

# THE STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE *published by*  
THE REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION, GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

Subscription communications  
should be addressed to J. H.  
Vander Vennen, 1061 Dunham  
St., S. E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

#### Editorial Staff:

H. HOEKSEMA G. M. OPHOFF  
G. VAN BEEK

Communications relative to con-  
tents should be addressed to Rev.  
H. Hoeksema, 1139 Franklin St.,  
S. E., Grand Rapids, Mich.

Entered as second class mail matter at Grand Rapids, Michigan

Vol. III, No. 10

FEBRUARY 15, 1927

Subscription Price, \$2.50

## MEDITATION

### A PRAYER FOR BREAD

Give us this day our daily bread.  
Matt. 6:11

Our Father!  
Which art in heaven!  
Give us this day our daily bread!

We know that Thou carest for all Thy creatures. Thou hast made them and they depend on Thee. They all wait upon Thee and Thou sustainest them and givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thy hand and by Thy bounties they are fed and their every need is supplied. The lily of the field Thou dost array in a beauty that was never surpassed by human apparel, and over the sparrow that is sold for two farthings Thou keepest watch. To Thee do the young ravens cry and Thou feedest them; and from Thee do the young lions seek their meat, neither do they seek in vain.

Father in heaven, Thy tender mercy is spread over all the works of Thy hands!

And these creatures live by bread alone, which Thou providest for them in Thy lovingkindness. Merely from the earth they are, for out the earth Thou calledst them from the beginning. Their soul is in their blood and they are wholly from below. And being earthy, merely

earthly, they are also sustained by the bread the earth produceth. And, Father, we are aware that we cannot live by bread alone. For Thou hast made us in Thine own image. And after we sinned against Thee and wretchedly proposed to live by bread alone, apart from Thee and in

opposition to Thy Word, Thou didst send Thy Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us, that we might live by Thy Word. This cover format, only slightly different from the original, was used from February 1927 to September 1941. By the end of this cover's tenure, the SB was already into its 17th volume year! The editorial staff at this time was composed of Revs. Hoeksema and Ophoff and Mr. G. VanBeek, with managing editor J. H. VanderVennen. When this cover was first used, the Protestant Reformed Churches were yet in their infancy, having been organized as a denomination for only two years.

earthly abundance, is death. We do not first seek after bread. The things of the earth are not our chief desire.

After Thee, the living God, our hearts yearn and long even as the hart panteth after waterbrooks. Thy Kingdom we seek, the glory and beauty of Thy Name we love, Thy will to do has, even though only in principle, become our meat....

And, thus taught by our Lord and faithful High Priest, so we prayed:

Hallowed be Thy Name!  
Thy Kingdom come!

Thy will be done, in earth as it is in heaven....

But, our Father, we still need bread.

For we also are of the earth as long as we dwell in this present tabernacle. Even though our inmost life is from above, spiritual, heavenly, eternal and can never be satisfied with mere bread from below, but only by the Manna that is from heaven; yet, we are also earthy, natural. For in this earthy tabernacle Thou wilt that, for a time, we dwell. Here we must dwell for a season, to show Thy grace in the world, to fight the battle, to travel our pilgrim's journey even to the end, to manifest ourselves as Thy children, to bring forth light in the midst of a world that is in darkness.

Even so, Father, we pray: And, therefore, we need food and many things earthly.

We do not  
But, for a  
Hence, Fa  
Our daily b

Glorious Father, we acknowledge Thy power and Thy grace. Thy Word is the power to give life. Thy Word is the fulness of life. Thy Word is the food and drink, and Thine are the means whereby bread is brought within our reach. The earth and its fulness belong unto Thee!

Thine is the seed the husbandman drops into the soft furrow of the soil, richly prepared; and Thou givest to



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

#### Postmaster

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

#### Reprint and online posting policy

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

#### Editorial policy

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

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

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

#### Subscription price

\$37.00 per year in the US, \$52.00 elsewhere  
esubscription: \$22.00  
esubscription free to current hard copy subscribers.

#### Advertising policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr, Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (email: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: [www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)

Website for PRCA: [www.prca.org](http://www.prca.org)

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

#### Editorial office

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

#### Business office

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

#### United Kingdom office

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

## Contents

### Meditation

- 75 Called to separate (II Corinthians 6:17, 18)  
Rev. Matthew DeBoer

### Editorial

- 77 Our forgotten (?) wayward children  
Prof. Barrett Gritters

### All around us

- 80 War in Israel  
Rev. Daniel Holstege

### Search the Scriptures

- 82 Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith (14)  
God's judgment and salvation (4) Habakkuk 3:7-13  
Rev. Ronald Hanko

### Taking heed to the doctrine

- 85 The *ordo salutis* (4a):  
Conversion: The old man  
Rev. Martyn McGeown

### Go ye into all the world

- 88 Protestant Reformed missions  
Years of rebuilding:  
Missions revived, 1954-1962 (2)  
Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

### All Thy works shall praise Thee

- 90 Light pollution: A distracting light  
Mr. Daniel Kuiper

### When thou sittest in thine house

- 92 Seeking the heavenly homeland  
Mrs. Sarah Mowery

### Report of Classis West

- 94 Rev. Joshua Engelsma



REFORMED  
FREE PUBLISHING  
ASSOCIATION



## Meditation

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

# Called to separate

**Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.**

### II Corinthians 6:17, 18

In II Corinthians 6:14-16, Paul commands Corinthian believers not to fellowship with unbelievers because of God's covenant of grace. He says in verse 14, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers." The apostle gives the reason halfway through verse 16: "For ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The words, "I will be their God, and they shall be my people," are the words God uses throughout Scripture to describe His covenant. With these words known as "the covenant formula," Paul is indicating that believers may not be friends with unbelievers because believers are God's friends.

Verse 17 begins with the conjunction "Wherefore," or "Therefore," showing that verses 17 and 18 give the conclusion of this section in which Paul calls the church to flee fellowship with unbelievers. Believers must "separate" from the wicked and "touch not the unclean thing" to the praise of their gracious Father and Friend.

### The covenantal basis

As verse 16 shows, the basis for the command to separate from the unbelieving wicked is God's covenant with us, but what is the covenant? It is first a relationship of friendship. The language of the covenant formula in verse 16 is the language of love. "I will...walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people." The covenant is a relationship of friendship that is established by God. We do not come to Him first and make the relationship. In Genesis 17:7, God says to Abraham, "I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee..." God does not say, "Please agree to be my friend," but He makes certain people His friends. Those people are His elect. Genesis 17:7

says that the covenant promise was made to Abraham and his seed. Galatians 3:29 shows who that seed is: "And if ye be Christ's then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." The covenant is with those who are Christ's, namely, the elect for whom He died. The covenant is the relationship of friendship established by God with His people based on Christ's work. Without Jesus, we sinners cannot be friends with the holy God. However, because of Jesus' work, we are perfectly righteous in God's sight, and thus we can dwell with God in friendship. Thank God for Christ!

An essential aspect of the covenant is the antithesis, which is living a life that is opposed to all that God opposes. In Paradise, God called His covenant friend Adam to live antithetically. Adam was not only to do what God said and eat of the tree of life, but He was also to reject the tree of knowledge, opposing what God opposes (Gen. 2:16-17). God could have simply not created the tree of knowledge, but He created it because He is greatly glorified when His friends reject what He rejects. This is how God has determined that we reveal our love for Him.

God called His covenant friend Adam to live antithetically in the Garden, but the antithesis was even more pronounced after the Fall. In Genesis 3:15, God said, "And I will put enmity between thee [Satan] and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Two different peoples would exist on earth on opposite sides. There would be the seed of the woman, Christ and His people, and on the other side would be the seed of the serpent, Satan and his people. God put enmity, or hatred, between these sides.

We believers now must actively stand on God's side, opposed to the Devil and his side. Verse 17 says we must "separate" from "them," the "them" referring to "unbelievers" (v. 14). An unbeliever is someone who does not believe in Jesus for salvation. He lives in "unrighteousness" (v. 14). In Paul's day, unbelievers surrounded the Corinthian church. Verse 16 implies that Corinthians worshiped idols, and we know from ancient writings that they especially served Aphrodite, the Greek god-



ness of love and pleasure. People would travel to Corinth, known then as “Sin City,” to satisfy their lusts at Aphroditē’s temple where there were more than 1,000 prostitutes. In verse 17, Paul is quoting Isaiah 52:11, where God commands the Jews to depart from Babylon. By quoting Isaiah, the apostle indicates that Corinth was like wicked Babylon, a type of the antichristian kingdom (Rev. 18). Like Babylon in Daniel’s day, Corinth did not persecute believers immediately, but first offered them the pleasures of sin. We live in Babylon today, a world where people seek their own sinful pleasures. Many openly walk in sexual sin, and others view fornication on their private screens for entertainment. Men make, listen, and dance to music that has filthy language and presents ungodly views of sex, women, success, and wealth. People do as they please on the Lord’s Day, worshiping themselves, instead of worshiping God with His people. “The Lord” commands His covenant friends, people bought by Christ, to separate from the world and their ways to His glory.

### The divine command

With the command, “Come out from among them,” in verse 17, Paul was telling the Corinthians, “You used to dwell in oneness with the world, but now you must leave that fellowship behind.” The apostle added, “Be ye separate,” meaning, “Withdraw from unbelievers and their lifestyle.” We must do the same.

God is not calling us to a *physical* separation from the world. This has been tried. Some have been hermits, living a prayer-focused life in a cave apart from all others. Monks have gone to monasteries. The Amish and Hutterites set up their own communities to flee the world. However, groups that separate from the world physically do not succeed at separating from the world’s sins. One of the reasons is that there are always unbelievers in the church that withdraws itself. Also, there is ungodliness in everyone, for each takes a sinful nature wherever he goes. We are to be in the world, but not of it. God says to the church in Philippians 2:15, “That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.” We may not live apart from all others in the world since God’s purpose is that the light stands in contrast to the darkness to His praise.

What God is calling us to do in the text is separate *spiritually* from the world. The separation unto which we are called begins in the heart. We must have a love for our covenant God and a hatred for the world’s sins as David did (Ps. 139:19-21). The people of the world are determined to enjoy life to the fullest, do as they

please, and set up a kingdom for man and his glory. We, God’s friends, must hate the world’s wicked walk, love God, and seek His praise. Then, we must live spiritually separate from the world by fleeing from their ways.

This calling to separate spiritually has physical implications. Coming out from among the wicked world means that we do not hang around with worldly people. We must talk to unbelievers around us and help them with their needs, but we must speak to them and assist them with the goal of witnessing to them. We may not be friends with them in the sense of going to their homes or out with them to join in their activities and entertainment. We may not physically go to any place where we will view or listen to things that are displeasing to God.

