scripture and the creeds. "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for *to give repentance* to Israel and the forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). "Then hath God also to the Gentiles *granted repentance* unto life" (Acts 11:18). "In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves if God peradventure will *give them repentance* to the acknowledging of the truth" (II Tim. 2:25). Canons III/IV.12 expresses the relation between God's grace and our activity in these words: "Man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received." Repentance, although our activity, is not an activity of ours on which salvation depends, for God gives it to us. At the same time, it ought to be obvious that repentance, although a work of God in us, is not His activity or act. God works in us so that we repent; God does not repent in us, through us, or instead of us.

We read of this repentance in Jeremiah 31: "Turn thou me, and I shall be turned" is Ephraim's prayer in verse 18, followed by Ephraim's confession in verse 19. "Surely, after that I was turned [God's work of conversion], I repented" [our activity]. And after I was instructed [God's work of correction], I smote upon my thigh [the expression of Ephraim's sorrow], I was ashamed [another expression of Ephraim's sorrow], yea confounded [another expression of Ephraim's sorrow], because I did bear the reproach of my youth." We see how beautifully Jeremiah describes God's work of conversion and its fruit in the life of the penitent sinner: *God turned me, I was turned, I repented*.

The Heidelberg Catechism describes this turning from sin in Lord's Day 33, where it explains the mortification of the old man and the quickening of the new man. I do not have space to explain those two terms, the old man and the new man, but a few words about turn-

ing from sin are necessary at this point. Turning from sin is in the words of the Catechism "a sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God by our sins." It is also "more and more to hate...them;" and it is "more and more to...flee from them" (A. 89). Sorrow, hatred, flight: that is turning from sin. God causes us to sorrow over our sins, to hate them, and to flee from them: that is conversion.

For example, we tell a lie in violation of the ninth commandment. When God works in us by His grace, several things happen. First, we are genuinely sorry that we uttered deceit. Our sorrow is not because we were exposed in telling a falsehood, or because of the embarrassing consequences that we must bear because of our dishonesty, but because we have provoked God who forbids lying. Second, from the heart we hate that lie that we have uttered because we now see our lie as it truly is: the proper work of the devil. Third, we turn from our lie, we confess it and apologize for it, we do what we can to correct the falsehood, and we endeavour to be truthful in the future. Sorrow, hatred, flight.

Paul writes of the Thessalonians that "[they] turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God" (I Thess. 1:9). That reminds us that conversion is not merely negative, a turning from sin, but also positive, a turning to God. The Heidelberg Catechism describes that positive turning: "it is a sincere joy of heart through Christ" (A. 90). Unless we know God's salvation of us as something in which we rejoice, we will not walk in new obedience out of thankfulness to our Savior. It is also "with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works" (A. 90).

The fruit of conversion is good works, good works that we do by the power of God's grace. Sadly, the idea of good works makes some Reformed Christians nervous; so ingrained into them is the beautiful truth that salvation is not by works (Eph. 2:8-9) that they prefer never to speak of good works lest they inadvertently speak too highly of them. Neither the Bible nor the creeds encourage such nervousness. The Catechism does not say, "We cannot do good works." The Catechism does not assert, "All we can do is sin." The Catechism does not teach, "The believer is still totally depraved" (yes, our flesh is totally depraved, but we, who are more than the flesh, are not). The Catechism proclaims unapologetically, "With love and delight [believers] live according to the will of God in all good works" (A. 90). Elsewhere, the Catechism asserts, "With a sincere resolution [believers] begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God" (A. 114).

If one objects, "I cannot do good works," either he is lying or confused or he is not converted. A regenerat-

ed, called, converted person can do, and does do, good works. If you have been converted, you are changed or transformed and you are a new creature. Now walk in that newness of life (Rom. 6:4; II Cor. 5:17).

A gradual and incomplete turning

Conversion is not a once-off, once-for-all, finished work of God, but it is a gradual work of God's grace. Initial conversion is followed by lifelong conversion. We *have been* converted, and we *are being converted*, and we *shall be converted* in the future. Therefore, we must have realistic expectations for the Christian life. If you are converted, expect to turn daily from sin to God, but do not expect perfect, instantaneous, complete conversion. Expect to struggle with sin, and do not expect that struggle to end in this life, but also do not expect that struggle to be hopeless. Paul writes, "Sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14).

Apply such realistic expectations to others also. Do

not expect perfection from your fellow saints. Do not expect perfection from your spouse. Your spouse will commit sin against you; your spouse will annoy you or even hurt you. Do not expect perfection from your children. They will commit sin; foolishness is bound up in their hearts; they, like you, are holy only in principle. Do not expect perfection from other church members, for they will sin against you. Practice longsuffering, kindness, and love: "Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another: if any man have a quarrel against any, even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Col. 3:12-13).

Your fellow saints are imperfectly converted, they are not fully renewed, not perfectly turned, and God has much work yet to do in them, as well as in you. Let that knowledge of your conversion and theirs determine how you relate to others, as you trust in God's grace to renew you after the image of His Son.



Go ye into all the world

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The Belgic Confession and missions (5)

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2023, p. 228.

In our preceding articles we observed that the missionary character and flavor of the Belgic Confession is evident from its content. We now conclude our consideration of this creed, noticing again that the creed has valuable things to say concerning the church's mission work.

Article 27: The Catholic Christian Church

Both the title of this article as well as its definition of the church point to and make provision for mission work.

The church of Christ (the body of the elect) is "catholic or universal." It is a church that exists "from the beginning of the world, and will be to the end thereof." It is also a church that is "not confined, bound, or limited to a certain place or to certain persons, but is spread and dispersed over the whole world."

