

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

NUMBER 2

## Intercession

light of his soul. But with these he cannot be saved, for even a rich man by nature does not understand the things of the heart". The natural man does not understand the things of the Spirit. They are spiritually discerned; and they are foolishness to him. Hence, in order to know and to possess the spiritual riches of grace, the eyes of one's heart must be enlightened.

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## Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Kalamazoo PRC in Kalamazoo, Michigan

# Called to the ministry of preaching unsearchable riches

Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.

Ephesians 3:7, 8

One of the great needs of the hour is the need for ministers and preachers. But what is the nature of the ministry? What are its challenges? And is it really a desirable work, something to which we wish our very own sons would aspire?

What makes a minister a minister? And what makes him personally convicted of his work, and therefore persevere, in the midst of earthly troubles, just as the holy apostle Paul, when he was in prison at the time he wrote Ephesians?

These verses contain insight and answers to such questions by setting forth the most basic foundation for the ministry and the minister's mentality and attitude toward his labors: the call of God to the ministry.

### The call of God to the ministry

Called to the ministry! What a solemn and weighty calling from God! Though the word "called" is not used here, the inspired apostle speaks of the idea of this calling when he writes, "Whereof I was made a minister." The passive voice powerfully indicates that it was *God* who called him to the ministry. For when Scripture adopts the passive voice in relation to holy objects, events, or persons, it is telling us that it is *God* who is *active* in causing something to happen. It was *God* who made Paul a minister. It was not ultimately man, or even the church, but God who called him to the ministry!

This calling is *basic* to a person's ministry, which is why the apostle, as a norm, begins his epistles declaring the fact of his calling (cf. Rom. 1:1; I Cor. 1:1). In a word, the calling of God is his "credentials" from God Himself that he belongs to the office of minister. It is, therefore, the one key factor that is crucial to a man's

conviction of his labor in the ministry. Without it, one has no right to the office, and therefore, also has no right from God to the work of the office. But with it, one not only has the *right* to the office, but will also have the *ability* to perform the work, and grow in those abilities according to the gift of the grace of God.

Since this calling to the ministry is so basic and important, we do well to consider its various aspects.

First and foremost, one who is called to the ministry needs to have *gifts* for the ministry. This is simply essential for a man who would serve in the ministry. There are two categories of gifts: *natural* and *spiritual*. *Natural* gifts include gifts such as public speaking, intelligence, linguistic abilities, a logical mind and, yes, the gift of leadership. To be sure, one does not have to be top-notch. For example, one may not be the very best public speaker, and the most intelligent student of his class in high school or college. But he does have to have a *sufficient* amount of these gifts so that he *speaks* well publicly and is able to craft *good, intelligent* speeches and writings.

But more important than natural gifts, there must also be *spiritual* gifts for the ministry. The apostle calls attention to one crucial spiritual gift when he calls himself "less than the least of all saints": the gift of humility. How crucial humility is for a weak and frail sinner who would be used as an instrument of God to care for His people! Besides humility, other spiritual gifts a man needs for the ministry include gentleness, holiness, and the greatest of them all: love! Great love for God! Great love for the people! Great love for the Word!

Second, he who would be called to the ministry must meet the *qualifications* of Scripture. And here, the qualifications of an elder found in I Timothy 3:1-7 certainly apply to him:

This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection

with all gravity; (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Third, there needs to be a *growing verification* of the call—*within himself, as he is guided and moved by the Holy Spirit within him from self-understanding of his own gifts*—but also a growing verification that is shared by others around him: by his wife, by his elders, by his fellow church members and also by his seminary professors over the course of his preparation for the ministry.

Last, but not least, there needs to be a real call from a real church “to come over and help us.” This final aspect of the call to the ministry is absolutely necessary. For without it, a man may have all the gifts, qualifications, and verification of the ministry from himself and people around him, but does not have a real charge from God to serve in and no real place of labor.

Dear reader, in relation to the great need for men for the ministry in our churches, are you looking out for gifts for the ministry among our young men? Are you teaching your children to love and pray for our churches? Are you encouraging those who might have these gifts to consider the ministry? Are you yourself one who might have these gifts, and if so, are you prayerfully considering the ministry?

### The work of the ministry

The main work of the ministry is preaching. While this is implicit in these verses, it is explicitly stated by the apostle in I Corinthians 1:17: “For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel....” And while preaching is the main work, it is not the only work. The minister, being one who is called to a *word-centered* ministry (cf. Eph. 4:11-16), is therefore also called, more broadly, unto the teaching and application of the Word in all of its various forms in the life of the members of the congregation. This includes the administration of the sacraments, catechetical instruction of the youth and children, leading Bible studies, comforting the sick and the grieving with the Word, and going house to house in the exercise of family visitation. These pastoral labors tell us that the main work of preaching must be done in the context of shepherding the flock. A preacher must therefore know and understand the sheep he is called to care for—their needs, their challenges, their gifts, their strengths, and their weaknesses. In light of this knowledge, the minister applies his word-centered

ministry to the flock accordingly, especially in his preaching.

And what is preaching? Preaching is the official proclamation of the gospel in the service of Christ and on behalf of His church. The meaning of the original is “to herald.” This means that he is to deliver *God’s* message. It is just as an angel bringing the official message of God, and it refers to the King’s messenger delivering the King’s official word and decree to the citizens of the kingdom.

In these verses, that word and message to be proclaimed is described as “the unsearchable riches of Christ.” This means that Christ must be at the very heart and center of the message being proclaimed: His person, His works, and all of what He teaches: in the form of commands, instructions, exhortations, warnings, admonitions, promises, and encouragements in the body of sacred Scripture. And because Christ is the infinite divine Word incarnate, what is to be proclaimed is *infinitely* deep wisdom for life and living! How fitting therefore, that it is described as “unsearchable riches”!

This all implies that the message of the preacher must be given by the King Himself. Knowledge of and insight into the Word needs to be given through much prayer and study and by the Spirit of King Jesus. There is simply no other way! For these are *unfathomably* deep riches that are being spoken of here. No man, of himself, can uncover these riches. A proper insight into and understanding of the infinite wealth of the wisdom of Christ in Scripture is needed and is to be proclaimed and applied to all who hear the preaching. Preachers are called to bring the infinitely rich, deep, and wonderful teachings of Christ to bear upon the lives of God’s people from the pulpit. What an awesome task and privilege this is! This is the ministry of preaching unsearchable riches to which ministers are called. Only the Spirit of Christ, who searches the deep things of God (I Cor. 2:10), can give such knowledge and insight to him. The work of the ministry is, therefore, a difficult work.

There is nothing easy about the work of the ministry. The minister faces long hours of labor. He is on call 24/7. He often finds himself alone in the ministry. He and his family live in a glass house. He is a public figure: everyone knows him, and he is expected to know everyone. He must be all things to all men. And he must be prepared for anything and everything in the ministry.

### The power that fuels the ministry

So the minister needs a power that will sufficiently fuel his ministry. Thanks be to God that He is faithful and supplies it! This power is set forth by the apostle in verse 7: “Whereof I was made a minister, according to the

gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.” It is none other than the power of God’s grace flowing forth from the cross of Christ. It was the gift of God’s grace given to him that made Paul a minister. And it is that same grace that continually needs to be given to him in order that he “should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.” It is only fitting that the preacher of grace be himself dependent on and fueled by grace!

He who is called to the ministry, being conscious of his total dependence upon the God of all grace, therefore recognizes the importance of prayer and is found

regularly and frequently on his knees before God’s throne of grace. For it is in the way of prayer that he receives the fuel he needs daily to empower his ministry.

Dear reader, will you therefore not join him on your knees and pray for your minister and his colleagues? Will you not beseech God to raise up many more young men who will be led to pursue training for the ministry? “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Matt. 9:37-38).

## Correction

### Asleep at the (theological) switch

Our thanks to an *alert* reader from the UK who pointed out a significant error in the October 1 issue (“The Belgic Confession and Missions [5]”). Athanasius was included among the “heretics and false teachers”

(mentioned by name in Belgic Confession, Article 9) who denied the doctrine of the Trinity. Of course, Athanasius is mentioned at the *end* of Article 9, not as one of the heretics but as the (supposed) author of the creed that *defends* the doctrine of the Trinity.



## Editorial

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

## When discipline “descends into butchery”

There are two maxims I try to emphasize in seminary and my students will not be surprised when I repeat them here: “Avoid extremes” (keep your balance!) and “remember history.” Both maxims are important when it comes to the exercise of Christian discipline in the church, especially to discipline of some gross sins.

The extremes to be avoided are *improper leniency* and *undue severity*. An attempt to reflect the *grace* and *mercy* of God may result in improper leniency. A desire to reflect the *holiness* and *justice* of God may result in undue severity. Good intentions notwithstanding, both are errors.