Verse 17 adds to the command to come out from among them and be separate when it says, “And touch not the unclean thing.” This is a quote from Isaiah 52:11 where God reminded the Jews to touch no unclean things. In the Old Testament, God called certain things “unclean,” like dead bodies and lepers. If the Jews touched these things, they became ceremonially unclean, a picture of spiritual uncleanness, and they were kept from temple worship for a time.

We now may not touch unclean things from a spiritual point of view. The world corrupts things, making them dirty with sin. It corrupts songs, movement to music, and moving pictures on a screen. When we touch these things in the sense that we join in listening, watching, and dancing, we become defiled. Our minds are filled with wrong thoughts, and our mouths imitate what we hear. This affects our worship at home during the week and at church. It is hard to meditate on Christ when you were living like the world the night before. So, God’s command to His friends is, “Do not touch the unclean thing!” Keep these things from entering your homes through the TV, computer, or phone. Avoid friendships with people that will bring these things into your lives. And, do not try to get as close to unclean things as possible, and then say, “What is wrong with this?” That question points one in the wrong direction and often leads to defilement. Instead, ask, “How does this help me glorify my God?” and if it does not, separate! Evaluate your TV, computer, and phone use, your friends, and what you do for fun, and put away the unclean thing.

This calling to separate must be given because Babylon looks so good to us who have a sinful nature. It is tempting to befriend a worldly person who is physically attractive and shares our interests. Babylon’s shows and music are so entertaining and pleasing to the flesh. Excuses come easily. “My parents used to listen to things like this when they were young, and they turned out fine.” Or, “There is some good in that movie.” We must

stop the excuses and separate in grateful obedience to our covenant God.

### A sure promise

After issuing the command to be separate, our covenant God promises at the end of verse 17, “and I will receive you,” meaning “I will open my arms to you and treat you with favor.” He adds in verse 18, “I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters....” The text does not mean that separating from the world is a condition we fulfill to be treated with favor and brought into Jehovah’s family. Verse 16 shows that the believers whom Paul commands to live antithetically were already in God’s covenant family.

What the text is teaching is that separating from the world is the way in which we believers enjoy family life with God. Those who do not separate from the world but continue fellowship with them are associating with

the Devil, and feel far from Jehovah. However, as we separate from the world in gratitude for God’s friendship, thinking on Christ and the covenant, we enjoy our Father’s friendship and favor. We who separate from the world by God’s mighty work in our hearts will enjoy His fatherly embrace forever in heaven.

This is amazing. We are weak sinners who deserve nothing from Almighty God. Yet, He forgives us, His friends, for Jesus’ sake. He strengthens us to separate from the world and, in that way of separating, causes us to experience His loving embrace.

This promise that we who separate will enjoy covenant family life with God is sure. It is sure because it is given by “the Lord Almighty” (v. 18). Nothing can keep Him from bringing us who separate to enjoy His covenant friendship. May this promise encourage and strengthen us to live antithetically.



## Editorial

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

# Our forgotten (?) wayward children

How many? How many covenant sons have turned away from the church and now wander in the misery of unbelief? How many daughters of Zion have rejected the faith of their father and mother and instead run in the cold and cruel world of darkness?

They were taught the truth as it is in Jesus, shown the cross where is forgiveness and hope, and by word and example pointed in the way of righteousness. But at some point, known only to God, their heart turned away from their parents, their church, perhaps even their friends. Then came the sad but not unfamiliar announcement in the Sunday morning bulletin: “After much labor and with great sorrow, the elders have granted the request of (covenant child’s name) to have their certificate of dismissal sent to their home.” And with those ominous words, the congregation is alerted to the son or daughter who is now a prodigal.

And then does the church forget them?

If you have access to your church’s membership directory of ten or 15 years ago, it would be a profitable exercise prayerfully and humbly to reflect on the church’s children whose names are not on today’s rolls.

Or, without a directory, look around the sanctuary on a Sunday and think about the wayward son or daughter. She sat next to you in catechism. He participated in youth Bible study. They went to the young people’s conventions with you. And now, gone.

Certainly, the absence of any name does not mean they all are in unbelief. But many are. Bitter about something, disenchanted with the church, or just saw the world and its allure, and left.

Are most of them forgotten?

Of course, not by their parents. Heartbroken father and mother cannot forget. Probably a day does not go by in which something will remind them of their little girl, now grown, who used to sit on their lap singing Zion’s songs; or the boy, now an adult, who for 18 years put his feet under their dinner table. Father or mother will not forget. And if the grief of a child lost in death is great, the loss to unbelief is greater—they worry for their *souls*. No, the parents do not forget.

But does the church? Their family of faith? The household of God, where care and concern for all the brothers and sisters ought to reflect—even more clear-

ly—the care that earthly families have for their ‘own’? Has the church forgotten her “wandering sons”?

Included in our hearts’ concern are not only the wayward who leave in their youth, but all the others: husbands who forsake their wives and wives their husbands; parents who abandon their children; families whose commitment to Sunday sports or work or a child’s wicked marriage led them to a church which condones their sin. These, too, were part of our church family.

### The instructive (but little known) forms

In the back of many Reformed churches’ songbook are the church’s creeds, Church Order, and liturgy. In the Protestant Reformed Churches’ *Psalter*, two liturgical forms are familiar because we read them frequently: the Forms for Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. But two liturgical forms are almost never read and are therefore almost completely unknown: the “Form of Excommunication” and the “Form of Readmitting Excommunicated Persons.”<sup>1</sup>

The doctrine—I use the word *doctrine* deliberately—of these forms ought to be as familiar to us as the doctrine of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper. The fathers at Dordt judged these forms to be creedal. Some early synods even instructed the churches to have the members memorize these liturgical forms. They wanted the people of God not only to know what to *believe*, but also how to *live*. And the forms for excommunicating and readmitting teach how to live towards the wayward and impenitent. The doctrine of sanctification—how to live in holiness—includes how to live towards the church’s wayward sons and daughters. This is biblical doctrine, as real as the doctrine of marriage or of Christ’s divinity.

The relation between these two forms and the Church Order ought to be noted. The Church Order, one of our ‘minor creeds,’ requires the use of the forms. When a “rotten and as yet incurable member” must be cut off, Article 76 requires the form “adopted for that purpose, according to the Word of God.” When the sinner repents and may be readmitted, Article 78 requires “the form for that purpose,” which, implied, is also “according to the Word of God.” The forms are an important part of the church’s proper government, based on the Word of God.

They are very instructive.

They answer, for example, the hard question of how to behave toward the impenitent; and we are warned not to have communication that is “too familiar,” but at the same time not to shun them. We learn that excommunication is not only cutting off from the church, but from Christ

Himself and all His benefits. We learn the three purposes of discipline—that the sinner may be ashamed, that the whole church be not endangered by his presence, and that God’s name be not blasphemed. And much more.

Early arriving church members who like to read before the service begins would do well to read these forms. Others will find time to read them, perhaps on Sunday afternoon.

### How to behave toward the wayward sons and daughters

The forms’ instructions most appropriate for our purposes here are the *actions* we are called to take toward the excommunicated. Note well: *after* excommunication.

Specifically, the church is admonished to three activities: to continue to *pray for* the wayward, to continue to *admonish* them, and to continue to *be good examples* for them.

How wonderful if the church remembers this. If she does, she will not forget her wayward children.

In the service when the wayward are formally cut off and the Form of Excommunication is read, it concludes with a prayer that is stunning for its wisdom, humility, and wonderful petitions. “We therefore humbly beseech Thee, to kindle in our hearts a pious zeal, that we may labor, with good Christian admonitions and examples, to bring again this excommunicated person on the right way, together with all those, who, through unbelief or dissoluteness of life, go astray.” That petition alone is worth memorizing. Does the church really mean this? Does she believe this is a proper attitude and activity towards those who have been cut off, or leave in impenitence? It is our *creed*! “O God! Kindle in our hearts a zeal to *keep on* laboring with admonitions and examples to bring back this one, and other wayward ones!”

Then, if the wayward repents (God be praised!) the Form of *Readmitting* is read. And it begins with an assertion that no church member can make in good conscience unless he has been praying the prayer in the Form of *Excommunication*. The elders announce to the congregation: “We cannot conceal from you now that he [the impenitent], by the above-mentioned remedy [excommunication] *as also by the means of good admonitions and your Christian prayers*, is come so far that he is ashamed of his sins, praying us to be readmitted....” That is, with this form we confess that God has used our continued admonitions and prayers to bring the impenitent to sorrow. But have we been doing that? It is to my shame that I have not sufficiently learned the doctrine in these creeds.

<sup>1</sup> You may find them immediately after the Lord’s Supper Form.

There are very few who ever are excommunicated. In 40 years of ministry, I have never read the form. Some churches have—in my home congregation, twice in the past few years—but those times are rare. Usually the impenitent member quickly leaves, breaking his confession of faith vow to submit to church discipline. And sometimes consistories do not inform the congregation of all their toil to correct the member who is living in sin but now escapes the complete exercise of discipline. This is regrettable because the consistory does not want to miss the opportunity to remind her members to pray for and admonish *these* wayward members, too. We hope for *their* repentance and reconciliation as much as those finally excommunicated with the form.

### The better way for us

There are ways that we can remedy this weakness. Here are a few:

First, *as a preacher*, I am committed to including the wayward children on my prayer list.

O God of mercy, we commit to Thee the sons and daughters of the congregation who have strayed. Some, recently. Others, many years ago. Father, many are our own flesh and blood, family members. Their walking in sin grieves us. That they are no longer with us in worship is painful for us. We plead, Father, work repentance in them. Turn their lives upside down, so that they have no peace until they find their rest in Jesus Christ and return to the church. May Satan bring their flesh to ruin, so that their spirits may be saved (I Cor. 5:5). Father, we cannot turn them, but we pray for them, for we love them. They reveal themselves as our enemies; but give us opportunity and the courage to admonish them as we would a brother. When they see us, as they rarely want to do, use our example of love and humility to win them....

Second, *as a father, grandfather, or head of my home*, I want to use family worship as an occasion to speak to my family about the church's wandering sons. I want to open up the otherwise painful subject, to instill in my family a humble attitude toward sinners, and remind them of the biblical instruction in the forms. (The wording that follows here will be almost directly from the forms):

Children, do you realize that we deserve the grief and sorrow caused us by the cutting off of our former fellow members? In fact, we all would be cut off and banished from God's fellowship if God would judge us for our great transgressions. Let's not be proud, but humble and take warning here to fear the Lord and take heed to ourselves; if we think we stand, take heed lest we fall. Remain steadfast, my sons and daughters, to the end. Have you seen how the brother began to fall and,

step by step, came to ruin? How subtle is Satan! He even knows how to cut people off from the means of salvation! Avoid the beginnings of evil. Be sober! Watch and pray, lest we enter into temptation. Did you realize that we could, just as well as they, harden our hearts? So work out your own salvation with fear and trembling!