For this reason, the gospel must be preached in all the world with a view to the salvation of that catholic church. A proper understanding of the church's catho-

licity is fundamental to being a mission-minded church. If the church fails to have this understanding of her catholicity, she will fail to have a proper interest in missions.

The church of Christ is also "one." There is but "one catholic or universal church." Christ, the Head of the church, has only one body. It is by His Spirit that He unites believers, for the church is "joined and united with heart and will, by the power of faith, in one and the same Spirit."

This, too, implies the need for worldwide preaching of the gospel, for preaching is the means the Spirit uses to make the oneness and unity of the body of Christ a reality. Faithful preaching of the truth on the mission field results, under the Lord's blessing, in the establishment of churches, denominations, and sister-church relationships. The truth, applied by the Spirit, unites believers and churches to each other.

Article 28: Every one is bound to join himself to the true church

The church that is spoken of here is the instituted church. God's people must join themselves to a faithful, instituted congregation of God's people "wheresover God hath established it." God establishes such congregations all over the world. Sometimes He does this through the formation of daughter congregations. But God also establishes new churches through mission work. An inference, therefore, is the church's work in missions. God is pleased, through mission work, to give the positive fruit of new churches being formed in different places and among different nations in the world. He provides such churches so that His people are able, by His direction, to join themselves to a true church of Christ.

Another significant implication of this article, in close connection with Articles 30 and 31 (which concern the special offices in the church), is that it is the instituted church which carries out mission work. The church contains the special offices, along with the office of believer through which those in the special offices are chosen. The latter applies to missionaries, as well. The church not only chooses its local officebearers, but also those in the special office of missionary, which is an extension of the office of the minister of the Word. Missionaries are not and may not be self-appointed (Heb. 5:4). They are to be chosen by the church, sent by the church, supported by the church, and supervised by the church.

Another related matter is suggested by this article, namely, that the missionary does his work with a view to the establishment of new churches. This is his main desire and goal. And whenever that goal is attained, then the process continues, for the newly established church now takes up the task of missions and of the spread of the gospel to those around it. That is to say, the new church is self-propagating.

The Belgic Confession not only reminds us of our calling to be busy in missions, but also guides us in how to do it. It especially makes clear here that mission work is the work of the church.

Article 29: The marks of the true church, and wherein she differs from the false church

The Belgic Confession speaks candidly concerning the sharp distinction between the true and the false church. This has a direct bearing on missions, for this distinction sets before the true church the fact that those who belong to false churches are the proper objects of her mission work.

But there is more. The antithesis between the true and false church indicates that the true church must be

antithetical in the proclamation of the gospel. Not only must the truth be set forth, but the lie (along with those who hold to it) must also be exposed and condemned.

What makes this clear is the example of the confession itself. The Belgic Confession does not hesitate to point out the characteristics of those who hold to and teach false doctrine (Art. 29). Nor does it hesitate to mention some of the heretics and false teachers by name: Jews, Mohammedans, Arius, Athanasius, and other false Christians and heretics (Art. 9), Epicurians (Art. 13), Pelagians (Art. 15), and Anabaptists (Arts. 18, 34, and 36). In addition to all this, the creed also condemns throughout the Roman Catholic Church, specifically pointing out (among other things) Rome's errors as regards the apocryphal books, justification, sanctification, the sacraments, and church government.

By means of all this the church today is reminded of her calling to be antithetical in missions, specifically when she proclaims the gospel to all the world. Errors must be pointed out, heretics must be named, God's people must be warned, and those who err in doctrine or life must be called to repent.

Article 36: The magistrates

This article concerns the relation between church and state. It speaks of the duties of citizens toward their earthly rulers, as well as of the duties that rulers have in relation to the church. A significant statement in this article is that it mentions the "preaching of the Word of the gospel everywhere."

This language reflects the language of the great commission (Matt. 28:18). Thus, here too the Belgic Confession reminds the church, albeit indirectly, of its calling to proclaim the Word of God to all nations upon earth.

Conclusion

All of the above-mentioned articles of the Belgic Confession of Faith (including those we considered in our previous *Standard Bearer* articles) demonstrate in varying ways and to varying degrees the missionary character of this creed. It is not true, as some claim, that this creed (along with the Heidelberg Catechism and the Canons of Dordt) is silent about and thus irrelevant for missions. Nor is it true that the creed is detrimental for missions because it supposedly saps Reformed churches of their zeal for mission work.

This observation has been made by others, too.

Our Reformed confessions summarize and reinforce the sound biblical doctrine that missions...[is] an essential part of God's work in this world. If our local churches are not actively engaged in missions at home and abroad, we cannot lay the blame for this at the feet

of our confessions. Rather, if that is the case, our own confessions testify against us.¹

The creeds are an important part of our heritage, also as regards missions. While it is true that they are not a comprehensive guide for mission work, this does not mean they say nothing. We have seen this with the

¹ Wes Bredenhof. “The Reformed Confessions and Mission” in *Planting, Watering, Growing: Planting Confessionally Reformed Churches in the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2011), 37.

Belgic Confession. This creed not only reminds us of our calling to be busy in the spread of the gospel in all the world, but also instructs us regarding the content of gospel preaching, and indicates as well some other aspects of how mission work should be done.

May we take seriously what the Belgic Confession states concerning the church’s calling and labors in missions, and may this spur us on to be diligent and zealous in this important work with a view to the gathering of all the elect and the subsequent return of Christ.



Strength of youth

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Battling the devil (5) Offense in the war

Previous article in this series: August 2023, p. 446.