Improper leniency dangerously minimizes sin, especially gross sin. It probably does not do justice either to the magnitude of the offence or to the severity of the damage inflicted by the sin. It is also likely naïve, both as to the difficulty of turning from some sins and to the deceptive skills of some who are caught up in it. On the

other hand, undue severity loses the biblical character of discipline, which must patiently and graciously restore sinners in love.

It is on the end of undue severity that church history helps. John Calvin warns against “undue severity” which he says, if we are not careful, will soon “slide down from discipline to butchery” (*Institutes*, 4.12.10). More from Calvin and history in a moment.

Because we confess that Christian discipline is one of the three marks of the true church (Belgic Confession, Art. 29), we want to exercise utmost caution to do it right, keeping in view the goals of discipline: the salvation of the sinner, the purity of the church, and the glory of God.

### Improper leniency in discipline

First, mercy must not become a license to leniency.

It has been common in past generations for elders

to hear a confession of sin, for example, from a young man and his girlfriend whose sin resulted in her pregnancy; or from a young man whose drunkenness led to a wreck and arrest, which soon became public. A consistory would hear such confessions with great joy, believe the sincerity of them, and (after appropriate admonition from Scripture) quickly reconcile the sinners with the church. The judgment that the sinners were sorry seemed relatively straightforward.

It would be wrong, however, to treat all sins in that way. Some gross sins of longstanding are quite different than sins ‘of weakness,’ what some in the early church called venial sins. But sins that go deep into a man’s history and become a part of his existence—addiction to alcohol, drugs, pornography, sexual abuse, or acts of violence against a wife—are enslavements to Satan, repentance for which is complex. Some devils do not come out as easily as others (see Matt. 17:21). When sin reigns in him (Rom. 6:12), cry and try as he might, he will likely go right back to it.

Looking back on the twenty years of my pastoral ministry, I see cases where I was probably more than a little bit naïve and perhaps improperly lenient.

That some would err on the side of leniency is not surprising. For one thing, as I said, the mercy and grace of God toward *us*—undeserving as we all are—ought to be reflected in our disciplinary actions toward others. In addition, the law of charity that suffers long, is kind, and hopes and believes all things, requires in us a disposition to believe what a brother or sister says. Charity warns against putting a cynical question mark behind every confession. Besides, since love covers sin (I Pet. 4:8; Prov. 10:12), our tendency ought to be: believe and as quickly as possible be finished. This Scripture must govern our conduct. Which is why church order commentators will recommend what VanDellen and Monisma did in the 1930s: “*as a rule* the repentant sinner ought to be received upon his testimony in the spirit of Christian love which gladly forgives and is eager to believe.”<sup>1</sup>

But every rule has exceptions; this one, too. Scripture also requires wisdom, and being naïve about some gross sins is not wise. Reconciling *impenitent* sinners endangers both the sinner (it does not save him) and the church (does not purify her).

It is a danger for the *sinner* because he is allowed to live in the church as though all is well between him and his God, even though he is not truly penitent and thus not determined to break with the sin. No pressure is put

on him any longer to put away his sin, so he continues in it and, if he does not repent, will perish in the sin. Reconciling prematurely, what the elders inadvertently did was to snip off the top of the weed but not reckon with the root that produced it. The evil outcome then is not merely that the weed returns—bad enough, but that it returns with a vengeance—the root now deeper, stronger, and more difficult to remove.

It is a danger for the *church* because the sin’s infection will spread, the impenitent may further damage his family, and the judgment of God will fall on the congregation that allows him to the Lord’s table.

I plan to return to this naïve and improper leniency in the next article.

### Undue severity in discipline

On the other end of the spectrum is an overly rigorous discipline that defends itself as honoring the holiness of God—as taking sin seriously, as it ought to be taken.

In Calvin’s commentary on II Corinthians 2 (the passage where Paul exhorted the church to forgive the penitent sinner and confirm their love for him) Calvin speaks very critically of the ancient church fathers who were, in his words, “unduly severe” in their discipline. The ancient fathers, he says, made the same mistake as the Corinthian church, which balked at *restoring* the *penitent* sinner. In his *first* letter to the church in Corinth, Paul warned against leniency: “Discipline him!” Now the pendulum had swung the other way in their treatment of the same sinner, and Paul needed to warn against an improper rigor: “Restore him!”

Calvin saw a similar “lack of wisdom in the ancient bishops,” and wanted to warn against it in Geneva. They “ought not to be excused...but we ought rather to mark their error that we may learn to avoid it.” In his *Institutes*, Calvin explained this “excessive severity of the ancients,” which both “completely departed from the Lord’s injunction and was also terribly dangerous.” He was referring to the Council of Nicaea (AD 325), which gave us the Nicene Creed. These ancients required that some penitent sinners be barred from the Lord’s Supper for three years, some for seven, some for as many as thirteen years, and some even until the day of their death. What can be the result of this butchery, Calvin asks, except “either great hypocrisy or utter despair?”<sup>2</sup> Calvin says that Augustine agrees with his assessment

1 Under article 74. *Church Order Commentary*, (Jenison, MI: RFPA, reprint 2018) 487. (Emphasis added.)

2 Find this in his *Institutes*, 4.12.8-11. For more information on this severity in the early church, the interested reader may look in Philip Schaff’s *History of the Christian Church*, vol. 2, paragraph 57; and H.J. Schroeder’s *Disciplinary Decrees of the General Councils*, pp. 8-58.



of the early fathers. Augustine was born only 29 years after Nicaea and witnessed firsthand the discipline that became “harmful” and “ceased to be medicine.”

The system worked like this. The outwardly *repentant* offenders were labeled the *penitent*. These penitents needed to express their penitence by *penance*, in varying degrees, and none were restored to communion of the saints or to Christ in the supper until the penance was complete. There were four categories of penitents. The “Weepers” were to lay prostrate outside the church doors, begging to be restored. The “Hearers” were allowed to come inside the building to hear instruction but not allowed to partake of the sacrament. The “Kneelers” were also allowed inside to hear the instruction, but only in a kneeling posture. Finally, “Standers” could participate in the whole worship, but always standing, not sitting with the other members. How long each ‘penitent’ was required to remain in a particular station depended on the severity of the sin and the judgments of the bishops, or elders. The minimum was three years; some were not restored for thirteen years; others, never. This is what Calvin and Augustine judged as unbiblical severity. Calvin even called it “butchery.”

As in the ancient church, so today, to allow discipline to slide into butchery is a temptation.

Understandably. When atrocious sins are committed in the church, the consequences of which are indescribably awful, *proper* desires may lead to *improper* attitudes and practices.

When I first entered the ministry about forty years ago, there was a strong sentiment in some conservative circles that no repentance of any homosexual could ever be believed. That is, if someone was caught in this sin, the church should never believe him if he expressed sorrow for it. Likely, their reasoning would have been that, in judgment upon such a sin, God would not “grant repentance” to them (II Tim. 2:25). In effect, they were recommending the same severity as Nicaea—perhaps allowing them to attend church but cutting them off from the sacrament (and thus, from Christ) for their lifetime, even though they had confessed.

The same tendency may appear among us when faced with the sins of sexual or spousal abuse. I have heard more than once the view that those who criminally mistreat their spouse will *never* repent—thus they cannot be believed; and that those who sexually abuse children will *never truly* turn from the sin. Thus, they propose the kind of probationary periods not unlike those the ancient church required. Maybe for life. If those who held this view were elders, they would put the penitent into the category of “Weepers” and ask them to remain outside for thirteen years.

If the failure to receive a repentant sinner is not formal, it may be practical: the member is held at arm’s length for the rest of his or her life, suspicion always hanging over him, a cold shoulder turned towards him. Officially reconciled, she is practically shunned, a scarlet letter permanently affixed to her bosom.

But our Lord says, of the *worst* of sinners: “Such were some of you,” and the reference is to homosexuals. In response to such an attitude in his day, Calvin said, “God, whenever it pleases him, changes the worst sinners into the best...” (*Institutes* 4.12.9).

Indeed, their genuine and full repentance may come with more difficulty, perhaps needs to be tested for a period of time, but the biblical caution of II Corinthians 2 is a necessary one: a truly repentant sinner is at great risk if the church does not restore him both formally, and very practically.

### The needed instruction of II Corinthians 2

Very few forget the warning Paul gave in his *first* epistle: “discipline!” But very few remember what follows in his second: “restore!” When Paul writes II Corinthians, the congregation had finally excommunicated the man guilty of incest. But Titus has reported to Paul a good outcome to the discipline: he repented. In other words, God had blessed that cutting off by breaking the man’s hard heart. Now, however, the congregation was hesitant to receive him back!

Paul’s instruction in chapter 2 needs to be seen in its details.

1) The “punishment” of the sinner was “sufficient” (v. 6). In other words, it had accomplished God’s purpose. It had truly been medicine. Now the congregation must receive him back and do so carefully.