And the sweet fellowship we formerly enjoyed? We may not enjoy that any longer. We must relate to them in such a way that they will be ashamed (II Thess. 3:14). But we may never forget and ignore them, which will be the easy way out. The Devil would love us to forget and ignore them. So, learn to speak carefully with the Word of God to show them their sin and call them to repentance and faith in Christ, assuring them that the bosom of the church is always open for those who repent....

Third, *as church members*, shall we pray for wisdom to speak to the fathers and mothers of the wayward, the men and women who have been abandoned by their spouse, the sons and daughters whose parents forsook them, the brothers and sisters whose family involved themselves in damaging the church.

We love you, even though we do not often know what to say, and in our embarrassment just say nothing. Please forgive us. We pray for your troubled heart. We pray for peace of mind, for submission to God's painful way for you, for strength to go on without despairing. We want to pray for you. May we know what else we should ask for of our Lord?

### Hope for the wayward children

The last and perhaps most important part of the forms' instruction is in the Form of Readmitting:

Our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18), having confirmed the sentence of His church in the excommunicating of impenitent sinners, declareth immediately thereupon "that whatsoever his ministers shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven"; whereby He giveth to understand that when any person is cut off from His church, *he is not deprived of all hope of salvation*, but can again be loosed from the bonds of condemnation. Therefore, since God declares in His Word that He takes no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but that he turn from his wickedness and live, so the church always *hopes* for the repentance of the backslidden sinner, and keepeth her bosom open to receive the penitent....(emphasis added)

### Hope! Always hope!

No one may consider his son an 'Absalom' until he dies. A parent might fear this, but he never concludes this until death. Nor may we, the church family from whom he walked away.

So we never stop praying, never stop admonishing,



and never stop watching, because we have hope! We do not know what the Lord may do, for He is sovereign; thus we commit the way of the wayward to Him. But our wayward brother or sister, father or mother, husband or wife, is never “deprived of all hope of salvation.” As the form puts it: the church not only “binds”

but also “looses” (Matt. 18). Thus, “our Lord Jesus Christ...gives us to understand that when any person is cut off from the church...he can again be loosed from the bonds of condemnation.”

Pray. Admonish. Hope.

Let us never forget our wayward children.



## All around us

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of the Wingham PRC in Wingham, Ontario, Canada

# War in Israel

Most of you know by now that the nation of Israel was attacked by Hamas in what was reportedly the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust.<sup>1</sup> Hamas is the radical Islamist group that has governed the Gaza Strip since 2007. The Gaza Strip refers to a narrow strip of land situated between Israel and the Mediterranean Sea. The Gaza Strip and West Bank, a territory sandwiched between Jerusalem and the Jordan River, are home to the Palestinian people, an Arabic people, most of whom bow to the idol named Allah. Hamas wants to wipe out the nation of Israel and take over the land that they believe rightly belongs to Palestinians.

The city of Gaza is familiar to anyone who knows the history of the Old Testament. Gaza was one of the five cities of the Philistines along the eastern shore of the Mediterranean, the other four being Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath. God fought for Israel in the days of Joshua to subdue that region, and He gave those cities to the tribe of Judah as part of their inheritance (Josh. 10:40-42; 15:45-47). Even our little children know that the Philistines, heathen worshipers of an idol named Dagon, rose up and attacked Israel in the days of the judges and kings. But God raised up Samson who once carried the gates of Gaza to the top of a hill near Hebron (Jud. 16:1-3). God raised up Samuel, in answer to whose prayers he thundered against the Philistines and discomfited them (I Sam. 7:10). God raised up David through whose faith he guided a stone into the forehead of the giant Goliath, a Philistine from Gath (I Sam. 17:50). God raised up Amos to pronounce that “for

three transgressions of Gaza, and for four, I will not turn away the punishment thereof... But I will send a fire on the wall of Gaza, which shall devour the palaces thereof” (Amos 1:6-7).

Hamas that governs the Gaza Strip today has this in common with the ancient inhabitants of Gaza: they too hate the ethnic descendants of Jacob, as well as us who are the spiritual seed of Abraham in Jesus Christ, and they want to expel the Jews from their land. Therefore, believing that the conditions regionally and globally were ripe, Hamas unleashed a violent assault on Israel on October 7, the fiftieth anniversary of the Yom Kippur War that began in October of 1973. Hamas launched over 5,000 rockets from Gaza into Israel, invaded the land and butchered men, women, and children, including babies, and carried away some 150 hostages. The attack provoked a lethal response from Israel, resulting in the destruction of many buildings and the death of thousands of people on both sides of the conflict. As of this writing in mid-October, the war rages on.

In the West, there has been widespread support for the nation of Israel, which has been a bastion of democracy in that part of the world and an ally of the United States, the United Kingdom, and other western nations since its founding in 1948. But many Islamic nations in the Middle East lay the blame for this war at the feet of Israel, claiming that the root cause of the conflict is the Israeli occupation of territories that belong to the Palestinians, and they call upon Israel not to retaliate. Amazingly, many in the West, including many leftist college students, have expressed support for the Palestinians in this conflict, while ignoring the horrific war crimes of

<sup>1</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/israel-hamas-us-biden-blinken-99eb4063edabc80fa1fa198fb0bb020e>.



Hamas.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, the support of the West has been primarily for Israel.

Among the supporters of Israel are millions of professing Christians throughout the world. Among the most zealous, though, are those who believe the false doctrine that God considers modern Israel and the Jews of the diaspora to be His chosen people and plans to fulfill His ancient promises to them in the future. These premillennialists believe that the church is distinct from Israel and that God may rapture us out of this world at any moment and go on to fulfill His purposes with Israel, converting the Jews to Christ en masse and sending Jesus back to the earth to reign in Jerusalem for a thousand years. Therefore, they take a keen interest in this war and issue the call to pray for the peace of modern-day Jerusalem and Israel, failing to see that the call to pray for the peace of Jerusalem is a call to pray for the peace of the church (Ps. 122:6; Heb. 12:22-23).

But others who do not share that theological view of the Israeli nation that began in 1948 still believe we ought to support Israel in this war. Russell Moore, the editor-in-chief of *Christianity Today*, is in that camp. He published an article on the very day of the attack in which he stated his belief that we Christians ought to support Israel in this war. He pointed out that Hamas is solely to blame for the terrorist violence they initiated and the awful brutality they perpetrated. He said that most Christians throughout history have held to some form of “just war theory” and that Israel is morally justified to respond to the violent attack on their nation with violent force. He believes we American Christians ought to stand with Israel too because it is a nation that shares our democratic ideals in a region dominated by authoritarian regimes. He concluded his article, “However we read the prophecy passages of the Bible, and however we disagree on world politics, American Christians ought to stand together with Israel now.”<sup>3</sup>

Whatever our view of the war in Israel and the idea of praying for world peace, we must not forget that God is sovereign over this bloody conflict and has ordained it as another sign and means of bringing about the coming of Christ. Jesus told us that in the last days there will be wars and rumors of wars, and he showed John in a vision that he would send forth the red horse of war to take peace from the earth (Matt. 24:6; Rev. 6:4).

These are just the “beginning of sorrows.” The wars and rumors of wars that are taking place in the world today, including the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War and the threat of a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, are just the *initial* birthing pangs in a world that will eventually bring forth the new and everlasting world by way of an ever-increasing groaning and travailing. Thus, the present war in the “Holy Land” draws our attention, even as amillennialists. The question arises, “Might this particular war in that particular part of the world have greater eschatological significance than other wars?”

In the November 1, 2014 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, I wrote about the rise of the radical Islamic terrorist organization ISIS along the Euphrates River. I directed the attention of readers to Revelation 9:14-19 which speaks of the blowing of the sixth trumpet. Read that passage after you finish this article and, if you are inclined, read Herman Hoeksema’s commentary on that passage in his book *Behold, He Cometh* (especially pages 331-332). He interprets the text as a prophecy of a great war in the last days “rising from the east and coming from the direction of the Euphrates upon the entire world.” This most recent war between Israel and Hamas, like many of the wars of our day, takes place in the area known as the Fertile Crescent, the Middle East, the region of the *Euphrates*. That whole region is notoriously unstable, a powder keg of tensions that could easily explode into a world war with the striking of a match like this present conflict. According to the vision of John, the great war that will be unleashed by the sixth trumpet will result in the death of “the third part of men” (Rev. 9:18). That devastating war will lead to the rise of the Beast as the “savior” of a world in profound turmoil and distress.

But as we watch the developments of the present war in Israel, let us not be afraid but see the footprints of the true Savior of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. Let us also be comforted by the knowledge that our great God and Savior is absolutely sovereign over all wars and will ultimately bring them all to an end. “Come, behold the works of the LORD, what desolations he hath made in the earth. He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth.... Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah” (Ps. 46:8-11).

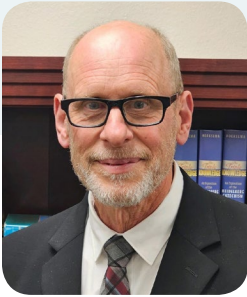
War points us to our ultimate hope for the coming of Christ, who will judge the living and the dead, including cruel men who perpetrate the most barbaric atrocities in war. In that day He “shall cast all His and my enemies into everlasting condemnation, but shall translate me with all His chosen ones to Himself, into heavenly

2 Albert Mohler reported on various pro-Palestinian student organizations in colleges around the United States in the October 12, 2023 episode of his podcast, “The Briefing.”

3 Russell Moore, “American Christians Should Stand with Israel Under Attack,” *Christianity Today*, October 7, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2023/october-web-only/israel-hamas-middle-east-war-christians.html>.

joys and glory” (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 19). War points us to that glorious kingdom of peace in the world to come when “the wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid,” when men

will no longer “hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD, as the waters cover the sea” (Is. 11:6, 9). May that day come quickly!



## Search the Scriptures

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

### Habakkuk: The just shall live by faith (14)

## God’s judgment and salvation (4)

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2023, p. 8.