Your very real and dangerous foe, the Devil, watches for your ruin. He is a ferocious predator, seeking to devour your soul. Ephesians 6:10ff. describe our spiritual warfare against this Devil and his hosts. This portion of Scripture, which really amounts to a warfare manual, supplies critical points that every Christian soldier should know. One of these points is how important preparation is: “Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth...and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace...” (vv. 14a, 15). Another of these points concerns defense in the war: “...having on the breastplate of righteousness...above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation...” (vv. 14b, 16-17a).

Still another of these critical points about the spiritual warfare is the necessity of good offense. That is what we will look at this time. The offensive piece of equipment for the Christian soldier is the sword, with which the soldier goes forth and attacks. Ephesians 6:17b refers to it: “...and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.”

The description of the sword

Picture, once again, the Roman soldier in the ancient days of the apostle Paul. In one hand he held a shield, and in the other hand he grasped a sword. The word for

“sword” used in Ephesians 6:17 is not a long sword, but a short sword or dagger, one or two feet long.

Once again, the apostle takes a military item familiar to his reading audience, and uses it to illustrate for them and us the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God—a piece of the armor of God that is for offense.

The sword is the written Word of God. The Bible is not man’s word, nor is it man’s word interwoven with God’s Word. If this were true, then the Bible would not serve as an effective weapon in the battle. But as the *Word of God*, Scripture is an entirely unique book that we approach with reverence, is the only authority for what we believe and how we live, and is an effective weapon against the Devil.

This written Word is God’s revelation of Himself to His people in Jesus Christ. What an amazing miracle that is: the highly exalted God and Creator of heaven and earth...makes Himself known to *us*! What love and what grace! He tells us about His work of salvation. Whether it is the prophetic pages of the Old Testament or the fulfillment of prophecy in the New Testament, the content of Scripture is the gospel of Christ and Him crucified. What makes up this written Word, from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, is the message of sin and grace. Christ is the unity of the book, and that is partly why “word” in Ephesians 6:17 is singular.

This sword, the written Word of God, has its source

in the Spirit. That is what sword *of the Spirit* means. This Spirit is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. The Spirit is God. In what sense does the Word of God have its source in the Spirit? The Spirit prepared all the circumstances under which the human writers penned the books of the Bible, and the Spirit also prepared the human writers themselves to write those books. Furthermore, in what we call the work of inspiration, the Spirit moved these men to write down God's Word, controlling them as they wrote so that they wrote only God's Word. II Timothy 3:16 says, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God." The words "inspiration of God" mean "God-breathed." II Peter 1:21 states, "For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." The word "moved" means "carried along." The sword, which is the Word of God, has its source in the Spirit, and thus is an effective and powerful weapon in the warfare.

The use of the sword

This is the sword that we are to take up and use. The soldier who takes up and uses this sword in spiritual combat must know two vital things.

First, the soldier must know the enemy. The Devil has many tactics, which we have been observing in this series. What we want to notice this time is that he tempts us to view the Bible as having little value. Satan knows how important the sword is, so he wants that sword out of our hands. To do that, he tempts us to elevate other books to the level of or above Scripture. Or, he tries to shift our attention to counselors at the expense of God's Word. Not that there is anything wrong with a wholesome book or with a good counselor, as such; but if these are lifted above or used at the expense of the Bible, a serious problem exists. Additionally, Satan tempts us to neglect Scripture, to see it as irrelevant to our lives, or to be lazy about reading it. Similarly, he seeks to lure us into filling our schedule so full of deer and shotguns, basketballs and volleyballs, Instagram and Snapchat, tasty food and good friends, highschool academics and college degrees, that we have no time for concentrated study of God's Word. Know the enemy and his tactics!

Second, the spiritual warrior in Christ's army must know the sword that he is using. It is shameful and dangerous if we do not know how to take up and use the sword. It must not be, dear readers, that we are ignorant of how to slash and stab with this word, or that we use it imprecisely. Is your Bible dusty? How critical that we know how to take up and use the sword—reading it, studying it, meditating upon it, and memorizing it! When it comes to discouragement in dating, a friend who has approached you with deep hurt in their life,

complicated issues within your local congregation, or a variety of other scenarios, are you able to wield the sword with accuracy?

Knowledgeable soldier, *use* the sword!

The Roman soldier in the heat of combat did not leave his sword in the sheathe. He took it out and proceeded to slash, stab, draw blood, and even kill with that offensive weapon. So must you take your sword and use it. A dusty Bible is a sheathed sword. May dust never collect on your bedstand Bible! With this sword, you slash, stab, draw blood, and kill the enemies before you—spiritually speaking, of course. The same Spirit who accomplished the work of inspiration is the Spirit who enlightens us spiritually. It is the Spirit who also strengthens us to take up the sword. It is the Spirit who works with the Word, making it effectual. This is the Spirit of the victorious Jesus Christ who has established the kingdom in His own blood, now sits on His throne in heaven, and will see to it that the sword is used for the accomplishment of His purpose; of this, we can be confident.

Let's look together at a few scenarios in which the sword is unsheathed and used.

The sword is taken up when the Word is faithfully proclaimed from the pulpit. The preaching, when it is faithful to the Scripture, is a double-edged sword. In the case of the reprobate, that sword goes forth to smite and destroy. In the case of the elect, that sword goes forth inflicting pain, but it is a piercing for saving good. On the mission field, a hardening takes place among the reprobate under the sword, and the same sword slashes at the works of darkness to deliver the elect from slavery. Especially, the minister unsheathes and swings the sword in what we call polemics, preaching that exposes errors, refutes them, and sets the truth over against them. Proper polemical preaching will slash at such errors and trends as common grace, federal vision, evolution, and evil trends in society—and that is for our protection. But also, polemics, properly done, will not neglect to aim at the errors and sins in our own lives—a painful piercing for our good.