2) “Forgive” in verse 7 means both to *speak* pardon to the brother and do so not because he deserves it but *graciously*. That is, his repentance was the path to forgiveness, but not the reason.

3) “Comfort” refers to the practical words spoken to put his soul at ease; he must no longer fear their judgment or condemnation but know their full acceptance.

4) That the church must “confirm their love” for him likely is reference to an *official* and public declaration that he is absolved from the bonds of excommunication.<sup>3</sup> The church loves him: they have determined good for him, consider him precious to them, and will do all they are able both to promote his wellbeing and embrace him as a brother—which is simply the definition of Christian agape.

3 “Absolved” is the language of the “Form of Readmitting Excommunicated Persons,” (PRC Psalter). The Greek for “confirm” could be translated “validate officially.”

5) Then Paul warns of the consequences of failure: “lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.” “Sorrow” is the *pain* that an impenitent sinner must feel.<sup>4</sup> Discipline inflicts pain. But it is possible, says Paul, for the church to inflict *too much* pain. Thus, Paul warns of “overmuch” sorrow, sorrow that is excessive. And excessive pain will “swallow up” a man. What the roaring lion (the Devil) seeks to do to a man—swallow him up (I Pet. 5:8)—excessive discipline can do to a penitent sinner.

Paul does not specify *how* the man would be devoured. Some guess suicide, but it is enough to imagine that the man simply sinks into despair. Calvin, remember, suggests it will lead either to utter despair or hypocrisy. But the context soon gives direction. Verse 11 speaks of Satan getting an advantage; and “we are not ignorant of his devices.” In the case of leniency, the Evil

<sup>4</sup> “Sorrow” in the Greek is the word from which we get the medical term “lupus,” a painful inflammatory disease.

One gives false assurance to the guilty. In the case of undue severity, he will inflict false guilt upon the true penitent. May we never cause that to happen.

Brother elders, our responsibility as God’s judges is monumental. As God’s representatives, we are horrified at the possibility of undue severity. God gives strong cautions against that. We recognize that God’s precious sheep are under our care and cannot imagine that we would be guilty of allowing any of them to be swallowed up by excessive pain. God forbid we offend any of His own.

Be strong in the Lord, then, and in the power of Christ’s mighty Spirit. Be faithful in your calling to discipline properly. May God, who loves the sheep more than we do, give you heavenly wisdom to discern the temptations on both sides.

Next time, God willing, the danger of *improper leniency*.



## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, pastor of Doon PRC in Doon, Iowa

# An introduction to Isagogics

Bible study is an essential part of the Christian life. Isagogics is a subject that can greatly help us in our study of God’s written Word. We hope to write a series of articles on this subject, beginning now with an explanation of what Isagogics is.

The word “isagogics” is derived from the Greek language and its literal meaning is “to lead into.” The purpose of Isagogics therefore is to *lead us into God’s Word*. Isagogics aims at doing this by giving a comprehensive introduction to each book of the Bible. This is reflected in the titles given to textbooks on Isagogics, most of which use the word “Introduction.”<sup>1</sup>

Isagogics is a relatively new field of study, for it arose and developed especially in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. What contributed to this development was the growth and popularity of higher criticism. The

higher critics attacked Scripture. They did so by focusing especially on the so-called human factor or human element in the writing of Scripture. This led to their questioning the authenticity of various books (or parts of books) of the Bible, which in turn resulted in a rejection of large portions of Scripture with the claim that these were simply the words of men. Thereby the authority of all of God’s Word (every book and every verse) was seriously threatened. Over against this, it became necessary once again to state and firmly to maintain that all of Scripture is the Word of God. This was accomplished in part by Isagogics.

All of this indicates that in order to do Isagogics and to do it correctly we must first hold to and maintain a correct doctrine of Scripture. We need emphatically to believe that the Bible is the infallibly inspired and inerrant Word of God. It does not simply contain the Word of God (and then also the words of men, as many claim), but it is the very Word of God. Every word in Scripture is God’s Word. This is so because the Author of every word was God the Holy Spirit.

<sup>1</sup> *New Testament Introduction* by Louis Berkhof, *Introduction to the New Testament* by Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* by Everett F. Harrison.



This truth concerning Scripture determines our entire outlook and approach with the Bible. That approach stands in sharp contrast to the approach of the higher critics who make the assumption that the Bible is not the Word of God. Usually they contend that no part of Scripture can be considered the Word of God until one proves that it is. This must be done, they say, by determining whether God has actually spoken that word, or whether the human writer has simply expressed his own personal opinion or viewpoint in the text.

Without the truth of infallible inspiration as our starting point, Isagogics would be a waste of time. Our doctrine of Scripture is crucial for Isagogics, for it ensures that we handle the Word of God very carefully. It means that we will strive to be as accurate as possible in introducing each book of the Bible. We will studiously avoid all speculation in the task of determining the details about each book and present only what God Himself has revealed to us about each book in the Scripture itself.

But what about Isagogics? What ought we to discuss and include in an introduction to a book of the Bible?

Louis Berkhof points out what most theologians consider to be the content of Isagogics. He states that “the study must investigate the questions of the authorship, the composition, the history, the purpose and the canonicity of the different books of the Bible.”<sup>2</sup>

The problem is that most textbooks on Isagogics give attention to all the items in Berkhof’s list except the last one, namely canonicity. It seems they fall into the same trap as the higher critics, for they focus on such things as the author, his literary style, the genre of the book, the time of composition, the place of composition, the occasion for writing, to whom the book was addressed, why it was written, and so on.<sup>3</sup> And they regularly look outside of Scripture (for example, to historical documents or new archaeological discoveries) for answers to their questions concerning these matters. In the end, many of their conclusions are based on speculation, with the end result that much disagreement exists among them about these matters.

We must have no time, however, for the notion that there is a human factor or human element in Scripture. It is and must ever remain our firm conviction that the whole of Scripture is divine.

It is true that God used human instruments for the writing of Scripture. God eternally ordained who those writers would be. God, by His providence, prepared them for this important task, by giving them and then also using their earthly personalities, abilities, circumstances, and more in their work of writing. And that is something we notice in Scripture, for we observe obvious differences between books as regards writing style, method of conveying the truth, language used, and so on. This reflects the personalities and life’s circumstances of these men.

But this does not mean there is a human factor in Scripture. The use of a human instrument does not equate to the presence of a human element in God’s Word. What emphatically proves this is that each man whom God used was inspired, in everything he wrote, by the Holy Spirit. To “inspire” means to “breath out.” The Spirit breathed out God’s Word through the men God used. The Spirit gave each man every word he must write, and saw to it that the man wrote it. The Bible’s sole Author is the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21).<sup>4</sup> All of Scripture is divine. Every word in Scripture is the Word of God.

We noted above that Berkhof mentioned the need to study the canonicity of the books of the Bible. To his credit, and in contrast to most others, Berkhof actually did this, for he also treated in his book on Introduction the “canonical significance” of each book. This is to be commended, for we believe the canonical significance of a book in Scripture is the most important subject in all of Isagogics. This is what is most useful for a proper understanding of each book of the Bible.

This does not mean that all the other topics that are discussed in Isagogics are unimportant. Knowing the author, date, occasion, and purpose of a book can be helpful. But these items do not constitute the chief task in Isagogics. They are of secondary significance. They are important only insofar as they shed light on the canonical significance of a particular book.

What determines whether or not this other information is important and beneficial is whether or not God makes these things known to us in the Scripture itself. If God does not tell us these things, we must not delve into the realm of speculation. Instead of allowing ourselves to be influenced by recent historical or archaeological research, we must be satisfied with what God has revealed. The rest is unnecessary and unimportant. We simply do not need it in order to come to a saving knowledge of Christ as He is revealed in the gospel.

2 Louis Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1915), 11.

3 For example, Everett F. Harrison in his *Introduction To The New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1964) treats the following subjects for most books: authorship, purpose, characteristics, readers, sources, date and place of writing, accuracy, historical value, recent study, and more.

4 For further proof of the Holy Spirit’s authorship, see Acts 1:16 and Revelation 1:9-11.

But what exactly is a book's canonical significance?

Canonical significance has to do with the unique place each book has in the canon of Scripture. The vital question about each book is this: What does this particular book of the Bible tell us that no other book tells us? What therefore is the unique place it occupies within the whole of Scripture?

This brings up the fact that the Scripture is an organic whole. The Bible as a whole is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and it is that as an *organism*.

God eternally conceived of the Bible as an organism. It is comparable to a living plant. A living plant has many parts, but it is nevertheless one plant with a living connection between all the parts. The same is true of Scripture. There are many parts to it: different testaments, different books, different types of literature, different human instruments God used, for example. But there is, as with a plant, a unifying principle. That principle of unity is the Lord Jesus Christ. All of Scripture is the one revelation of God as the God of our salvation through Jesus Christ His Son.