**I saw the tents of Cushan in affliction: and the curtains of the land of Midian did tremble. Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation? Thy bow was made quite naked, according to the oaths of the tribes, even thy word. Selah. Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers. The mountains saw thee, and they trembled: the overflowing of the water passed by: the deep uttered his voice, and lifted up his hands on high. The sun and moon stood still in their habitation: at the light of thine arrows they went, and at the shining of thy glittering spear. Thou didst march through the land in indignation, thou didst thresh the heathen in anger. Thou wentest forth for the salvation of thy people, even for salvation with thine anointed; thou woundedst the head out of the house of the wicked, by discovering the foundation unto the neck. Selah.**

**Habakkuk 3:7-13**

In verses 7-13 Habakkuk reiterates some of the history of Israel’s entrance into Canaan under Joshua and of the distressing days of the judges. He does so in no particular order, but his retelling is nonetheless effective.

Cushan in verse 7 appears to be a reference to Mesopotamia, and Midian to that nation. The verse recalls the history of Othniel’s victory over Cushanrishathaim, king of Mesopotamia (Judg. 3:7-11) and to Gideon’s victory over the Midianites (Judg. 7:1-8:13). The word “affliction” is actually the word “vanity” and the word “tremble” means to tremble with fear. What a picture, then, verse 7 draws: the Lord’s work of salvation making even the curtains of Midian afraid, and proving all the life and culture and might of ancient Mesopotamia but vanity.

Thinking of the partings of the Red Sea and the Jor-

dan River, and the smiting of the River Kishon (Judg. 5:21) in the days of Barak and Deborah, Habakkuk asks in chapter 3:8, “Was the LORD displeased against the rivers? was thine anger against the rivers? was thy wrath against the sea, that thou didst ride upon thine horses and thy chariots of salvation?”

The question is asked because the answer is obvious. God’s displeasure was not directed at the brute creation. The rivers and the sea were His instruments in the great events Habakkuk is remembering and retelling: the sea in drowning Pharaoh and his army, the River Kishon in defeating Sisera and his army, and the Jordan in being divided to let Israel pass through to the conquest of Canaan. His anger was, of course, directed at the Egyptians and the Canaanites, but even that does not answer the question completely. He was angry with the nations and used the rivers and the sea against them on behalf of His people. Calvin says,

When he asks, was God angry with the rivers and the sea, he no doubt intended in this way to awaken the thoughts of the faithful, that they might consider the design of God in the works which he had already mentioned; for it would have been unreasonable that God should show his wrath against rivers and the sea; why should he be angry with lifeless elements? The Prophet then shows that God had another end in view when he dried the sea, when he stopped the course of Jordan, and when he gave other evidences of his power. Doubtless God did not regard the sea and the rivers; for that would have been unreasonable. It then follows that these changes were testimonies of God’s favour towards his Church: and hence the Prophet subjoins, that God rode on his horses, and that his chariots were for salvation to his people.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 151.

As Calvin says, it was for the salvation of His church that the Red Sea was first piled in heaps and then returned to its former flood, that Jordan was stopped in its course, and that Kishon overflowed its banks and swept away the Canaanite armies. That is obvious, but is not always remembered by the church in times of trouble and suffering. Habakkuk did not remember it when he was first told of the coming of the Babylonians.

God does all things for the salvation of His church. At the shore of the Red Sea, Moses said to Israel, “Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which he will shew to you to day: for the Egyptians whom ye have seen to day, ye shall see them again no more for ever” (Ex. 14:13). Psalm 114:5 asks: “What ailed thee, O thou sea, that thou fleddest? thou Jordan, that thou wast driven back?” The answer has already been given in verses 1-3: “When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion. The sea saw it, and fled: Jordan was driven back.” Judges 5:21 sings, “The river of Kishon swept them away, that ancient river, the river Kishon. O my soul, thou hast trodden down strength.”

That He uses even the created order to destroy the enemies of His church and deliver His people is a great and needed testimony in these last days to the truth that the battle is the Lord’s and He fights on behalf of His church. The horses and chariots referred to are not literal, but describe God on behalf of His church as One-man army. The horses and chariots of the Egyptians and of the Canaanites were nothing to Him. He removed the wheels of Pharaoh’s chariots and sent the River Kishon to sweep away the nine hundred iron chariots of the Canaanites.

The chariots and horses may very well include the chariot and horses that took Elijah to heaven (II Kings 2:12) and those that Elisha’s servant saw at Dothan (II Kings 6:17), part of God’s angelic army. Psalm 68:17 says, “The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place.” Nevertheless, it is the Lord Himself who fights for His people and to whom the victory belongs even when He uses the angelic hosts.

The first part of verse 9 has suffered from many interpretations. One writer mentions over one hundred of them. Nevertheless, the reference to the Lord’s bow being unsheathed according to the oaths of the tribes is not difficult. The oath can only be the great oath of His covenant to establish Himself forever as the Friend of His people. It is His word to Abraham, to His descendants and to us; a word that is infallible, sure, unbreakable. God is pictured, therefore, as a mighty war-

rior, with His bow ready for the defense of His covenant people and the destruction of their enemies. And if the word “selah” indicates a musical pause or rest, it comes at an appropriate place. What a thing to think of: Habakkuk’s vision of God armed for battle at the head of His horses and chariots of salvation!

The last part of the verse reminds us that God is no ordinary warrior, but one whose weapons are the powers of creation, the rivers again being mentioned, the very earth divided by them. Those powers of creation, rivers and seas, mountains and valleys, beasts and birds, rain and sunshine, sun, moon and stars, the changing seasons and planetary orbits are part of a vast army that marches to do His will. Those who have grace are able to see it in earthquakes and floods, in famine and pestilence. These are accomplishing His will in the judgment of the nations and the salvation of His people. They are always part of His coming for judgment and salvation in Christ.

Verses 10 and 11 personify those powers of creation and describe them as though they were alive. They, too, are God’s servants and do His will, trembling at His command, where men and women in their unbelief do not tremble and obey. What a picture! The mountains tremble before Him, the floods pass by as on review before their great Captain. The waves of the sea are like soldiers lifting up their hands to salute Him to whom they owe their obedience.

Verse 10 describes Sinai and the Red Sea. Hebrews 12:26 reminds us of how the mountain shook at God’s voice and the waters of the Red Sea passed by and lifted up their hands when He divided the waters to make a passage for Israel, as also did Jordan when Israel was ready to cross into Canaan. Nevertheless, whenever an earthquake shakes the mountains and whenever there is a storm on the sea, Habakkuk’s words are fulfilled.

That is not a thing to be forgotten. When mountains tremble and the sea lifts up its hands, then it is good to remember that they tremble and are lifted up before Him and in acknowledgment of His almighty power as the God of His people. So we sing in Psalter #259, st. 5, 6 (Psalm 96):

Make all the nations know God reigns forever;  
Earth is established as He did decree;  
Righteous and just is the King of the nations,  
Judging the people with equity.

Let heaven and earth be glad; waves of the ocean,  
Forest and field, exultation express;  
For God is coming, the Judge of the nations,  
Coming to judge in His righteousness.

Verses 11 and 12 describe the conquest of Canaan under Joshua. Verse 12 describes the conquest in general terms and verse 11 with specific reference to the



Battle of Gibeon, when Joshua defeated the five confederate kings of the Canaanites, commanding the sun and moon to stand still to help Israel. As Habakkuk reminds us, the battle of Gibeon was the Lord's battle. Not only did He make the sun and moon stand still, something beyond the power of any man, but Joshua 10:10, 11 says, "And the LORD discomfited them before Israel, and slew them with a great slaughter at Gibeon, and chased them along the way that goeth up to Bethhoron, and smote them to Azekah, and unto Makkedah. And it came to pass, as they fled from before Israel, and were in the going down to Bethhoron, that the LORD cast down great stones from heaven upon them unto Azekah, and they died: they were more which died with hailstones than they whom the children of Israel slew with the sword." Joshua 10:14 adds, "And there was no day like that before it or after it, that the LORD hearkened unto the voice of a man: for the LORD fought for Israel."

Verse 12 describes God marching through Canaan and the Canaanites in His anger mowing and threshing them. There is, of course, no other explanation of Israel's victories. A people, mostly untried in battle, a rabble of former slaves, moving irresistibly through the armies of the Canaanite nations, not only defeating them, but wiping them out, must have been the work of their God.

Verse 13a is the important part of Habakkuk's prayer and recollection of Israel's past history. God's going forth is always for the salvation of His people. Even when His going forth touches the lives of His people in persecution, in church troubles, in the rise of antichrists and of the man of sin himself, in wars and rumors of wars, in apostasy and lawlessness, He goes forth for their salvation. Always He is bringing judgment on the nations and working out the salvation of His people. All things work together for good to those who love God.

There is much difference of opinion about His "anointed" (v. 13). Many identify His anointed as His people, true and elect Israel. Certainly they are included but seldom if ever in Scripture are His people called His anointed. The reference is usually to Israel's leaders, to their kings especially (I Sam. 12:3; 24:6; II Sam. 23:1; II Chr. 6:42; Ps. 18:50) and sometimes to their priests (Zech. 4:14), and more importantly to Christ (Ps. 2:2; 89:38; Is. 61:1).

We agree with the translation of the KJV and its use of the word "with," taking His anointed to be Christ. We read the verse: "Thou wentest forth for the salvation of Thy people, even for salvation with Thy Christ, Thy Messiah." We agree with Robertson, who says: "A better interpretation is that the word means 'with,'

and is presenting God's 'anointed' as having a different relation to salvation from that of the *people*. God's salvation is *for* His people, but it is accomplished *with* His anointed."<sup>2</sup>

Why should it be thought strange that Habakkuk suddenly makes such an explicit reference to Christ? This is the Word of God and even in the Old Testament God's Word was plain enough concerning the coming and work of Messiah. Faithful Israel spent its days waiting and hoping for the Lord's Anointed. Realizing, too, that men like David and Solomon often failed as the Lord's Anointed, they expected someone greater than these kings (Luke 11:31).

Habakkuk, then, has Christ in view once again. He is the reason why the Lord does not cast off or destroy His people. He is the One by whom Zion is redeemed through judgment. It is unthinkable that God would go forth for the salvation of His people without His Anointed. Jesus said in Nazareth, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18, 19).

Calvin says,

He adds, with thy Christ. This clause still more confirms what Habakkuk had in view—that God had been from the beginning the deliverer of his people in the person of the Mediator. When God, therefore, delivered his people from the hand of Pharaoh, when he made a way for them to pass through the Red Sea, when he redeemed them by doing wonders, when he subdued before them the most powerful nations, when he changed the laws of nature in their behalf—all these things he did through the Mediator. For God could never have been propitious either to Abraham himself or to his posterity, had it not been for the intervention of a Mediator.<sup>3</sup>

Habakkuk, then, thinking of the coming of Babylon, not only looks to the past for proof that in every way and in all circumstances God will work out the salvation of His people. He also looks to the future and to the coming of Christ, the Anointed One, in whom all the promises of God would be fulfilled and His people saved with an everlasting salvation. We must do the same.