The sword is wielded when it comes to the presence of sin in our lives. In our personal devotions we go to the Scriptures and apply them to the sins that we struggle with day after day. In the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, we take the sword and repeatedly thrust at those sins in our lives. Perhaps we see sins that *others* are walking in—oh, how reluctant we are to get involved, to confront, to rebuke...but we must! We bring the sword, the Word, to those walking in sin, calling them to repentance. It is our prayer that the Spirit use this Word to prick deep within.

The sword is grasped and thrust forward against Satan who comes with his temptations. When Jesus was tempted of the Devil, He answered the Devil with the Word of God. Jesus took out the sword! In this we learn how we, too, must face our adversary: not with our own words or wisdom, but with Scripture alone. When the Evil One tempts you to use your body impurely, swing at him with I Corinthians 6:19-20—“Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s.” When

the Devil tempts you to act wrongfully toward another person, slice hard at him with Ephesians 4:31-32—“Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.” In what particular ways does Satan tempt *you*, young soldier? Which specific Scripture passages can you take up to fight against him?

The sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God! Take it up, use it, in the power of the Spirit of Jesus Christ who has the victory both now and forever.



All Thy works shall praise Thee

Mr. Joel Minderhoud, science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and member of Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Perfectly fitted for a lowly station

In the USA, approximately 1.4 billion tons of manure are produced annually by the 9.8 billion heads of livestock and poultry.¹ Dung beetles, tiny insects that recycle animal feces, remove about 30% of the agricultural dung. The 8,000 different species of dung beetles live in all continents (except Antarctica) and serve more than agricultural environments, being found in all sorts of habitats, from farm fields to prairie grasslands to deserts. Such a creature, with such a lowly task as eating and decomposing animal scat, likely escapes our notice. But this creature of God is highly worthy of our attention because it leads us to contemplate the wisdom of God and to meditate upon the spiritual truth that God equips us for our callings in this world.

Dung beetles—perfectly fitted

Scientists generally group the thousands of species of dung beetles into three categories—rollers, dwellers, and tunnelers—based on what method they employ to remove the dung from the earth. Each type of dung beetle has its own unique characteristics. In this article we focus our attention on how the roller beetles are particularly fitted for their task.

Rollers, the most famous of the dung beetles (wor-

ship by the Egyptians 4,000 years ago during the time of Abraham and the other patriarchs), are equipped with three key physical characteristics that fit them to roll dung. Their back legs are thin and bowed in order to wrap around a mass of dung and form it into a ball-shape that will roll easily. Their front legs are short and strong to support their weight and push the dung ball from place to place (yes, they do a “hand-stand” of sorts and push the ball while on their front legs, while their hind legs wrap



Picture of beetle rolling dung

around the ball and continually shape it). This work requires great strength. Dung beetles are considered to be the strongest of all insects, capable of rolling dung that is 50 times their own weight! That is equivalent to a 200-pound man pushing four mid-sized cars! Finally, their front legs also have rake or comb-like extensions to help pat bits of dung onto the ball and to help shape the dung ball as it is formed.

Because competition is intense for dung (as a food source and as a brooding source), dung beetles must act quickly when they arrive at a pile of manure. Rollers quickly form a ball of dung and rapidly roll it away from the dung pile before other dung beetles battle them for

¹ USDA data <https://www.ars.usda.gov/research/publications/publication>.

this resource. What is fascinating is that dung beetles roll the dung away in a straight-line path (not wavering to and fro), regardless of obstacles. Recent research



Picture of beetle

shows that the dung beetles navigate this straight line path using cues from the location of the sun (if they are working during the day) or from the location of the moon (as many dung beetles are nocturnal).

In fact, even though dung beetles' eyes cannot distinguish individual stars, they are able to distinguish the faint glow of large clusters of stars, such as the Milky Way. "Currently, dung beetles are the only animals we know of that use the Milky Way for reliable orientation," says James Foster of the University of Konstanz in Germany. "They are excellent little astronomers."²

In addition to the amazing ability to be guided in their navigation by celestial bodies, rollers (as well as dwellers and tunnelers) are equipped with a keen sense of smell, able to detect the smell of fresh scat a half mile away. Evidence of this is that dung beetles always approach dung from a direction downwind of it.

God's wisdom displayed

When we see these physical characteristics so perfectly given to the dung beetle to complete its ordained task of cleaning up wastes from the fields, we see God's wisdom displayed. Herman Hoeksema describes wisdom this way:

Wisdom is the marvelous virtue of the Most High that is displayed in the perfect harmony and adaptation to one another of all things, so that each creature in the whole cosmos has its own name, occupies its own place, serves its own purpose, and is perfectly adapted to serve that purpose; and so that the individual purpose of each creature is subservient to the purpose of the whole: the revelation of God's name and the praises of his glorious virtues.³

Dung beetles—"perfectly adapted to serve [its] purpose"—reveal the wisdom of God!

Each of the dung beetle's members is wisely formed to complement the other so that the task of cutting out the dung, fashioning it into a ball, and hastily rolling it away can be accomplished. God fitted the dung bee-

tle with strength, with properly shaped legs to shape and roll dung, with a keen sense of smell, and with an amazing ability to navigate with cues from the Milky Way—all for the goal of efficiently and capably recycling the manure that the multitudes of land animals deposit daily. Everything in the creation harmoniously fits! From odorous chemical compounds wafting from the manure, to the celestial bodies that direct the beetles' pathways—all creatures, from the tiniest to the greatest, are woven together in a marvelous fashion by our Almighty, most-wise God!