That the Bible is an organism also means that the Holy Spirit organically inspired the Word of God. Organic inspiration includes what we mentioned earlier, namely, that God used living men, along with their different abilities, circumstances, experiences, writing styles, and more, to produce His Word. The Bible was not written mechanically. The men God used were not like robots, typewriters, or secretaries, but they wrote from the viewpoint of the unique, God-given circumstances and perspectives they had. The result of the

Spirit's work through these men is that each book is a part of that organism and also has its own unique place in the organism. Each book has something unique to reveal to us about God and His Christ.

This has two very significant implications. The first is that no book is able to stand by itself. Because it belongs to the organism of Scripture, it needs the rest of Scripture for its proper understanding and interpretation. Scripture must interpret Scripture.

Secondly, the fact that each book belongs to the organism of Scripture means that the Scripture would be incomplete without any one of the sixty-six books. Each book has something unique to contribute to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. Every book is needed for the revelation to be complete.

We might say that the revelation of God in Christ, which is Scripture, the Bible, is, as it were, the face of Jesus Christ, the entire revelation of His Person as the manifestation of the God of our salvation, and that every part of Scripture has its own significance in the revelation of that Person of Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

This ought to make clear how necessary and beneficial it is to know the canonical significance of each book. This will guide us in searching out the truth concerning Christ in every chapter and verse of God's Word. The Lord willing, we will direct our attention to this in our future articles.

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5 Herman Hoeksema, *New Testament Introduction* (syllabus published by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary), 1.



## Pillar and ground of truth

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

# What the layman should know about textual criticism: Introduction

Suppose you are reading the Bible, the NIV or ESV, for instance. You keep seeing footnotes saying that some manuscripts add or omit a word or phrase, and that other manuscripts use different words. Then you come to Mark 16:9-20, Mark's narrative of Christ's ascension into heaven and His words to His disciples immediately preceding it. You notice that in the ESV the entire passage is sandwiched between double brackets [...] prefaced with this remark: "[Some of the earliest manuscripts

do not include 16:9-20.]"<sup>1</sup> The NIV presents the text without double brackets, but still separates it from the preceding verses, and includes a more specific note: "[The two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20.]"<sup>2</sup>

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1 *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton: Crossway Bibles), 2001.

2 *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1978.

A similar thing happens with John 7:53-8:11, the story of the woman whom the Pharisees caught in the act of adultery. In the ESV, the story is preceded with this note: “[The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11].” The NIV informs us that “[The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not have John 7:53-8:11.]”

No brackets alert you to the fact that John 5:4 is missing in the NIV and ESV; the narrative simply moves from verse 3 to verse 5.<sup>3</sup> Footnotes in the NIV and ESV draw attention to the omission, but do you usually read footnotes? If not, you would overlook the omission.

### Textual criticism: a brief explanation

What is going on?

Several answers could be given. One answer is this: what is going on is textual criticism. New Testament textual criticism is the scholarly work of comparing the readings of every currently known Greek manuscript of the New Testament, observing the differences in the readings, and trying to give a reasonable explanation for these differences, with the goal of determining as best as possible the exact Greek words that the Holy Spirit originally inspired.

Textual criticism, in itself, is not something that should alarm us. *How* textual criticism is carried out can be a reason for concern; future articles will return to this. But textual criticism is lower criticism, in distinction from higher criticism. Lower criticism deals with the words of Scripture, and has as its goal to determine as best we can which words the Holy Spirit used. It presupposes divine, verbal inspiration; in fact, the doctrine of inspiration *motivates* believing scholars to determine as best they can which exact words the Holy Spirit used.

Higher criticism, by contrast, is an attempt rationally to demonstrate that the books of the Bible were actually written by those who claimed to write them (David, Mark, Paul, for example), and were actually addressed to those to whom they say they were originally addressed, and were actually written in light of the circumstances they claim to be addressing. In other words, higher criticism refuses to take the Bible’s witness to these matters at face value, and attempts to demonstrate it. In the end, while some higher critics might at times find interesting arguments that support the assertions that Paul wrote Galatians, many higher critics use their

conclusions to undermine the Scripture’s testimony that Paul wrote to the Galatians in the mid-first century.

To be clear, not everyone who does the work of textual criticism has a high view of Scripture. Some of the scholars might be unbelievers who are interested in the matter merely because they enjoy studying ancient documents. Others do the work of textual criticism in the service of higher criticism. Their motives and goals are wrong. But the field of textual criticism as such is not wrong. Believers may engage in it; more to the point of these articles, believers may observe the principles by which it is carried out, and work to understand it, with a view to defending the authenticity of the entire Word of God, from start to finish.

### Textual criticism: technical and scholarly

Textual criticism is a technical, scholarly enterprise. It is not an art; it is more of a science. When done properly, it adheres closely to sound principles.

In other words, when the ESV and NIV inform the reader about what some manuscripts say, and assert that some of these manuscripts are more reliable than others, it is telling the average Bible reader, the layman, about technical matters that scholars have noted, and about which the reader is in no position to judge. If some scholar tells me that manuscript X is reliable, and that manuscript Y is not reliable, who am I to contradict him? In other words, without any further information, these comments are unhelpful, and the reader has no ability to evaluate them.

In fact, many conservative Reformed pastors would say that the statements are misleading. True, some manuscripts are “the earliest,” that is, they are the oldest manuscripts available to us as of today. In the future, it is possible that even earlier ones be discovered. But the statements are misleading in three respects.

First, “earliest manuscripts” might leave the reader with the impression that we are talking about a large number. The NIV at least is forthright and specific: *two*! Of hundreds of manuscripts that contain the gospel accounts, *two* do not contain these verses!

Second, who says, and on what basis, that these are the “most reliable”? We have moved from fact (“earliest”) to interpretation (“most reliable”). Perhaps the interpretation is wrong. Or, perhaps these manuscripts are reliable in regard to their witness to other passages, but not reliable in their witness to these passages. The words “most reliable” express an opinion which, I will argue in future articles, is based on false premises.

Third, the statements leave the impression that at the time these two earliest manuscripts were written, the church apparently did not know of these verses, or con-

<sup>3</sup> The KJV includes John 5:4, which reads, “For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.”



sider them part of the Bible. What the reader is not told is that Greek manuscripts are only one category of witnesses to the reading of a given passage; other evidence might suggest that the church did know of these verses and consider them part of the Bible.

So, the footnoted comments in the ESV or NIV are unhelpful. They make assumptions about which the reader is not told, and regarding which there is difference of opinion even among scholars. And they leave the impression that perhaps these verses do not actually belong in Scripture. To suggest such is a very serious matter! It implies that either the church for about fifteen hundred years considered something to be God's Word that in fact is not part of the revealed gospel, or that late in history some men are suggesting something is not properly part of God's Word, when in fact it is. The warning of Revelation 22:18-19 comes to mind: this is no small thing.

### The scope and goal of these articles

The scope of these articles is limited to New Testament textual criticism. Old Testament textual criticism is also a scholarly field of study. Some of the same principles that govern New Testament textual criticism also govern Old Testament textual criticism, but the two fields are sufficiently distinct that we limit ourselves to the New Testament.

One goal of these articles is to explain the technical and scientific matter called New Testament textual criticism, on a level that laypeople (hopefully) can understand. To be clear, when you finish reading all these articles, you will not be experts in the matter. I am not an expert in the field. I teach a unit on the basic principles of New Testament textual criticism, but that makes me no expert. The experts devote their entire life-work to the matter.

But why bother informing the laymen of this? Because of a second goal: that when you read footnotes and other notes included in Bible versions such as the NIV and ESV, you remain convinced that the supposedly disputed passages are, in fact, God's Word. Were you to hear a preacher preach on them, you can say with confidence. "That is the Word of God!" Were you to read a Bible version that suggests they should be omitted, you may say with confidence, "But their inclusion is

part of God's revelation to the church of all ages!" And if you ever hear a person suggesting that these passages are not in fact part of God's Word, you may say without hesitation, "But they are!"

The third goal is to demonstrate that the Greek text underlying the New Testament of our King James Version is sound and reliable. That, really, is the bigger issue at stake. The late 1800s saw a shift in views of Scripture and views of the Greek texts underlying the New Testament of the English translations. Consequently, almost every English Bible translation since the Revised Version of 1881 (United Kingdom) and the American Standard Version of 1901 (United States) is based on a different Greek text than is the KJV. The

only exception to this is the New King James Version, which uses the same textual basis as the KJV itself.

Having stated three positive goals, let me be clear what my goal is not: my goal is not to examine the ESV or NIV at length and point out their weaknesses. They have their weaknesses. The KJV has its weaknesses too. Any product of men, which men have weaknesses, will have weaknesses. But that is not the point for now. The point for now is that the textual basis of the KJV/NKJV is one

of the strengths of these versions, and the textual basis of every other English translation is one of its weaknesses.

I do not say that one who reads the ESV or NIV is not reading the Word of God. God's Word transcends Bible versions. Some English translations, really paraphrases, do not deserve to be called translations of the Holy Scriptures. But the NIV and ESV are translations of God's Word.