2 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 237.

3 Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 4, p. 163.



## Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. Martyn McGeown, pastor of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan

### The *ordo salutis* (4a): Conversion: The old man

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2023, p. 11.

**And rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.**

**Joel 2:13**

#### The terminology

In the last article in this series on 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 terms “old man” and “new man” from Heidelberg Catechism, LD 33 were mentioned but not explained. In this article and the subsequent one I intend to explain those two concepts in connection with the biblical truth of conversion.

The “old man” is a biblical term, not something that Reformed theologians have invented. It appears three times in the writings of the apostle Paul: “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin” (Rom. 6:6); “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Eph. 4:22); and “Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9).

The idea is found in other passages where the words “old man” are not used. The most common synonym for “old man” is “flesh”: “This I say, then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lusts of the flesh: for the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other, so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal 5:16-17). Other synonyms for the “old man” are “evil” and “sin:” “I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me” (Rom. 7:21); “Sin that dwelleth in me” (Rom. 7:20).

The “old man” is also a creedal idea, found not only in Heidelberg Catechism, LD 33, but also in other parts of the Catechism and in the other Reformed confessions, although the idea is often expressed in different

terms. Consider these examples from the Catechism: “I am prone by nature to hate God and my neighbor” (A. 5); “The corrupt inclinations of the flesh” (A. 43); “My corrupt nature against which I have to struggle all my life long” (A. 56); “More and more to know our sinful nature” (A. 115); “That depravity which always cleaves to us” (A. 126); and “Our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh” (A. 127). Consider also some examples from the other creeds: “A sense of this corruption should make believers often to sigh, desiring to be delivered from this body of death” (Belgic Confession, Art. 15); “We do no work but what is polluted by our flesh” (Belgic Confession, Art. 24); “But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities, but they fight against them through the Spirit” (Belgic Confession, Art. 29); “[God] delivers also from the dominion and slavery of sin in this life, though not altogether from the body of sin and from the infirmities of the flesh, so long as they continue in this world. Hence spring daily sins of infirmity, and hence spots adhere to the best works of the saints” (Canons 5:1-2).

The old man is not an old man as such. You should not think of a ninety-year-old man living in a nursing home, grey-headed, walking with difficulty with a walker or a cane, and suffering from all kinds of infirmities. The Bible uses the term “old man” to describe a spiritual idea. Perhaps the best translation of old man is *old self*. The Christian has an old self and a new self, but we must not think of a split personality or of two persons. Even the term “two natures” is problematic. I prefer to reserve the term “nature” for Christology, where we speak of Christ’s human and divine natures.

There are in the hearts of all Christians two principles at work. Perhaps we cannot precisely define or explain them, but we know them; we feel within us inclinations towards sin. But, at the same time, we feel the desire to live in godliness; a struggle—the new fighting against the old.

#### The idea of “old” and “man”

The term “old man,” though, captures two important

ideas. The old man is called old because of its antiquity—it is ancient; in fact, the old man is as old as the fall of Adam into sin; that is the source of the old man. The old man is also called old because it is contrasted with something new. If something is old, it is ready to make way for something newer and better. “That which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away” (Heb. 8:13).

The old man is called the old *man* because it involves the whole person: the heart, the mind, the soul, and the will. The old man cannot be compartmentalized, as if we could say, “The old man is in my heart, but not in my mind” or “The old man is in my mind, but not in my will.” The old man permeates, and affects, *every part of us*—that is why we need a new man.

In summary, we *are* the new man, but we *have* the old man.

The Heidelberg Catechism, LD 33, is very helpful in identifying who or what the old man is; take note of two words in A. 89, “we” and “sins.” By using the word “we,” the Catechism addresses the old man as part of us. When we mortify the old man, we are not thinking about someone else. It is easy for us to look at others, at their sins, but the Catechism says, “we.” “It is a sincere sorrow of heart that *we* have provoked God” (A. 89). If others have sinned, that is between them and God; *we* have provoked God. When your neighbor provokes you to anger, that is his old man at work; when you respond in anger, that is *your* old man at work. Each of us is responsible for the sins of our own old man. That is also Scripture’s focus: “*our* old man” (Rom 6:6); “that ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man” (Eph. 4:22); “ye have put off the old man with his deeds” (Col. 3:9).

Sometimes we try to dissociate ourselves from the old man. We say, “The old man is an evil principle inside me, but the old man is not really part of me”; or we say, “The old man is the devil and I am not responsible for what he does.” But the Catechism does not allow such dissociation or deflection. The Catechism says, “A sincere sorrow of heart that we have provoked God” (A. 89). Never think that the old man acts independently of you. When the old man lusts, *you* lust; when the old man is deceitful, *you* are deceitful; when the old man is corrupt, *you* are corrupt; when the old man is violent, *you* are violent.

The other word that the Catechism uses is “sins.” “That we have provoked God *by our sins*” (A. 89). This teaches us that the old man is evil; and other places in

the creeds and other passages in the Bible teach us that the old man is only evil. Romans 7:18 says, “in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth *no good thing*.” Ephesians 4:22 says, “which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts.” Colossians 3:9 says, “ye have put off the old man with his deeds.” In the context, those deeds are evil deeds such as anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, and filthy communication (v. 8) and fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness (v. 5). The old man is never said to be the source of good deeds.

There is not in the old man any speck of goodness, any inclination toward God or toward holiness; and there is never any improvement in the old man. The old man is, and forever remains, in this life, totally depraved. Do not misunderstand: we are not only and forever totally depraved. We are, by God’s grace, regenerated and, therefore, holy. But the old man within us, or the flesh within us, is never anything else than totally depraved. Therefore, we

should not expect any improvement or any reformation there. We should expect to improve, slowly, often painfully slowly, in sanctification, but we should not expect *our old man* to improve. The only thing we can do with the old man is mortify him, that is, kill him.

### Mortifying the old man

The term mortify appears first in Romans 8:13. “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.” Notice a couple of truths in that verse. First, *we* mortify the deeds of the body; the apostle does not say, “If the Spirit mortifies.” The Spirit does not have sorrow that He has sinned; the Spirit does not hate His sins; the Spirit does not flee from His sins. That is impossible because the Spirit is holy and has no sin. Rather, the apostle writes, “If ye mortify the deeds of the body.” Second, we mortify the deeds of the body *through the Spirit*. We do not mortify the deeds of the body in our own strength; the Spirit gives us the power to do it. This is also creedal, Reformed language: “*They* fight against them *through the Spirit* all the days of their lives” (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). Take note—*They* do it and they do it “*through the Spirit*.” Canons 5:2 teaches, “Hence spring daily sins of infirmity and hence spots adhere to the best works of the saints, which furnish them with constant matter for humiliation before God and flying for refuge to Christ crucified; for mortifying

**There is not in the old man any speck of goodness, any inclination toward God or toward holiness; and there is never any improvement in the old man. The old man is, and forever remains, in this life, totally depraved.**



the flesh more and more by the spirit of prayer and by holy exercises of piety.”

The word mortify also appears twice in Colossians chapter 3. In verse 5 we read, “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth.” Often, in the Bible “members” are parts of the human body; here, the idea is the inclinations of the flesh, which need the body for their fulfillment. By mortifying your members, or by mortifying the old man, the flesh is not permitted to fulfill its longings and desires after certain sins. Again, we notice that mortifying the flesh is a command to us: mortify! Do not expect the Spirit to mortify your flesh while you do nothing or while you are passive, but actively, deliberately, consciously mortify the old man.

The opposite of mortify is quicken. We are called in Heidelberg Catechism, A. 90, to be active in the quickening of the new man, but we may not quicken the old man. Quickening the old man would be to feed him, to indulge him, to pamper him, and to make excuses for him. You feel anger rising in your heart; to feed that anger would be to dwell upon all the reasons you have to be angry and to fill your soul with bitterness and resentment. You would indulge your flesh or encourage your old man. The result would be that you speak a cruel word or you perform a violent act. You feel pride welling up in your heart; to feed that pride would be to tell yourself about how great you are and to deny that you owe everything to the grace of God. When you feed pride, you will begin to speak and act proudly. You feel lust in your heart; to feed that lust you begin to think about another woman or man, or you feed your lust by looking at pornography or watching lascivious scenes in movies or listening to lascivious lyrics in songs. That is exactly what the flesh wants, what it longs for and craves.

Mortifying is the very opposite of indulging, pampering, and feeding the flesh. When we feel anger rising in our hearts, we suppress it and repent of it before we actually speak an angry word or commit a violent deed. When we are tempted to hurt someone with words, we bite our tongue and refuse to say the word that we thought of saying. When we are tempted to wound our neighbor, we turn from our evil design. That is what Paul means in Ephesians 4:31: “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you with all malice”; and in Colossians 3:8:

“But now ye also put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication.” Putting away or putting off those things means that you refuse to do them, to speak them, or even to think them in your heart.

### Rending the heart

Mortification is very painful. The prophet Joel expresses how painful it is when he commands, “Rend your hearts and not [or not only] your garments” (Joel 2:13). Imagine how painful it is to rend—or tear—your heart. Rending our hearts is not ripping our left ventricle from our right ventricle or our left atrium from our right atrium; those are chambers of the heart. We are talking about sorrow over sin that reaches the very depth of our being, so that our mind is troubled by it, our soul is grieved by it, our emotions are disturbed by it, and our will is repulsed by it.

Why would anyone do that? Why would anyone mortify the old man and turn to God? The answer is that God gives an incentive to the one who comes in repentance. Joel 2:12 says “Therefore also now, saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God.” The question is why? Here’s why: “*For* [because] he is gracious, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repenteth him of the evil.”

So, is there a sin in your life that you are afraid to confess and of which you are afraid to repent? Do not fear. If you confess a crime to the authorities, they may show you some leniency, but you probably will not escape all punishment; but when you turn from your sins, God is merciful—He does not merely show some leniency, but He takes away all punishment, He forgives, He turns away His anger.

How can God be so merciful to sinners who turn from their sins? Is it perhaps *because* we rend our hearts and not our garments? Is it *because* we have true sorrow over sin, *because* we hate our sins, and *because* we flee from them? Do our tears and sorrows blot out and wash away our sins? Of course not! It is because Jesus who never sinned bore the punishment that we deserved to bear. His blood sealed our pardon, and out of thankfulness to Him we turn from our sins and begin to live a new life in devotion to Him.