What folly to attribute all of this to a Big Bang or to billions of years of random evolutionary changes. What folly and sinfulness to worship this creature as the Egyptians once did in worshiping the dung beetle. "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and *creeping things*...who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and *served the creature more than the Creator*, who is blessed for ever. Amen" (Rom. 1:22-25). Throughout history, sinful man has denied the Creator and has worshiped the creature rather than the Creator.

But thanks be to God for the gift of faith by which "we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3). Apart from God's grace, we also would deny Him and worship the creatures. But we no longer live in this bondage, graciously having been delivered from this! Let us, therefore, praise Jehovah for this gracious deliverance and for giving us eyes to see His wisdom so clearly displayed in the dung beetle! Praise Him for *all* His wondrous works!

For a lowly station

We likely overlook the work of dung beetles. Their presence in the creation is probably not even noticed, partly because it is at night that "the beasts of the forest do creep forth" (Ps. 104:20), and more likely because most of us actively avoid the smelly manure in the fields where the dung beetles labor. Regardless of whether we notice or not, and whether the task is menial or not, dung beetles have a very important task in God's creation. There are three major benefits to the labors of the dung beetle. Without the recycling labors of the dung beetles, manure deposits (pats) would harden and accumulate, killing off the vegetation below it. An average cow drops twelve pats per day. In regions of Texas, it is estimated that dung beetles bury approximately 80% of the cow manure from the fields. Without this removal

2 <https://spaceweatherarchive.com/2022/09/06/dung-beetles-navigate-using-the-milky-way-new-results>.

3 Herman Hoeksema, *All Glory to the Only Good God*. (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2013), 253.

of dung, plants and animals would not be able to thrive, adversely affecting the ecosystem balance.

A study done in Tsavo National Park in Kenya demonstrated how rapidly dung beetles can eliminate a bolus of elephant manure. In the evening, scientists put out a 30-liter bait sample of elephant dung. “Clouds of small beetles swept in, landed on the dung and immediately tunneled into it. Within half an hour...the firm, malodorous, football-size boluses of dung [were transformed] into a spreading mat two or three centimeters thick and as much as two meters in diameter.”⁴

Secondly, the activity of dung beetles serves the important purpose of aerating and fertilizing the soil. The tunneling dung beetles dig holes into the ground and tunnels below ground in order to bury the dung and to raise their offspring. This digging and tunneling activity aerates the soil, thus loosening the soil particles and providing easy pathways for plant roots and rainwater to infiltrate the soil.

Finally, dung beetles remove parasites and greatly reduce the number of flies that breed and spread from fresh dung. Cow manure is a great breeding platform for flies; each cow pat can serve as a breeding ground so that 3,000 more flies develop in about two weeks. Besides pesky flies, there are disease-causing microorganisms in manure that also are eliminated by the dung beetles’ consumption of the manure.

Problematically, modern parasiticides (chemicals that kill parasites) that are given to livestock to protect them from ticks, fleas, and other parasites, harm the dung beetles that feed on the dung. Careless use of the parasiticides may actually have the potential inadvertently to cause an increase in fly and disease-carrying microorganism populations by harming the very dung beetles that eliminate these pests. Again we see that the creation is so intricately woven together that to harm one creature has its effects on many other creatures connected to it.

Spiritual picture of the Christian’s calling

Eating manure to eliminate it from the face of the earth is a lowly calling. Such a lowly station ought to remind

us of the spiritual truth of humility and service to which we are all called. “I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Ps. 84:10). Our natures desire that *we* be served. But we are called to a life of humility and service (Phil. 2)—to a life of serving others, not ourselves. Let not pride or ambition reign in our heart, but let us be humble servants. May we learn not to be envious of others who appear to have a supposedly more prestigious calling in their daily work or in the church, but humble ourselves and be content with whatever calling God has given us. All callings and stations are important in God’s church! “Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor” (I Cor. 12:22-23).

Let us also never forget that it is God who calls each to his station. And where He calls, He equips! As Jehovah so wisely equips the dung beetle for its task, so He perfectly equips you for your calling.

Is yours the calling to be a parent of covenant young children? When you feel overwhelmed with the high responsibility to train His covenant children in His ways, be reminded that God who has called you also equips you! Is yours the calling to serve as an

elder and make judgments regarding sin, or repentance, or doctrinal distinctions? When you feel overwhelmed with the weightiness and difficulties of your labors, be reminded that God who has called you also equips you! When Moses felt unable to lead Israel (“O my Lord, I am not eloquent...I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue,” Exodus 4:10), God promised to equip him (“Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say,” Exodus 4:12). And so it was with Gideon (Jud. 6:14-16), and so it has been with God’s people throughout history.

Be encouraged in God’s promises that He who has begun a good work in you, will complete it! “Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect [complete, equipped] in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (Heb. 13:20-21). “Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it” (I Thess. 5:24).

⁴ Bernard Heinrich and George A. Bartholomew. “The Ecology of the African Dung Beetle.” *Scientific American*. Vol. 241, No.5. (November 1979), 146-157.



Remembering the days of old

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

Thys Feenstra history

This family history was submitted by Josh Feenstra and Marlin Feenstra, both members of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. Their contribution to this series of PRC family histories is greatly appreciated.

The Feenstra family, as it originated from, and still primarily finds its membership in Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California, traces its beginnings to Thys Feenstra. Thys was a founding member of the church in 1932, and was present for much of the PRCA's early denominational history.