But if, in the providence of God, before our Lord returns, a new Bible version is produced that can really equal the KJV as regards its textual basis, it must be a version that uses the same textual base as the KJV uses, and does not think that two ancient manuscripts outweigh hundreds of others.

Next time, I hope to present a brief historical survey of the good and bad developments of textual criticism.

**And they [NIV and ESV] leave the impression that perhaps these verses do not actually belong in Scripture. To suggest such is a very serious matter! It implies that either the church for about fifteen hundred years considered something to be God's Word that in fact is not part of the revealed gospel, or that late in history some men are suggesting something is not properly part of God's Word, when in fact it is. The warning of Revelation 22:18-19 comes to mind: this is no small thing.**



## When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Margaret Laning, wife, mother, and grandmother in the Protestant Reformed Churches

## Under His wings we trust

The book of Ruth is a brief gem that lends itself to reading aloud with your family, even in one sitting. Infallible and inerrant just like all of Scripture, it is a true story. It is about a Moabitess convert who trusted in Israel's Jehovah, with all the components of an enthralling story—tragedy, hope, romance, suspense, courage, and faithful heroes. A seemingly impossible story, Ruth causes us to focus on an unlikely ancestress of King David and the King of kings, Jesus Christ. What good can come from a heathen convert living in the day of the judges when every man did that which was right in his own eyes? Sometimes we think we have things all figured out, but thanks be to God He is the One in control.

It was the beginning of barley harvest with fields packed with tawny, tufted spikes. Boaz saw Ruth gleaning in his field, her shawl and long skirt waving in the spring breeze. Word had it that this Moabite widow was a virtuous woman. Boaz desired to speak to her and eventually did:

It hath fully been shewed me, all that thou hast done unto thy mother-in-law since the death of thine husband: and how thou hast left thy father and thy mother, and the land of thy nativity, and art come unto a people which thou knewest not heretofore. The LORD recompense thy work, and a full reward be given thee of the LORD God of Israel, under whose wings thou art come to trust (Ruth 2:11, 12).

Our children might ask what trusting in God means. Boaz gave an illustration that even a child can understand. God is likened to a mother bird spreading her wings over her chicks. The chicks go to their mother for comfort and protection. When they hear the screech of a hawk, they have no doubt where to hide. As they scurry under her wings, feeling her downy warmth, they have confidence she will protect them. No evil can come their way without taking her out first. Who is able to come against our omnipotent, sovereign God? Ruth was safe under His wings, as we are, too.

We cannot trust God without the work of the Holy

Spirit. During the time of the judges, the church professed to be His chosen people, yet walked in unrepentant sin. They forgot God. The land once flowing with milk and honey dried up. In Old Testament Israel a famine meant there was unfaithfulness in the land. This warning was set forth in Deuteronomy 28. It is a stark warning for us and our children, too. When we become full of God's good gifts, we can be tempted to forget the Giver Himself. That is our depravity.

It is hard to imagine the suffering and hardship God's people experienced in the famine. Even so, the answer to God's chastising hand was, as it is today, to repent and trust God, not to run away. I asked my grandchildren to clean up a family room not long ago. There were toys everywhere—train tracks, Legos, books, crayons, stuffed animals, costume jewelry, tutu's, you name it. One of them said she did not make the mess, or at least hardly any of it. That may have been somewhat true, but I wanted them to work together as a family. When the famine hit the land of Israel, Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons left for Moab. Staying in Judah, and exhorting one another to repent and turn to the Lord would have been considered the right thing to do. The dire ramifications of that move were great. Within a ten-year period Naomi's husband and two sons died, leaving her a widow, childless, and with two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Yet, God brought His word to Ruth through this family. He is sovereign over sin in the most astonishing ways.

Trusting God is a work of the Holy Spirit. There is a long-standing Jewish tradition to read the book of Ruth during the Feast of Pentecost.<sup>1</sup> Whether the book was chosen solely for its harvest festival setting is hard to say. Even so, there are some fascinating similarities between Ruth's life and what happened two millennia later at the great Pentecost in Acts 2. Ruth's conversion as a foreign proselyte was rare, pointing to the future

<sup>1</sup> William Hendriksen, *Bible Survey: A Treasury of Bible Information*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1947), 303.

of an international, universal church as shown in Acts 2 when the gospel was preached to people from almost every part of the Roman empire. At Pentecost, the Spirit filled the believers, so that they dwelt together as those who have one heart, unselfishly sharing God's good gifts with each other. Ruth shined in this area as well, especially toward Naomi. God's grace and Holy Spirit were evident in how they trusted in Him during times of trials and uncertainties.

If man were judge, he would have passed over Ruth the Moabitess. Was not Moab God's wash pot? (Ps. 60:8). But God saves everyone He intends to save. In an astounding illustration to show us we have no idea whom God will save, Jesus compared the movement of the wind to the operation of the Holy Spirit. It is not surprising that the words in Hebrew and Greek translated "spirit" and "wind" are the same word. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8). In Acts 2 there came a mighty rushing wind and 3,000 were saved. The Lord of the harvest sent His equally miraculous, precisely placed breath upon Ruth.

Our children may wonder how we know when God's Spirit comes to live in our heart. How could Ruth know? Try stepping outside with your little ones and have them feel the wind on their face and listen to the swishing breeze through the trees. At one moment airy drafts whisper softly, then gutsy gusts and power puffs whirl and swirl this way and that. Can anyone see the wind? Who can pin down a dancing whirlwind or hold it in her hand? Invisible, unpredictable is the wayfaring wind.

When our merciful God regenerates us, we will begin to see the effects of the wind, weak means that we are. It is similar to when we see the autumn leaves skipping through the yard and birds with still, outstretched feathers gliding with ease. It will not be as the charismatics think, with speaking in tongues and miracles, but with the fruit of the Spirit as in Galatians 5:16-26. When we are born of the Spirit, the Scriptures start to make sense and we grow in conviction to obey His word. Although God's Spirit regenerates just once without our knowledge, we and our believing children are privileged to pray for more. "God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him, and are thankful for them" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 45, A. 116). Isn't the outdoors a lovely place to talk about our heavenly Father?

Trusting God includes times of testing—sacrifice and trials to temper us.

Perhaps your mind goes to past or present circum-

stances when you were afraid or grieving. Ruth lived in the days when being a poor widow and childless was a vulnerable existence. Boaz told her she trusted "under" God's wings. Under is the best place to be. Are we willing to submit, to put ourself under God's perfect will in everything? Are we willing to die to self to shelter under the wings of our only Comforter? I knew someone who thought it was fine to tell God how angry she was at Him. When we criticize the Lord, we are not under His wings, but trying to perch on top of Him, condemning Him. When life does not go as we plan, we can become bitter with God.

We do not know Naomi's heart as she returned to Bethlehem. She suffered an extreme blow and we can only sympathize. Naomi told her friends to call her bitter, because she left for Moab full but came back empty. When we go through difficult trials, sometimes grievously hard, it is tempting to lose sight of the blessings we have. An older woman once told me, "In hard times remember your blessings."

Naomi seemed unaware of the great blessing in Ruth. Just prior to this, Ruth vowed her humble confession of faith, "...whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

What could have gone through Ruth's mind at the moment she heard Naomi say she came back empty? Did she wave at Naomi to get her attention, or sputter in her best New York delicatessen accent, "So what am I, chopped liver?" Probably not. Though mothers-in-law have been the aim of jokes throughout time, Ruth was kind.

Those trusting in God have a blessed life. Providentially, Ruth gleaned not just in any field, but in Boaz's field, a near kinsman. In Deuteronomy 25:5-10 there was a decree for widows. A near kinsman had the responsibility to redeem the family property, to marry the widow, and to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance.

Boaz was an honorable, godly man for our sons to look up to. During the time of the judges, the weak were exploited, especially women. Boaz protected Ruth. Not only was Ruth a widow, she came from a wicked nation. The Lord prepared Boaz for Ruth. His mother was Rahab from Jericho. Boaz received Ruth's confession with joy for he knew she was a Jew inwardly. Boaz took notice of Ruth because she was a virtuous woman (Ruth 2:11; 3:11). Is that the goal of our daughters and what our sons seek? Boaz was kind. He greeted his reapers with a hearty, "The Lord be with you" (Ruth 2:4). A young woman should observe how an eligible bachelor treats others. Boaz encouraged Ruth with kind words and actions. He used his strength and means to protect



and provide for her. He made sure the male reapers did not touch her, that she had ample barley, and fresh water to drink.

Do you like happy endings? Ruth received a heavenly harvest starting in this life.