**Mortifying is the very opposite of indulging, pampering, and feeding the flesh. When we feel anger rising in our hearts, we suppress it and repent of it before we actually speak an angry word or commit a violent deed. When we are tempted to hurt someone with words, we bite our tongue and refuse to say the word that we thought of saying. When we are tempted to wound our neighbor, we turn from our evil design.**



## Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, pastor of Pittsburgh PRC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

# Protestant Reformed missions Years of rebuilding: Missions revived, 1954-1962 (2)

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2023, p. 471.

It was the 1950s. The aftershocks caused by the split of 1953 were still rumbling throughout the denomination. The churches were in a turmoil. Struggling to survive, the remaining men on the Mission Committee knew it to be the calling of the churches to send forth men into the harvest. Missions is an integral part of the work of the church of Christ. Neglecting the work of spreading the gospel was not an option. The committee approached the PRC Synod of 1954 with the request that several new men be appointed to the Mission Committee and another missionary be called. Synod concurred and instructed First PRC in Grand Rapids to call a missionary. When in January 1955 Rev. George Lubbers accepted the call as missionary, he immediately took up labor for a few months in Pella, Iowa. His attempt to salvage a church from the wreckage of the church that existed there prior to the split met with failure. Only two families remained faithful.

But the attention of the Mission Committee in 1955 was now drawn to Colorado and the Dakotas by a series of events that had taken place there.

In our last article we set the stage for what was to become the mission work after the split of 1953. We briefly explained the interaction between the PRC and the Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS) during the late 1940s. We found that there had been a loose agreement between the two denominations that together they host several conferences with each other, send representatives to each other's synods, and send prospective students to be taught in our seminary. Only one conference was held. In the next few years, the RCUS neglected to send representatives to our synods. I was wrong in my last article, however, when I stated that the RCUS did not send any students to our seminary. Upon further study, and with the help of a couple of men,<sup>1</sup> I was able to confirm that Herman Mensch was enrolled in the PRC seminary in 1947 in order to study for the

ministry in the RCUS. He successfully sustained his examination before their classis in 1952 and subsequently was called to serve a pastorate in a RCUS church in Leola, South Dakota. Later he also received a call to Isabel, South Dakota, becoming, as it appears, a pastor in two very small churches at the same time. Two other students from the RCUS were enrolled in the PRC seminary during the years following, one of these with the intention of becoming a minister in the RCUS: Harley Bittner; the other with the intention of becoming a minister in the PRCA: Marvin Koerner.

We note this only because Herman Mensch would serve an important, howbeit questionable, role in our mission work during the late 1950s. While in the PRC seminary, Herman Mensch received a thorough training in the Reformed faith and our Protestant Reformed distinctives. Along with this instruction, he and Homer Hoeksema, his fellow classmate had many discussions together. As a result, Mensch became convicted of the Reformed faith as opposed to what he learned in the RCUS while growing up in Menno, South Dakota. Also, he and Hoeksema became fast friends. During the years that Rev. Mensch served as pastor both in Leola and Isabel, he kept contact with Rev. Homer Hoeksema. This friendship, in turn, led to correspondence with Missionary Lubbers and Rev. Cornelius Hanks, secretary of the Mission Committee. These connections, together with the conference and contacts we established with these churches during the latter half of the 1940s, were the means by which our churches would begin a labor among several churches that had come out of the RCUS: Loveland, Colorado; Forbes, North Dakota and Isabel, South Dakota.

We consider first of all our mission work in Loveland, Colorado. This work began in a church known then as the Hope Reformed Church of Loveland. This congregation belonged to the Rocky Mountain Classis of the RCUS, until which time this denomination merged (in 1936) with the Evangelical Lutheran church to become known as the E & R church (Evangelical and Reformed Church). At that time, the Loveland congre-

<sup>1</sup> Much thanks to Mr. Al Rau who was a member for a time of the church in Forbes, North Dakota and to Prof. Douglas Kuiper, the church history professor in the Protestant Reformed seminary.

gation became independent, adopting its own constitution. We cannot appreciate enough what God has given us as a denomination in our own beloved Church Order until we witness what happens with churches that have no biblically based church order. The congregation in Loveland as an independent church needed a preacher. Where does an independent church find a preacher? Well, Loveland turned to the E & R Church, the very denomination from which this congregation had severed ties! Hope Reformed Church of Loveland *hired on a yearly basis* Dr. Max Schoenhaar, an ordained pastor in the Rocky Mountain Classis of the E & R. They did not call him. They hired him. In fact, Dr. Schoenhaar was a pastor in the E & R with no fixed charge. This left him available to be hired on a temporary basis. At the same time, he was president of the Rocky Mountain Classis and felt that by his position in the Loveland church, this church was indeed a part of the E & R.

Though the congregation for the most part was not particularly satisfied with Schoenhaar's preaching, the church drifted along until, in the fall of 1954, Rev. H. Mensch was asked to preach a couple of Sundays for the congregation. Most of the elders and a large part of the congregation were impressed with the truth he preached. In December of 1954 Rev. Mensch sent a letter to the Mission Committee asking for assistance from the PRC. What follows are a number of excerpts from his letter:

Just a word concerning the congregation of Loveland, Colorado.... I received a letter from one of the Elders, and according to the letter they are seeking for help. He asked me in the letter about joining up with the Eureka Classis, but I would sooner see them get into contact with the Protestant Reformed Churches, for the following reasons....

I'll make a suggestion concerning Loveland, maybe if Homer (Hoeksema) or Herm (Hanko?) could come out to Isabel I could go along with him to Loveland for a few days and talk the thing over.

I would say that there are about a possible 10 to 15 families that are willing, with which one could work.<sup>2</sup>

In the middle of March 1955, before Rev. Lubbers was installed as missionary, he along with Rev. Mensch and an elder from the RCUS of Leola, South Dakota traveled to Loveland to visit a number of families of the Hope Reformed Church. After discussing "various fundamental points of doctrine," the saints in Loveland realized they were not hearing in the preaching many of the important truths of God's Word. Neither were they

as a congregation receiving proper pastoral care and instruction. In a personal letter written to Rev. Lubbers the consistory requested that he come and labor among them beginning in July.

The request, of course, was not itself proper. It was addressed to a man that was not yet installed as missionary. It was a request made to an individual and not to the Mission Committee or what was soon to be Rev. Lubber's calling church. It was a request to labor before proper investigation was made into the viability of the work there. Yet, at the April 20, 1955 meeting of the Mission Committee, on the basis of Rev. Lubber's report of his visit to Loveland and on the request of the consistory of Loveland made to Rev. Lubbers, the committee "decided that Rev. Lubbers will visit Loveland in the near future to make arrangements for working there." Then in the next article the committee decided that "if necessary, Rev. (C.) Hanko will accompany Rev. Lubbers to Pella and to Loveland."<sup>3</sup>

During the last week of April (plans must have already been made before the Mission Committee met on April 20), Rev. C. Hanko and Rev. Lubbers traveled to Loveland "to investigate this area as a possible field for mission endeavor." Upon their return, they reported that "tentative arrangements had been made, subject to the approval of the committee and the calling church, that Rev. Lubbers should begin laboring there on or about the first of July."<sup>4</sup> The Mission Committee reported to synod, "At our last meeting, the committee approved of this action and also received approval of the calling church. Because of a sudden turn of events, Rev. Lubbers has already gone to Loveland to take up his labors there."<sup>5</sup>

The sudden turn of events the Mission Committee reported to synod is what happened in Loveland after the visit of Rev. Lubbers and Rev. Hanko the last week of April. Though Dr. Schoenhaar had already informed Loveland's consistory to find another preacher, he did not expect this consistory to turn to the PRCA for assistance. He was present when Rev. Lubbers and Rev. Hanko visited Loveland and actually sat to hear Rev. Hanko preach. He witnessed the excitement of the congregation and their desire for more of this preaching from the PRC. After our delegation to Loveland left, Dr. Schoenhaar as the president of the Rocky Mountain Classis of the E & R called a meeting of the members

2 This letter was received at the January 3, 1955 meeting of the Mission Committee, Article 4. At the same meeting Rev. Lubbers accepted the call to be home missionary, Article 5.

3 Mission Committee minutes of April 20, 1955 meeting, Articles 6 and 7.

4 See the report of the Mission Committee in the 1955 *PRC Acts of Synod*, pp. 78, 79

5 1955 *PRC Acts*.



of Loveland congregation. He made the claim that 18 members of the congregation had signed a petition requesting that two elders and two deacons of their congregation resign from their office.

Now, all of this may seem strange, since Loveland church was an independent church with its own constitution and was not a part of the E & R church. Or was it? Secretly, Dr. Schoenhaar had taken the monies collected by Loveland church that were allocated for benevolence and had paid the synodical dues (what we would call assessments) in the E & R church. The E & R church assumed therefore that Hope Reformed Church in Loveland was still a member church in its denomination. For that reason, Dr. Schoenhaar assumed the authority to call a meeting of the congregation in Loveland to depose its officebearers.

On May 23 Rev. Lubbers traveled by train to Loveland to enter the fray! For a week Rev. Lubbers met with the entire group of saints to discuss the situation and draft a plan of action. Rev. Schoenhaar had given the consistory members the ultimatum to resign by June 5. Before the end of May it was decided:

To call an immediate meeting informing Rev. Schoenhaar

to be there in order to discuss the crisis. (Neither he nor those of his faction appeared at this meeting.)

To suspend Rev. Schoenhaar from office along with the deacon that was an accomplice in the schism they caused in the congregation.

To call the congregation to worship on Sunday at 10 A.M.

To inform the secretary/treasurer that his services were terminated and the bank be notified that he was no longer in charge of the account.

Retaliation was immediate! The church building was locked, a counter accusation was delivered to the members of the consistory, and a meeting of the Rocky Mountain Synodical Judicatory was called. Elder Gus Huber was told that he must deliver the minute books to Rev. Schoenhaar immediately.

Despite the threats, the congregation met in a room in a public school on the following Sunday and there met in worship two times. Rev. Lubbers reported that about 50 souls were in attendance. His report to the Mission Committee included this commentary: “it was a happy and blessed group that met that morning. They expressed that they felt as if they were liberated from the house of bondage.” Our mission work in Loveland, Colorado had now begun!



## All Thy works shall praise Thee

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

## Light pollution: A distracting light

Earth is part of the Milky Way galaxy, a spiral galaxy that contains an estimated 100 billion stars and stretches an incomprehensible 100,000 light years in diameter.<sup>1</sup> On the darkest nights, we are able to view only a minuscule percentage of those stars with the naked eye and, yet, they act as an innumerable host that declares God's glory. When we sit in stillness under the night sky and consider the work of God's hands, we are reminded that He has set each star in its place and calls each one by name. Their nightly appearance is a constant reminder that our almighty God is able to fulfill all that He has promised.