Like many families in the PRCA, the Feenstra family traces its roots back to the Netherlands. Thys' father, also named Thijs¹ was born in the northern province of Friesland in 1875. His mother Sara Jacoba Greep was born in the southernmost province of Zeeland in 1869. They would marry in 1895 after just two months of courtship. Thijs was "an architect in a long line of family architects."² Shortly after their marriage the newlyweds would move to the district of Scheveningen in The Hague, and attend the Reformed Church, which The Queen of Holland and the Royal Family (The House of Orange) also attended. Dutch society was characterized by strong class distinctions at this time, with seats in the churches being

auctioned off to the highest bidder. The closer the seats were to the Royal Family, the higher the price.³

On February 11, 1902 Thijs and Sara would have identical twin boys, Kryn and Thys, who joined other children born to the family so that, by 1904, there were six children. Two years later, Sara would pass away in childbirth. This was a tragedy for the family personally and financially, because the money that Sara's family contributed to Thijs' business when they were married had to be returned to them upon her death.

The Feenstras had hired a nursemaid named Adriana Pieterella Phernambucq to help with the children and household. Adriana stayed on after Sara's death, and on January 23, 1907, roughly seven months after the death of Sara, Thijs and Adriana would marry. Since Adriana was a commoner from the poor class, Thijs' financial situation, reputation, and social standing suffered. Thys remembers that after his mother's death "we lived in a large house and had to uphold our name and place in society. We did not want people to know that we were poor." They would



back: Louisa, Adriana, Reink, Thijs, Johanna
front: Kryn, Marinus, Thys., Circa 1908

keep a wooden ham in the window and go to the bakery to get an empty cake box so that others would think they could still afford a bakery cake.⁴ Eventually the family decided to start over in the New World.

1 Thys was named after his father and had his father's spelling (pronounced the same—rhymes with nice) on his birth certificate. At some point he started using "Thys," which I will use to denote the younger, using "Thijs" for his father.

2 Mark H. Hoeksema. "Interview with William Feenstra," *Beacon Lights*, vol. 75, no. 6, (June 2016), 6.

3 Thys Feenstra. "A Brief Journey: An Account of One Man's Pilgrimage," (1988), 4.

4 Thys would write of this later: "When I look back on those days, it seems that this was so foolish. We certainly did not have to be ashamed of being poor because we confess that God makes both rich and poor, and by His mercies saves both rich and poor."

The Thijs Feenstra family immigrated to Canada from Holland in 1911. Thys was nine years old at this time and he remembers the band playing “Farewell, my dear Fatherland; dear Fatherland, farewell” as the boat left the harbor. They would settle in the city of Winnipeg, Manitoba, where they took up farming.

Times remained difficult, especially financially, for the family. Thys would receive education only through the fourth grade before he would be sent off to work in a factory. At nine years old he was working nine hours a day, six days a week. He writes, “The days seemed to be never ending, standing behind a wood-cutting machine all day long doing the same thing every day. On Saturdays I got off early and could go home at 3 o’clock.” The family would reside near Winnipeg for roughly five years before moving to the United States. Adriana had family in the Los Angeles area, and they would find a home in Montebello, roughly ten miles from Los Angeles.

Shortly after arriving in Montebello the family would lose two children (Louisa and Rienke) to the Spanish flu epidemic (1918-20). Thys writes, “Our sister died when she was twenty years old. That was a terrible epidemic; all the churches and schools were closed.”⁵ A short time later, the Feenstras would move about 200 miles north to Paso Robles, where they would buy a house on a 40-acre tract of land.⁶ In the providence of God the house would burn to the ground; they would lose everything in the house except for an old family Bible that was rescued out of the flames by Kryn.⁷ They soon purchased another house, but would lose this one too, during the depression that affected much of the country after WWI. They would spend three years in Paso Robles before returning to Los Angeles.

When Thys was in his early twenties, he developed asthma and doctors advised him to move to a drier climate. He moved about 70 miles east to Redlands because the climate suited him, and because there was a community of Dutch people and a Christian Reformed Church there. He boarded with a Mrs. Jacoba Zoetewey, who had a daughter named Jeanette.

The Zoeteweys were also recent immigrants, originally settling in Holland, Michigan. However, Jacoba’s husband John suffered from severe asthma, so they soon moved to Orange City, Iowa, then Denver, Colorado, before ending up in Redlands in 1919. John passed away from asthma-related illness in 1920.

John had been a very talented musician. His daughter Jeanette later wrote, “He directed choirs and taught Sunday School when we lived in the Netherlands. When he would take the Sunday School children for an outing he would have them singing all the way to their destination and all the way back. Our whole family has music in their blood.”⁸ He played the organ for services in the “Old church” in Rotterdam, and it was said he could play any piece by ear.

At that time Jeanette worked at the Redlands Sanitary Laundry for \$16 a week. A year after moving to Redlands, Thys married her in the Christian Reformed Church on Clay Street. After their marriage, the young couple would move back to Los Angeles for two years to help care for Thys’ father. They would live with Thys’ parents and help with the farm, peddling vegetables and fruit. Jeanette writes that Thys and his twin brother Kryn “would go around with a horse and wagon and sell the produce they raised. They had a lot of fun fooling people because they were identical twins.”⁹

But again, due to the damp air of Los Angeles, Thys would fight sickness, and the young family would soon find themselves back in Redlands. There they once again joined the Christian Reformed Church. However, trouble was brewing in the church. Thys writes, “It was early spring of 1932, when Rev. Schans made the announcement from the pulpit that a decision had been made by the consistory that the next Sunday would be the last time the Dutch language would be used in the preaching. At this time we had Dutch service in the morning and English in the evening. The majority of the members were not happy with this decision, and protested the action. The grounds given were that it was too early to make this change, as many of the people did not fully understand the English language.”¹⁰ Roughly forty families (approximately half the church) would sign a protest of the consistory’s decision. The consistory would respond harshly, accusing the families of organized resistance. Without officially visiting any of the families, they placed them all under the first step of censure. Thys and Jeanette were among those who signed the protest. For them, the issue was not primarily