She listened to Naomi's advice and had lain by Boaz's feet on the threshing floor. Ruth asked him to spread his skirt over her (Ruth 3:9). "Skirt" is the same word as "wing" used by Boaz earlier when speaking to Ruth

about her trust under God's wings. This is a symbolic pledge of marriage, reflecting our marriage to Christ our Redeemer. The couple wed and had a precious son. Boaz redeemed Elimelech's inheritance. The field Ruth gleaned in she now owned, and everyone knew she was better to Naomi than seven sons. Boaz praised Ruth for taking refuge with him under God's wings. By His grace we put our trust there, too.



## Strength of youth

Rev. Heath Bleyenberg, pastor of Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta

## How to study the Bible

**Understandest thou what thou readest? And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me?**  
**Acts 8:30-31**

Can you empathize with the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8? He was returning from Jerusalem where he had offered his sacrifices and worshiped God. Now he was sitting in his chariot. His Bible was open to Isaiah 53. He was reading the passage. He was trying to understand what it was saying and about whom it was talking. But he was having a difficult time of it. Philip approaches him. "Do you understand what you're reading?" And the man says (as much), "No! I've read it. But I don't understand what I'm reading!"

Can you empathize with this Ethiopian eunuch?

I specifically address you young people and young adults.

Has that ever happened to you? Remember when you were a child. Sitting around the dinner table. Afterwards Dad opens the Bible and reads a passage. He asks you a question or two about the passage. But you're speechless. "I don't know what it means." Or perhaps when you were in the young people's society. And on Saturday night you read the passage that will be discussed the next day. But after reading the passage, you feel somewhat stumped because you don't know what it means. Then the next day the young people's leader asks some questions about the passage, but there's no answer. After a few moments, and out of a bit of frustration, you say, "It means what it says..." which is simply a nice way of saying, "I don't know what it means." Many are the times in our lives when we become the Ethiopian eu-

nuch. We read a passage from the Bible. We think about it. But we simply don't know what it means!

Though that happens, we want to minimize those occurrences. We want to open the Bible in school, at home, in Bible society, and we want to understand what it means! After all, the object of our study is the Bible, the sacred Scriptures. This is God's revelation of Himself to us. Herein is contained *truth*. You do not know any truth at all unless you know and understand the content of the Scriptures, which is Jesus Christ Himself. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." The inspired apostle declares, "All scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16-17). The Bible, from beginning to end, is the revelation of our Savior and the work He would do to save us from our sins and bring us to heavenly glory.

Therefore, the Bible is vitally important to us. And we must see how needful it is to understand it.

In the remainder of this article and the next we are going to explore how to study the Bible. Although I'm going to give you a number of steps to follow in studying the Bible, these steps do not come from me. Rather, they come directly from the Word of God. That's because the Bible is a unique book. The Bible itself determines how we approach it and how we are to understand and interpret it. In seminary there is a whole course devoted to the proper interpretation and understanding of the Bible. The course is called Hermeneutics. If a man goes wrong in his hermeneutics (his ap-

proach to and interpretation of the Bible), then at best he will have a deficient knowledge of the Bible, and at worst he will have a wrong and distorted knowledge of the Bible.

We want a right knowledge and understanding of the Bible. Therefore, we bend the knee and submit ourselves to what the Word of God has to say, even with regard to how we approach, understand, and interpret it.

The following list of steps on how we are to study the Bible is by no means exhaustive. It is simple and basic. It is designed that you may take this list and go to any passage of the Bible and apply it. Be aware however, although the steps themselves may be simple enough, yet engaging in the study of God's Word is not always easy. It takes work. It takes focus. It takes a godly determination. But for the child of God this becomes an enjoyable and fulfilling exercise! And with time, diligent study, and through much prayer, God will give you that deeper understanding of the Bible that you so crave.

Let's learn how to study the Bible as the Holy Spirit teaches us from the history recorded in Acts 8 of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch.

### Step #1: Read the Bible

This could very well be the most important step. It's so simple, yet so profound. So easy, yet at times becomes such a chore to do. In order to understand the Bible, you have to *read* the Bible. That's what the Ethiopian eunuch was doing. He was reading the Bible.

There are no excuses here for any of us. It doesn't matter if you don't like to read. You must read the Bible! It's rather disappointing when I hear someone say, "You know what, I'm just not much of a reader." I understand. That person is expressing something along these lines, "I don't like to read a whole lot. I'm not like some people who always have their nose in a book." But the sad thing is that when people say "I'm just not much of a reader," then usually neither do they read the Bible as often as they ought. (Also, let it be said, there are times when a person can be such an avid reader of books, that he or she neglects the reading of Scripture.)

But we must read the Bible. And read it often! Not only are we to read the Bible as a family around the dinner table. Not only do we follow along when the minister reads the Bible in church. We must also prioritize sitting down and reading the Bible alone. We need to set aside time every single day to read the Bible and have our own personal devotions. We may not say, "But I don't have the time!" That is a lazy excuse. If anybody could have said, "I don't have the time," it would have been the Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8. I suppose the Ethiopian eunuch could have used that excuse, "I don't

have time to read the Bible. I'm an important man! I'm in charge of all the queen's finances. I've been away for quite some time, and now I have to make haste and get back to Ethiopia and my work." I highly doubt that any of us are more busy than the Ethiopian eunuch. Yet, he found the time. He made the time to stop what he was doing, to take a break from his normal labor, and sit down to read the Bible.

So read the Bible. Then re-read the Bible. Take time to meditate on and memorize the words you read. If you will study the Bible, you must begin with regularly opening and reading the Bible.

### Step #2: Desire to understand the Bible

When you read the Bible, you have to desire to understand what you read. It doesn't do you any good if you read the Bible and all the while you're not exerting yourself to understand it and to comprehend the words that you read.

Sometimes that happens to us. The teacher in school or the professor in college gives you an assigned reading. In the late evening hours you sit down and begin to read. You read a paragraph or two. You read an entire page. And suddenly you come to the realization, "I have no clue what I just read." Your mind was elsewhere. Maybe you weren't quite so interested in reading in the first place. And now for all the words you just read, it never even processed in your brain. Why was that? It was because you started off the wrong way. You didn't have the *desire* to understand. Or at least you let yourself become so easily distracted so that you went through the motions of reading, only in time to realize that you really weren't reading with understanding and comprehension in the first place.

This same principle applies when you read the Bible. You have to desire to understand and comprehend what you read. Isn't that what we see with the Ethiopian eunuch? When he was reading Isaiah 53, he was thinking about the words he was reading. See in your mind's eye that man sitting in his chariot. His forehead is wrinkled, his eyebrows furrowed. He's deep in thought. His mind is working. He's pondering the Word of God. He's trying to understand it. That becomes the concern of Philip. Philip approaches him and asks, "Understandest thou what thou readest?" Philip was very concerned whether the man was understanding what he was reading.

That ought to be our approach to the Bible. Reading, but reading with the hearty desire to understand and grasp what we're reading.

Next time we'll continue our examination of Acts 8 and uncover more steps in how we ought to study the Bible.



## Church and state

Mr. Brian VanEngen, member of the Hull PRC in Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney

# The Supreme Court expands public accommodation protections for Christians

In recent years, the courts have issued rulings allowing same-sex couples to marry and requiring accommodations for those of varying sexual identities. Many state and federal laws provide protection for those of differing sexual orientation and identities, much like the laws prohibiting discrimination based on race or national origin. The United States Supreme Court has also acknowledged rights of those with differing sexual orientations and identities, including the right of same-sex couples to marry, but at the same time has issued rulings guarding the free speech and religious freedoms of those whose religious beliefs are in opposition to these practices. The Court has treaded a very narrow path in balancing and defining the respective rights of the two opposing positions.

Recently, the United States Supreme Court issued a ruling in such a case involving a Colorado website designer, Lorie Smith, who wished to begin a business called 303 Creative LLC.<sup>1</sup> The business would create websites for couples celebrating their upcoming weddings. However, she was concerned that the state of Colorado would use the Colorado AntiDiscrimination Act (“CADA”) to impose penalties and sanctions if she refused to provide services for same-sex couples. She also wished to explain on her website the reasons for her refusal to perform certain services for same-sex couples. CADA prohibits any communication indicating that a person’s patronage is not welcome at the business due to a protected characteristic, such as sexual orientation. She filed a petition in federal court seeking an injunction to prohibit the state from using CADA to prosecute her and interfere with the business. Her request for injunction was denied by the district court, and the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the denial, so she petitioned for appeal to the United States Supreme Court.

The process of dealing with a charge of discrimination can be lengthy, time consuming and expensive, whether under Colorado law or that of any other state. Lorie Smith sought to avoid those issues by seeking judicial resolution of the question even before the state

prosecuted an alleged violation. Interestingly, much of the criticism of the Court’s opinion in this case seems to be focused on the question of whether Smith had standing to bring a challenge.<sup>2</sup> The question of legal standing requires that a party bringing an action must have an actual interest in the case, by both being directly affected by it and by having an actual pending dispute, as opposed to a theoretical dispute. The reasoning is that only parties with a real interest in a case will have sufficient motive to prosecute the case zealously, and a ruling will be based on actual facts, so that a later case with different facts can be distinguished. The Supreme Court addressed this argument, noting that the Tenth Circuit, the federal district court which initially ruled on the appeal, had found that Smith did have standing, and the case had been submitted on a set of agreed-upon facts, in which the state agreed that she would be subject to prosecution under CADA.