Yet, for many of us, only a handful of stars is visible

when we peer into the night sky. As industrialization of the world has increased, so has the use of outdoor, artificial lighting. The result has been pollution of the night sky with light. According to a recent study, 80 percent of the world's population is affected by light pollution. In the United States and Europe, 99 percent of the public is unable to experience a natural night.<sup>2</sup> The widespread use of artificial light interferes with night vision and diminishes our ability to detect the natural light of the stars. In a similar way, with spiritual application, we will see that the pursuit of earthly pleasures clouds our view of the light of God's Word.

1 NASA: Solar System Exploration (Accessed 2023, March 25). *Beyond our solar system*. <https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/solar-system/beyond/overview/>.

2 International Dark Sky Association (2016, June 10). *80% of world population lives under skyglow, new study finds*. <https://www.darksky.org/80-of-world-population-lives-under-skyglow-new-study-finds/>.

## Vision

In order to understand how light pollution interferes with the ability to see the stars, a brief description of how the eye functions is helpful. The eye contains photoreceptors, which are specialized cells located in the retina that are responsible for receiving and transmitting light. These cells contain pigments that are sensitive to light and are able to convert the energy from light into electrical signals. When light enters the eye, it passes through the cornea and the lens, and is focused onto the retina, where it is absorbed by the photoreceptor cells. The photoreceptors then send signals to the brain through a network of neurons. The brain interprets these signals and creates the images that we see.

The retina contains two main types of photoreceptors—rods and cones. Cone cells contain pigments that are sensitive to different colors of light. There are three types of cone cells, each containing a different pigment that is most sensitive to either blue, green, or red light. When light enters the eye, it stimulates the appropriate cone cells, which then send signals to the brain indicating the presence of that particular color. The extent to which each of the different types of cones is stimulated allows for the detection of the whole range of colors. Rod cells, on the other hand, are unable to distinguish between colors of light. However, they contain a pigment called rhodopsin that is 100 to 1000 times more sensitive to light than the pigments found in cone cells. When light enters the eye and hits rod cells, rhodopsin absorbs the energy and generates an electrical signal. The strength of the electrical signal is proportional to the intensity of the light, allowing the brain to distinguish between different levels of brightness.

In the presence of high-intensity light, the rhodopsin present in rod cells is broken down and the rods become inactive. Cone cells, therefore, are the primary photoreceptors used during daylight and under bright artificial light. When day transitions to night, the brightness of light decreases. Cone cells, which require greater brightness, begin to deactivate and the rhodopsin in rod cells is gradually reassembled and reactivated. Therefore, our eyes become more and more sensitive to dim light as darkness develops and rod cells are increasingly activated. It takes about 20 to 30 minutes for this reactivation to occur, which explains why it takes about that long for our eyes to acclimate when we step into the dark night from the bright lights inside our homes.

## Light pollution

Having an understanding of how the eye detects light, we now turn to the topic of light pollution. Light pollution

refers especially to the use of unnecessary or excessive artificial lighting. There are two main types of light pollution that affect our ability to see the stars: local light pollution and skyglow.<sup>3</sup> Local light pollution, also called line-of-sight light pollution, comes from nearby light sources that send bright light directly to our eyes. Examples are bright street lights, parking lot lights, or flood lights of homes that are directed sideways towards the eye. That light interacts with our rod cells, degrading rhodopsin, and reducing our sensitivity to light. This reduced sensitivity contributes to our inability to detect the light of dimmer stars.

The second type of light pollution, skyglow, is the result of the scattering of light in the atmosphere. Earth's atmosphere consists of numerous particles, such as dust, water vapor, oxygen molecules, nitrogen molecules, and pollutants. When light interacts with these particles, it gets absorbed and re-emitted in different directions. This causes light to scatter through the atmosphere before it reaches our eyes. The amount of scattering depends to a large extent on the wavelength of light. Sunlight consists of all the colors (ROY G BIV) of light, each having a different wavelength. Colors on the red end of the spectrum have longer wavelengths and colors on the blue end have shorter wavelengths. Shorter wavelength light (for example, blue light) scatters more than longer wavelengths (for example, red light). Because of blue light's short wavelength, it scatters through the atmosphere to a greater extent than other colors present in the sun. It bounces through the atmosphere, filling the sky with blue light that eventually reaches the eye from all directions. This is the reason the sky appears blue on a clear, sunny day.

The scattering of sunlight in the atmosphere is a natural process. However, at night, most light scattering comes from the multitude of artificial lights present in our surroundings. That light, especially when emitted sideways and upwards, causes the sky to glow. When the sky is dark, rod cells can detect the contrast between the light of very faint stars and the dark background. When skyglow exists, the light of dim stars is blocked from our vision.

The somewhat recent switch from incandescent to LED bulbs has contributed to an increase in light pollution. Typically, light from incandescent bulbs produces warmer yellow and amber tones (towards the red end of the spectrum), while LEDs give off harsher white and

---

<sup>3</sup> Space and Beyond Box (Accessed 2023, March 20). *How to see stars and deep sky objects in a light-polluted city.* <https://spaceandbeyondbox.com/how-to-see-stars-and-deep-sky-objects-in-a-light-polluted-city>.

blue tones. Because of the amount of scattering that occurs with blue light, LEDs tend to contribute more to skyglow than incandescent lights. In addition, rods are more sensitive to blue light, so the blue light of LEDs degrades rhodopsin more rapidly than the warmer colors of incandescent bulbs.

### **Distracted by light**

By way of analogy, there is a spiritual lesson to be learned from an understanding of light pollution. Artificial light is needed in a world that is busy in the pursuit of earthly pleasures. Much of that light pollutes the sky, distracting our eyes and diminishing our ability to see the light of the stars. In a similar way, our own busyness with the cares of this world can distract us from spending time in the light of God's Word. Psalm 119:105 teaches that God's Word is a "lamp unto [our] feet, and light unto [our] path." God's Word serves as a guiding light in our lives. It provides us with wisdom, direction, and encouragement. It points us to Jesus, who is the "light of the world" (John 8:12). Because this is the case, we are called to set the Lord before our eyes at all times (Ps. 16:8) and look to "Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2).

However, it is not uncommon to find our eyes and minds distracted from God's Word by all that glitters and glows in the world around us. Just as light pollution clouds the brightness of the stars, the constant bombardment of information, entertainment, and materialism can cloud our sight of Christ and His Word. We may become more concerned with accumulating wealth, status, or power than serving God as commanded by His Word. We may become self-centered, forgetting that we are called to love and care for our

neighbors as ourselves. Even when we go to church, it can be the case that our minds are so distracted by the cares of this world that we fail to focus properly on the preaching of God's Word. In a society that relies heavily on technology, distractions from God's Word can be even more prevalent. We often find it difficult to disconnect from our digital devices, social media, and other on-line platforms. The bright light of screens stimulates the eyes and captures our attention, distracting us from meditating on the light of God's Word as we ought. As our eyes focus on all that shines in the world around us, they lose the ability to see Christ, who is our Light and our Salvation.

In the midst of a busy and distracting world, may the words of Psalm 46:10 be brought to mind: "Be still, and know that I am God." The pursuit of earthly glory, riches, possessions, and power can bring momentary satisfaction, but they do not have the power to bring true peace and joy. They will fade away like everything else here below. Therefore, we are called to put away the pursuit of earthly things, turning off those distracting lights, in order to set our minds on Christ. We must intentionally make time each day to put down our work, set aside our screens, stop the games, take up the Scriptures, and quietly meditate on the promises of that glorious Word. That Word is the revelation of Christ who is our "shield" and "exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). We belong to Christ! Because He was forsaken, we are forgiven and have been made partakers of all the benefits of salvation. In Him we have fullness of joy and are fully satisfied. As those who belong to Him, we are able to rest in the confidence that the God who made this universe with more stars than we can count protects and preserves us to the very end.



## **When thou sittest in thine house**

**Mrs. Sarah Mowery, wife and mother in Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado**

## **Seeking the heavenly homeland**

Do your children long for heaven? Do you? Before our family road-tripped from our home in Colorado to Florida last summer, we spoke of palm trees, the ocean, and the beautiful house awaiting us. Our daughters planned to collect seashells; our sons longed to fish for sharks. None of us have ever seen heaven. Do we anticipate that place in such a way that our children

are more excited to go there than they are any earthly destination?

In I Corinthians 1 and 2 the apostle Paul contrasts the wisdom of the world—which is no wisdom at all—with the wisdom of God, the good news of Jesus Christ crucified. Paul, quoting Isaiah, says this about the gospel: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have en-



tered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (vv. 9–10). The gospel good news includes “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting” (The Apostles’ Creed). As the Heidelberg Catechism also teaches, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart imagined the things of heaven (Lord’s Day 22). But God has kept back nothing profitable in order to instill in us a desire for that better country.

## The present heaven

The Bible uses the word “heaven” to refer to the firmament, as God Himself does in Genesis 1, and also to denote God’s dwelling place. God is omnipresent, but the present heaven is a physical place, “which is above all the spheres, and the firmament itself, and even the entire frame-work of the world.”<sup>1</sup> There Jesus ascended in His resurrected human body. And there, in His Father’s house, He prepares a room for each one the Father has given to Him.

Every Friday I ready my oldest child’s room for her return from college. I vacuum, dust, and change the sheets, and her siblings and I leave small gifts on her desk in anticipation of her arrival. *Jesus* prepares a room for you, child of God. He prepares a room for me. To that place our souls—now sinless!—go at the moment of death (Luke 23:43). We must reassure our children of this when we stand with them at the grave. We do not grieve as those who have no hope (I Thess. 4:13). For we know that although the dust returns to the earth, the spirit returns to God who gave it (Eccles. 12:7). Some teach soul sleep. The Bible teaches body sleep.<sup>2</sup> And the bodies of God’s people do not sleep unwatched and uncared for. They sleep “in Jesus” (I Thess. 4:14). “Their souls are in his presence, and their

dust is under his care and power.”<sup>3</sup>

Since they do not sleep, what occupies the souls of God’s people in this intermediate state? First, in answer to Jesus’ prayer, they are with Him where He is, beholding the glory of the Son of God, who loved them and gave Himself for them (John 17:24; Gal. 2:20). Just to be there is to experience “fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11). There they are judged and, for the sake of Christ’s satisfaction, forgiven (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 21). There they rest from their labors and are comforted regarding evil things that befell them in this life (Rev. 14:13; Luke 16:25). Not only do they remember their former lives, but they also are interested in God’s people and His plan as it unfolds in history (Rev. 6:9–11). And with Christ they reign (20:4–6). None of us has seen heaven, but the apostle Paul was once taken up to its innermost recesses. He knew

whereof he wrote when he declared that to be there “is far better” (Phil. 1:23). Yet, along with us who are still on earth and all of God’s creation, the saints in heaven long for something better still.