5 Charles Terpstra Interview, PRC archives, 1985.

6 This house was located on Feenstra Road, which still exists in Paso Robles, California.

7 This Bible, in which family marriages and prayers had been recorded, was a first edition of the *Statenvertaling* Bible, the first translation into Dutch from the original Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek languages. It was commissioned by the great Synod of Dordrecht in 1618, financed by the government of the Protestant Dutch Republic, and first published in 1637. It was previously rescued from fire on at least one other occasion. It now resides in the rare book cabinet of the library at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.

8 William Gabrielse, “*Going Dutch*” in *Redlands, CA* (1991), 62.

9 “*Going Dutch*,” 63.

10 “A Brief Journey,” 41.

language but hierarchy. Thys writes, “Our trouble was not a doctrinal issue, but we fought against the evils of hierarchy.” “[The minister] himself brought the split in the church to a head when he preached a sermon about the rebels Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. We were those rebels.”¹¹

The case would go to Classis for adjudication. Classis would meet at the Christian Reformed Church in Los Angeles. Thys was among the three men appointed by this protesting group to represent their case to Classis. For hours certain delegates spoke in favor of the consistory and would not let the protestants speak. Finally, about one o’clock in the morning, the protestants were given the opportunity, and many gave vent to their grievances. Finally, Classis decided not to approve of the consistory’s censure of the protestants and appointed a committee to study the issue. However, a few days later, there was a turn of events. Thys writes,

On Monday morning, we received a committee of two members from Classis West, who were visiting each family separately. It seemed we were the first ones to be visited, because it was very early in the morning. Their visit was short and to the point. They reported that they had a special Classis meeting Saturday morning, and that they had changed the mandate of the committee from one of investigating to one of seeking our repentance. We told them that we would abide by the decision that Classis had made on Friday evening.¹²

That week the entire group met to figure out what to do next. They decided that they would stay together as a group and rent a building for their Sunday worship. It was also debated whether they were going to ask a minister from the Reformed Church in America to come preach for them, or to ask Rev. H. Hoeksema of the Protestant Reformed Churches in Grand Rapids to come speak to them. Thys writes, “It was Mr. Vanderwal¹³ who urged us to ask Rev. Hoeksema to come. That same evening, a letter was drawn up to ask him to come over and help us, namely to enlighten us on the doctrinal stands of the Protestant Reformed Churches.”

Rev. Hoeksema would arrive in Redlands in June of 1932, and would be of much help to the group of families there. Thys writes,

The first Sunday, he preached for us from Isaiah 50:4, “The LORD God has given me a tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary.” The opening words and the text that he preached were like the balm of Gilead to us. How could it be that God could have comforting words for us, who were weeks ago called rebels like Korah, Dathan, and Abiram?

Rev. Hoeksema would spend several weeks in Redlands getting to know the families there and letting them get to know him and the doctrinal positions of the PRC.

It was a joyous time for all. Thys writes,

The Protestant Reformed cause became our cause, and before Rev. Hoeksema returned to Grand Rapids, we were organized as the First Protestant Reformed Church of Redlands. From then on as we gathered together, we were the instituted church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Never had I heard such singing as on that first Sunday morning in the Contemporary Club, where we first met.

Thys Feenstra and the rest of the families in Redlands were very sad to see Rev. Hoeksema go, but he left the group there “with a church history that is worthwhile for me to record. He left us with a gospel wherein God is sovereign, and wherein God is God, and where God saves us through sovereign elective grace.”¹⁴

In time, with the help of Rev. Hoeksema, Thys and many of the other protestants would come to see that doctrinal differences, not language issues, were of primary importance. Roughly 55 years later Thys would write, in an explanation and encouragement to his own future generations that,

The question probably arises in your minds as to how our forefathers could just leave one church and join another. We were not just floaters. Most of us were born and raised in the Reformed Churches, and all this happened in about a month’s time. The reason why we could join the PR Church is because our worship and confessions remained the same, except for a few exceptions, namely, that we did not accept the “Three Points” which the CR church had adopted through the Synod of 1924.¹⁵

Yet the language issue undoubtedly played a very significant part in the group deciding to join the PRC as well. The Sunday services were given again in the Dutch in the morning and English at night. In Rev. Hoeksema’s first sermon to the group there Thys remembers

11 First Protestant Reformed Church 25th anniversary program [1932-1957], 5. This was the original name of the PRC in Redlands. When it was reconstituted after 1953, the congregation took on the name “Hope PRC.”

12 “A Brief Journey,” 42, 43.

13 Mr. James Vanderwal, who was Prof. B. Gritters’ great-grandfather.

14 “A Brief Journey,” 44, 45, 46.

15 “A Brief Journey,” 47.

specifically the Dutch Psalm that Rev. Hoeksema read before he began to preach and the singing of Psalm 65 in the Dutch language. The newly formed Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands would not transition to having all English services until Rev. L. Vermeer's pastorate in Redlands in the late 1940s.