In a 6 to 3 decision, the Supreme Court found that the web designer could not be coerced into creating a message that she disagreed with, in this case an electronic communication on a website celebrating a same-sex marriage, when the web designer believes that marriage is between one man and one woman. The Court based its decision on the Free Speech clause of the First Amendment, rather than the Freedom of Religion. The Court reasoned that just as government cannot keep someone from expressing their ideas, the government also cannot force someone to express an idea that they disagree with. In support of its position, the majority cited precedents including the 1943 ruling in *West Virginia Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette*,<sup>3</sup> which held that schoolchildren could not be forced to recite the Pledge of Allegiance, and *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston, Inc.*,<sup>4</sup> which held that

1 *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*, 606 U.S. \_\_\_\_\_ (2023).

2 See, for example, Melissa Gira Grant “The Mysterious Case of the Fake Gay Marriage Website, the Real Straight Man, and the Supreme Court,” *The New Republic*, June 29, 2023.

3 *West Virginia Bd. of Ed. v. Barnette*, 319 U.S. 624 (1943).

4 *Hurley v. Irish-American Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Group of Boston, Inc.*, 515 U.S. 557 (1995).



a group of veterans could not be forced to allow a gay rights group to participate in its parade.

This case is different than some in that it involves public accommodations. Especially beginning with civil rights cases, the Court has found that the government has a compelling state interest in ensuring that services made available by businesses to the public are available to all members of the public. The landmark case in this area of law is the case of *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States*,<sup>5</sup> in which the court ruled that the government could prohibit discrimination in providing hotel services based on race. The majority in this case distinguished such cases by noting that this case involved an element of speech, in that the content of a website is “expressive in nature.” The majority noted that Smith had indicated she was willing to perform services for homosexual people, but not if it required her to make a statement that would make it appear that she condoned such a lifestyle. The majority stated that the question before it was “Can a State force someone who provides her own expressive services to abandon her conscience and speak its preferred message instead?”<sup>6</sup> The answer of the majority was that a State cannot.

This case appears to be very similar to a case decided five years ago, the case of *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*.<sup>7</sup> That case gathered national attention when the state of Colorado prosecuted a baker for a civil rights violation for refusing to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple. The *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case was even prosecuted under the same statute as the *303 Creative* case. While it may seem that the Court simply issued another identical ruling in the *303 Creative* case, to understand the significance of this new ruling one must understand the way in which the United States Supreme Court works. With state appellate courts or the federal circuit courts of appeal, a litigant has the right to appeal a decision with which they disagree.

However, the United States Supreme Court is different. A litigant does not have an automatic right of appeal to the Supreme Court. A party that wishes to appeal to the Supreme Court must first file a document known as a “Petition for Writ of Certiorari.” This document is in the form of a brief that informs the court about the facts of a case, how the party believes the lower court erred, and why the Supreme Court should hear the case. The only appeals that the Supreme Court

deals with are those for which the court first votes to accept the appeal. In order for the Supreme Court to grant certiorari, a litigant needs to show that the case presents a unique point of law that has not been decided before, or a division between federal circuit courts in which the courts have reached different conclusions on the same point of law, or some other issue of national significance. The Court only accepts between 100 and 150 of the over 7000 cases it is asked to review each year.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, while the *303 Creative* case may seem similar in facts and outcome to the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* case, there is a reason the United States Supreme Court agreed to hear it.

The difference between the two opinions is that in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop* opinion, the Court ruled in the baker’s favor on very narrow grounds, focusing on the fact that the Colorado Civil Rights Commission showed hostility towards the baker’s religious beliefs rather than maintaining the required neutrality in enforcing the law. In the *303 Creative* ruling, the majority has taken a significant step in finding that the state cannot force a person to make a statement contrary to his personal beliefs, even in the context of providing business services in matters of public accommodation. The three dissenting Justices highlighted this outcome by stating “Today, the Court, for the first time in its history, grants a business open to the public a constitutional right to refuse to serve members of a protected class.”<sup>9</sup> The minority also noted that “The Court also holds that the company has a right to post a notice that says, ‘no [wedding websites] will be sold if they will be used for gay marriages.’”<sup>10</sup>

One could argue that the dissenting Justices overstated the outcome of the case, as the website designer had indicated that she would provide services to all customers, just not those that violate her conscience. Nevertheless, as the dissenting Justices imply, the ramifications of this decision could be far reaching.

On its face, the decision only applies to those businesses providing services that are “expressive in nature,” meaning that the business is communicating an idea through its services, such as a baker designing cakes or a website designer. It could be argued that other mediums of expression, such as photography, would be included too. However, it is questionable whether the

5 *Heart of Atlanta Motel v. United States*, 379 U.S. 241 (1964).

6 *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*, 606 U.S. \_\_\_\_\_, at 19 (2023).

7 *Masterpiece Cakeshop vs. Colorado Civil Rights Commission*, 584 U.S. \_\_\_\_\_ (2018).

8 <https://www.uscourts.gov/about-federal-courts/educational-resources/about-educational-outreach/activity-resources/supreme-1>

9 *303 Creative LLC v. Elenis*, 606 U.S. \_\_\_\_\_ (2023). Dissenting opinion at 1.

10 *Id.*

ruling would protect a landlord who refused to rent a home to a same-sex couple, as the act of leasing is not “expressive in nature.”

Nevertheless, the ruling does indicate that the Court is willing to protect individuals from being required to act contrary to their conscience. If a website designer cannot be prosecuted for expressing opposition to same-sex marriage, it would seem unlikely that a pastor or teacher could be prosecuted for speech that opposes this lifestyle. The case would also seem to bolster a doctor’s right-of-conscience argument in cases where the

law would otherwise require him to perform procedures that violate his beliefs.

Legislatures and courts at the state and federal levels continue to expand and preserve the rights of “protected classes” of people who engage in lifestyles with which we disagree. The battle lines are increasingly drawn, and rulings such as that in the *303 Creative* case provide legal opportunity to stand against such teachings and for the truth. May the Lord give us wisdom and strength to stand firm in upholding His laws as opposition to His truth grows.



## RFPA annual meeting address

# Spreading the Reformed gospel to the four corners of the earth

*The following is an edited transcript of a speech given by Rev. Daniel Kleyn at the annual Reformed Free Publishing Association meeting on September 28, 2023, in Grandville PRC. Rev. Kleyn served as a missionary in the Philippines for more than 14 years.*

Reformed literature, specifically Protestant Reformed literature, and more especially the literature produced by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA), has served the spread of the Reformed gospel in the Philippines in significant ways. Recently I asked some of our Filipino brothers and sisters to comment on the role Reformed literature played in their journey to and growth in the Reformed faith. Here follow some of their observations.

The [RFPA] books are stimulating and make me interested to know more about the doctrines that the Protestant Reformed Churches dearly hold to for so long. The publications are also helpful in explaining doctrines in a biblical way. Knowing that the books, magazines, and pamphlets will lead me back to the Bible gives me confidence that I will not get lost.

Every reading moment is an opportunity of enlightenment. I know it is not of my own understanding and not merely because of these books, because I know that the understanding I have is the work of the Holy

Spirit. However, I believe that these publications are being used by the Almighty to spread His gospel, making it known to all who happen to get hold of these publications.

No one would disagree that we must spread the Reformed gospel in all the earth. We have the biblical warrant in the Great Commission: “Go ye therefore and teach all nations,” and “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.” This command clearly indicates that the fundamental way to spread the gospel is by preaching. Preaching is the chief means God uses for the effective (that is, saving) spread of His truth. That is why preaching is the essence and strength of mission work. Preaching the gospel is what missions is all about. It ought to be a given that our churches are busy doing this.

But we may and ought also to use other means. In fact, we may use every possible legitimate means available. And there are many, such as the Internet, radio, correspondence, videos, lectures, and more. But what perhaps trumps all these others is literature.

Reformed literature has played a significant role in our denomination’s mission work in the Philippines. This topic gives us the opportunity, therefore, to reflect upon and learn from our experiences in the Philippines. But my goal is especially this, that the RFPA and its supporters will be encouraged in their work of publishing

Reformed literature by hearing from our Filipino brothers and sisters about the remarkable ways in which God has used such literature in their lives.