The present heaven also experienced a fall, the fall of Satan and his hosts. It is a place that with this worn-out universe will be cleansed by fire and renewed. Then God will “gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and

which are on earth” (Eph. 1:10).

## The new heaven and earth

The new heaven and earth will consist of a renewed cosmos in which God—the infinitely holy, incomprehensibly vast, inconceivably good and glorious Creator and Sovereign of the universe—will dwell with His people forever. This is the end that He declared from the beginning (Is. 46:10). There we will enjoy such intimate fellowship that God Himself will wipe away every tear from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). Such knowledge is so wonderful, so high; we cannot attain it. But He who knows our frame and remembers that we are dust has by His Spirit revealed more about the

**So when my children ask, “Where will we live after Jesus comes back?” I reply, “On a new earth” (Is. 66:22). And when they want to know, “What will it be like there?” I say, “Like this earth, only so much better, because the curse will be no more. No more thorns or thistles! No more earthquakes! No more death!” (Rev. 22:3; Rom. 8:21; Gen. 3:18; I Cor. 15:26). And when they wonder, “Will there be animals there?” I respond, “Yes! All kinds of animals! And none of them will ever even try to hurt you!” (Is. 11:6–9).**

1 John Calvin, *Calvin’s Complete Commentary*. Reference from II Cor. 2:12. e-Sword 13.0.0 edition.

2 David Engelsma, *The Church’s Hope: The Reformed Doctrine of the End (One): The Millennium*, (Jenison, MI: RFP, 2021), 50.

3 Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible*. Referenced from I Thess. 4:14. e-Sword 13.0.0 edition.

kingdom prepared for us from the foundation of the world.

So when my children ask, “Where will we live after Jesus comes back?” I reply, “On a new earth” (Is. 66:22). And when they want to know, “What will it be like there?” I say, “Like this earth, only so much better, because the curse will be no more. No more thorns or thistles! No more earthquakes! No more death!” (Rev. 22:3; Rom. 8:21; Gen. 3:18; I Cor. 15:26). And when they wonder, “Will there be animals there?” I respond, “Yes! All kinds of animals! And none of them will ever even try to hurt you!” (Is. 11:6–9).

Still more. Not only will earth and heaven be renewed: our sinless souls will be reunited with our bodies, no longer vile but like Jesus’ glorious body (Phil. 3:21). “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Is. 35:5–6a). Then the body ravaged by cancer will be raised imperishable, powerful, and spiritual (I Cor. 15:42–44). Then the woman limited by cerebral palsy will be healed, and the man afflicted with autism will be made whole. “And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last” (Luke 13:30). Neither will those who are first exalt themselves, nor will those who are last be provoked to envy.

With all of these changes, your children may wonder, “Will we know each other?” And you can tell them, “Yes. The resurrected Jesus told His disciples, ‘It is I myself.’ Likewise, you will be yourself, and I will be myself. We will know each other” (Luke 24:39). “Best of all, Jesus will know you...and you will know him!”<sup>4</sup>

What will we do in the new creation? With people from every tribe, nation, and language, we will serve God (Rev. 5:9, 22:3). We will serve Him perfectly, with all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength; never again will we miss the mark of His glory. There we will spend endless ages learning the exceeding riches of God’s grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. Now we know in part; then we shall know even as we are known (Eph. 2:7; I Cor. 13:12). We will eat (Luke 12:37). We will laugh (Luke 6:21). We will sing (Rev. 5:9–13). We will rule cities (Luke 19:17). We will build and plant (Is. 65:22a). Here the vanity that plagues our work under the sun will be no more: instead, we will long enjoy the work of our hands (v. 22b). Here the former things—death, sorrow, crying, pain—will not be remembered nor come into mind (Is. 65:17). Instead,

God will be in all our thoughts. Is this the place for which you long? What about your children?

### Living as heavenly citizens

When I was a child, I used to pray that Jesus would not take me to heaven until I first married and had children. I was sure I would miss out if I did not experience those things. Perhaps our children think the same way. We must teach them that all earthly types of heavenly realities fail. Marriage is a good gift: he who marries does well. But both those who marry and those who do not must know that to belong to Jesus’ bride is far better. Likewise, those to whom God does not give children will not get to heaven and find that they lack. Along with Abraham, who lived in tents because he sought a heavenly homeland, our citizenship is in heaven (Heb. 11:4; Phil 3:20). Therefore, no future stage of earthly life, no house, no relationship, no education, no vacation destination will satisfy the longings of our hearts or the hearts of our children. Only God can and will. And He chooses to do so, finally and fully, not on this earth, but on the renewed one.

Understanding that, what sort of people are we to be? A hopeful people. And hopeful people are holy and godly people (II Pet. 3:11–13). So we aim for God’s glory in our eating, in our drinking, in whatever we do. We faithfully steward the gospel, the time, and the earthly possessions entrusted to us. Anticipation of our heavenly homeland not only determines how we grieve, but how we celebrate. It makes us wise with regard to leisure: we take care not to replace rest with ungodly entertainment. Nor is there room for fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness in our homes. Because our affections are on things above, we furnish our homes not only with things for the body—a table and chairs, sofa, and beds—but with things for the soul—kindness, humility, patience, forgiveness, and love. The meals we share are served with heavenly bread. In our hearts and in our homes, thankfulness prevails, and spiritual songs are sung. Evil speaking is reproofed, and anxiety is banished by prayer. And one of the things for which we earnestly pray is that our Lord return and make all things new. For we know that “the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever” (Deut. 29:29). And the things that He has revealed to us about heaven make us long to be there.

Is that true of us? Is it true of our children?

4 Randy Alcorn. *Heaven for Kids*, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Kids, 2006), 54.

# Report of Classis West

## Meeting September 27, 2023

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on September 27, 2023, in Crete (IL) PRC. The Crete congregation did a fine job of hosting the delegates.

The day before the meeting, an officebearers' conference was held on the timely subject of "Sexual Abuse in our Churches and the Proper Response." Prof. Cory Griess spoke first on "The Consistory's Response to Sexual Abuse," and Prof. Russell Dykstra spoke next on "Repentance and Reconciliation of the Abuser." The conference concluded with a round-table discussion among pastors, elders, and professors in which they talked about various questions and challenges they face in working through cases of sexual abuse.

Delegated to Classis were 25 men (8 ministers and 17 elders), and they were joined by three synodical deputies from Classis East. A number of visitors were also present, including junior high and high school students from the area Protestant Reformed school. By alphabetical rotation, Rev. J. Marcus chaired the meeting.

Two elders signed the Formula of Subscription as first time delegates to Classis, the minutes of the previous meeting of Classis were approved, and the questions of Article 41 of the Church Order were asked and satisfactorily answered by the consistories.

The highlight of the meeting was the examination of Pastor-elect Matthew Koerner, who had accepted the call to serve as pastor of Hosanna PRC (Edmonton). The night before Classis convened, the delegates



*Pastor-elect M. Koerner  
and his wife Sharon*

gathered with the Crete congregation to worship God and to hear the specimen sermon of Mr. Koerner. He preached on Psalm 34:1-3 and displayed clearly the gifts that God has entrusted to him for the proclamation of the gospel. The majority of the morning of Classis was taken up with the joyful work of examining Mr. Koerner in theology, knowledge of Scripture and the Reformed

confessions, controversy, and practica. Throughout the exam the brother gave a good account of the intellectual and spiritual gifts necessary for the ministry. Classis unanimously approved his examination, and the synodical deputies from Classis East heartily concurred. The brother plans to be ordained and installed into the ministry in the next few months. [As of this publication date, it may be reported that the brother was to be ordained and installed as Hosanna's pastor on November 9.] We give thanks to the Lord of the harvest for supplying our churches with another faithful laborer!

After the conclusion of the exam, Classis heard regular reports from the stated clerk, classical committee, and reading sermon library committee and approved their work.

The church visitors of Classis reported on their work with the saints of Covenant of Grace PRC (Spokane, WA) after the resignation of office and departure from the denomination of their pastor and two of their three other officebearers. Classis approved the work of the church visitors regarding this case and thanked them for their timely response to the situation. Classis also asked the consistory of Loveland PRC, which has taken oversight of the saints in Spokane, to bring a recommendation to the next meeting of Classis regarding the viability of a congregation in Spokane and the path forward for the saints there. Finally, Classis communicated to the saints in Spokane its continued love, care, and support for them.

In closed session, Classis treated the report of a special committee assigned by Classis in March to help a consistory regarding a case of sexual abuse. Classis approved the work of the special committee up to this point, and gave further mandates to the special committee as to their work with the consistory going forward.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply through March of 2024 for the vacant congregations of Loveland (CO) PRC, Lynden (WA) PRC, and Randolph (WI) PRC.

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$11,174.59.

Classis finished its work by about 5:00 p.m.

Classis West will meet next in Randolph (WI) PRC on March 6, 2024, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma  
Stated Clerk, Classis West



## Announcements

### Wedding anniversary

On September 27, 2023, **Larry and Tillie Nelson**, our beloved parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents, celebrated their 70<sup>th</sup> year of wedded life. We thank our Lord for this occasion and for their godly example of faith, endurance, and love; and pray that He will continue to bless them. “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children” (Psalm 103:17).

Rick and Sharon Tolsma

- Evan, Kim, Ben, Dean, Jordan, Jake Bleyenbergh
- Joe, Jennifer, Mason, Sydney, Lucy, Jolee Schimmel
- Everett, Michelle, Myron, Martin, Evelyn, Will, Elma, Lee Langerak
- Matt, Stephanie, Levi, Samuel, Aubrey, Owen Dykstra

Diana Todd

- Henry and Melissa Huisken
- Aaron, Jennifer, Aandon, Addison, Aliyah, Aubrey, Alexandra Lanting
- Keith Lanting

Stephen Nelson

Loveland, Colorado



A Reformed Christian  
magazine written  
for young people by  
young people

In a world  
of growing  
darkness,  
find guidance  
on how to  
let your light  
shine.



Subscribe today at  
[beaconlights.org](https://beaconlights.org)



And while you're there, check out our archives and devotionals!

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council of Loveland PRC in Loveland, CO expresses Christian sympathy to Kevin and Carol Scholfield in the death of Kevin's mother, **Mary Lou Scholfield**, age 92, of Greeley, Colorado, who was taken to her heavenly home on July 31, 2023. “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Vice-president, Bob Brands

Clerk, Joel Moore