Rev. Gerrit Vos would be Redlands' first minister, laboring there from 1932 to 1943. The congregation flourished under Rev. Vos, with Thys going so far as to say that the eleven years under Rev. Vos "were the most precious years of my life."¹⁶ During this time he would serve as a deacon and elder, and would begin his long career as the Redlands Sunday School teacher.¹⁷ He was also instrumental in many ongoing building projects. In 1933 the congregation would build their own church on the corner of Clay St. and Lugonia, and in 1934 they would start their own school in the basement of the church.¹⁸ Yet, for Thys, "greatest of all, the gospel was being preached, and I was privileged to hear it."¹⁹

In time, however, controversy and trouble would, as it always does, make its way into the church. Thys, as a perennial elder and leader in the PRC in Redlands during these years, would have been witness to all of it. In 1943 a school dispute would turn into a church dispute and 16 families would leave the church and return to the CRC. There would be problems with Rev. Vermeer during his pastorate, and the denomination-wide split in 1953 would initially leave Redlands with only 11 families. Thys Feenstra was present at the PRC Synod of 1953, and would defend the PRC not only against those seeking conditional theology, but also against those who did not want the preaching that we must do good works (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 86). He writes of this time that there "were men in our churches who were trying to lead the church as a denomination in the direction of the antinomians, and if this were to happen, it would be the end of the PR churches." He continues,

They said that Christ fulfilled this for us when God raised Him for our justification. Now, I too, agree with this, but they did not say enough. Christ fulfills that "must" for us, in us and through us, so that we fulfill that "must" in Him. We read in Scripture, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for

it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do according to His good pleasure." That is Reformed!²⁰

These issues were especially prominent in Redlands. Rev. Hoeksema would come back to reconstitute the church after the split of 1953, and he would stay with Thys and Jeanette. Within a few weeks of reconstituting, the church would grow again to include 27 families. Then Thys would remark that, "This certainly was a sad history, because some of the brethren refused to come with us because of these men who did not want to hear the preaching of the *must* and the activity of faith."²¹ In some capacity though, some of these men would stay with the PRC after the split, and would continue to plague the church. During Rev. H. Kuiper's pastorate, Thys writes that, "It seems that some of the people went to church to see if our ministers would make a slip of the tongue with regard to 'conditions' and 'prerequisites.' These were not happy days in the history of the church." Rev. Kuiper was often sick during this time and Thys would often have to read sermons. He writes, "I often read, and was often criticized for reading 'borderline' sermons."²² It would all come to a head in the early 1960's during Rev. H. Veldman's pastorate. Thys writes,

The Lord had given the Redlands congregation, after the split, ministers who held high the banner of truth. Rev. Veldman was certainly a preacher of the gospel and was a profound teacher. During this time synod appointed a committee to come to Redlands because the consistory needed help with some difficulties they were having. It was the old problem that some of the brethren did not want the preaching of the *must*, or the activity of faith. These brethren caused a lot of trouble in our church. The synodical committee upheld the consistory and from then on we had peace in our church. We will never, never forget these times.²³

Thys was a defender of the truth, and a defender of the church, as were many of his generation. The majority of the men in the church of that time had grown up in poverty. They were in many cases uneducated, at least by the standards of our day. Thys had only a 4th grade education, and at nine years old was working 50+ hours a week in a factory. Yet, many of them read as much as they could, especially the Bible; and they fought for what they thought was right, not arbitrarily, but based on the Word of God. Thys writes,

16 "A Brief Journey," 50.

17 Thys would serve as a Sunday School teacher for 35 years.

18 The school in Redlands would be the first Protestant Reformed school in the denomination. It was called "First Reformed Christian School" and operated until the split of 1953.

19 "A Brief Journey," 51.

20 "A Brief Journey," 55.

21 "A Brief Journey," 60.

22 "A Brief Journey," 61.

23 "A Brief Journey," 61.

Principles cannot be changed because of our own carnal benefits. They must be in harmony with the Word of God...the only stand of the church is to adhere to principles and never depart from them, because they are eternal and not determined by man, society, the State, by convictions and circumstances, but by the most High God Himself. This cannot be changed.²⁴

Adherence to biblical principles would make life hard at times. Thys would battle against radicalism and liberalism, both within the church and sadly in his own family. He would write a short account of his life entitled, "A Brief Journey" shortly before he died. In writing that book he would detail some of those sorrows,

24 "A Brief Journey," 55, 56.

being "overwhelmed sometimes with grief because of them."²⁵ In an interview with C. Terpstra, he would say of these troubles in the church, "It would take a book to fill its pages, if I were to write all the details of what happened in Redlands. But I don't think that would be necessary, do you? For, who gathereth those things gathereth sorrow."²⁶

By God's grace five of his seven children would remain faithful to the church and many of his descendants remain in Reformed churches, particularly Hope PRC of Redlands, California. Thys Feenstra passed away on July 21, 1989 at the age of 87 years.

25 "A Brief Journey," 55.

26 Interview, 1985.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Hudsonville PRC expresses our sympathy to fellow officebearers, elders John VanBaren and Mitch Zuverink, deacon Jordan VanBaren and their families, in the loss of their brother and uncle, **Mr. Gerald VanBaren**, at the age of 62. May they find comfort in Psalm 116:8, 9: "For thou hast delivered my soul from death, mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the LORD in the land of the living."

Ed Hoekstra, Vice President
Ralph VanderVeen, clerk

Bound volumes

The September 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 99. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of October. For additional orders, call Dwight at (616) 457-5970.

Reformed Witness Hour

reformedwitnesshour.org

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

- October 1—Satisfied with Marrow and Fatness
Psalm 65:1-3
- October 8—Gathered unto Armageddon
Revelation 16:10-16
- October 15—The Final Sign of Christ's Return
Luke 21:25-28
- October 22—The Scripture of God's Word
II Peter 1:20, 21
- October 29—To a Thousand Generations
Psalm 105:6-8