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Let me begin by relating what has been done with Reformed literature in the Philippines. Back in 2010, the two missionaries at that time (Rev. [Richard] Smit and myself, who both began serving as missionaries in 2009), saw the need for literature as a vital tool for our work. Prior to that time, some Filipinos had access to our literature, but for the great majority it was too expensive to obtain. This led us to consider making RFPA books available in the Philippines at a more affordable price. Collections were taken in the PRCA to make this possible. These collections provided the funding to subsidize the price of books, cover shipping costs, pay for magazine subscriptions, and provide pamphlets for free. Since then, thousands of books have been sold. In the course of the last eleven years, Filipinos have purchased close to 18,000 books [this way]. In addition to this, countless magazines and pamphlets have also been distributed.

As the following comments demonstrate, all of this has been greatly appreciated by the saints in the Philippines:

Thank you for making these books available at discounted prices. I have learned so many things from what I have already read. By God's grace, the Lord gives me opportunity to share what I am learning with others here at church, especially with my elders.

In a country where the prominent religion is pagan and only a remnant of Reformed churches exists, Reformed books, pamphlets, and other literature are scarce and expensive. It is truly a blessing to God's people that these Reformed writings are made available and affordable.

I am very grateful that we have the privilege to buy PRC books with big, big discount. Not all are as privileged as we are. I so love the PRC books that I let non-PRC books sit on my shelf and collect dust. Maybe I can find time to read them when I am finished with these most treasured ones.

This literature has been made available in our mission work for good reason. Scripture itself indicates that literature has a vital role to play in spreading the truth. You are no doubt familiar with the words of Paul in II Timothy 4:13. Paul was in prison in Rome, and from there he instructed Timothy to bring various items to him. This included the instruction: *Bring the books*. Books were crucial for his work as a missionary.

Every missionary needs books. He needs them first of

all for himself personally. He needs books and literature that are in harmony with Scripture and the Reformed creeds. He needs them for the preparation of sermons and of all the instruction he gives. He needs them to keep him from straying from the old paths and the good way.

This is also implied in the Formula of Subscription, which missionaries sign when they are installed. A missionary must "teach and faithfully defend the aforesaid doctrine, without either directly or indirectly contradicting the same, by [his] public preaching or writing." It is impossible for him to do this (that is, to make sure he does not directly or indirectly contradict the truth of the Reformed faith) without use of Reformed literature.

Secondly, literature is needed in missions for the use and benefit of those being instructed. The Form of Ordination of Missionaries mentions that the first duty of the missionary is "to bring to their attention by all fit and lawful means the glad tidings that Jesus Christ has come into the world to save sinners." Those "fit and lawful means" do not include social programs, puppets, films, movies, music ministries, medical missions, and so on. But those means include preaching first of all, and then also literature. Those "fit and lawful means" include Reformed pamphlets, magazines, and books.

Reformed literature serves to complement the instruction a missionary gives. He teaches, and then he can also recommend a book or two for further reading and study. He struggles to communicate a truth, and so he can suggest a book that gives a clear explanation. He notices that some hesitate to accept what he teaches as being Reformed, in which case a book can serve to verify that it is.

This has been my experience many times over in the Philippines. RFPA books have been of great value in the work. This is corroborated by the following comments from our brothers and sisters there:

Reformed literature gives me instant access to the truths I want to learn. Reformed literature is a great source of Reformed theology for those who are interested in the Reformed faith and for new converts. Reformed literature helped me gradually and little by little know about and become familiar with the Reformed confessions. Reformed literature serves as a guide in my witnessing and in refuting Arminianism. Reformed literature serves as my reference and guide as an office-bearer.

Reformed literature helps us evangelize more effectively in the Philippines. Through these publications we are able to explain or at least demonstrate our convictions to anyone who is interested in the Reformed faith. The



literature also assists new members in expanding their grasp of Reformed beliefs.... Furthermore, visiting the Internet as an alternative is not recommended for new believers like us, since it is impossible to sift through material to find the genuine teaching of the Reformed doctrines.

Another aspect of the spread of the truth through literature is the work of translation. Translation has always been done with the Bible. This was considered a high priority by the Reformers, who saw to it that God's Word was available in the language of the people. And therefore, it ought also to be done, as much as possible, with the other means we use for the spread of the gospel. If our literature is worth spreading, then it is also worth translating, specifically wherever English is not spoken or understood, or where hearers are not very familiar with it.

The RFPA recognizes the necessity and value of this. This is implied in the RFPA's statement of purpose: "Our mission is to glorify God by making accessible to the broadest possible audience material that testifies to the truth of Scripture as understood and developed in the Reformed tradition." The key phrase here is: "making accessible to the broadest possible audience."

That statement and phrase no doubt stand behind the translation work the RFPA has had done or has overseen. To date a total of twenty-one [book] translations have been completed, and twelve more are in the works. This translation work involves twenty-three different RFPA titles and nine different languages (Spanish, Burmese, Portuguese, Hungarian, Romanian, Dutch, Tagalog, Russian, and Korean).

In the Philippines, two RFPA books have been translated into Tagalog (Filipino), namely, *Doctrine According to Godliness* and *Come Ye Children* (see image of cover here). In addition, over 600 Reformed Witness Hour messages were translated, along with four PRCA pamphlets. And not to be overlooked is the fact that the PRCP has produced a translation of the Heidelberg Catechism.

My personal involvement in this translation work has heightened my awareness of the challenges involved, such as the man-hours it takes, the necessity of a good grasp of both languages involved, the difficulty of arriving at the best translation of a given word or phrase, the need for a thorough knowledge of the material and of Reformed doctrine, the fact that some theological terms cannot actually be translated, and the reality that many Filipinos prefer to read Reformed literature in English.

This is not to say that translations are not helpful and

are therefore unnecessary. They are indeed very useful for the older generation as well as for those who are not English-speaking. No doubt that is more so the case in other countries than in the Philippines where most are bilingual.

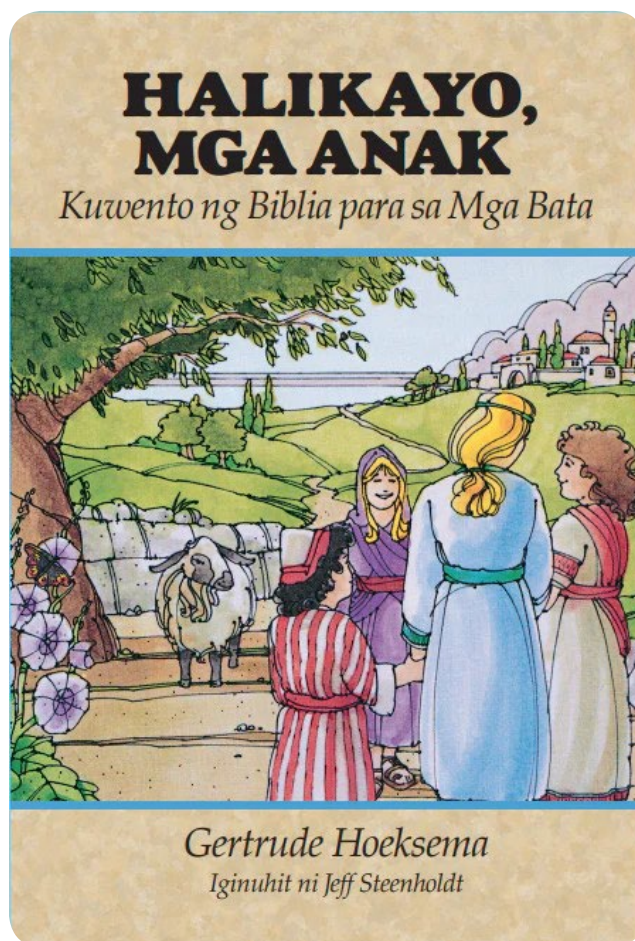
The RFPA's work in translation is indeed worthwhile. If this literature is worth spreading in all the world, it is worth translating into the different languages of the world.

Here follow a few comments from the Philippines concerning this, comments that are specific to the Filipino language:

Both Tagalog and English Reformed literature are helpful. It depends on the reader, on what he or she prefers to read, whether Tagalog or English.

Tagalog translations would be useful, because not all Filipinos are well-versed with the English language. However, I understand the vocabulary limitations of our language to explain the doctrines clearly, and I believe that will be a challenge. Also, some English terms don't have an equivalent in Tagalog.

I would like also to have the books translated into Tagalog. I know God is sovereign in spreading the



gospel, but if it's okay to translate into Tagalog that's much better to reach people here in the Philippines. I believe that mostly the elderly will benefit.

In conclusion, we note again that the gospel needs to be spread to the four corners of the earth. And through the Lord's blessing, the RFPA has produced and continues to produce material that is worth spreading. RFPA books present the true gospel, and not the false gospel of Arminians, or Roman Catholics, or other religions. RFPA books are substantive and meaty and provide solid food for the soul, unlike the fluff found in most other books today. RFPA books explain the truth in clear language, not in double talk that produces confusion. And RFPA books are biblical. That especially is their strength. We have literature that is, by God's grace, in harmony with the Scriptures and the Reformed creeds.

The Lord has given us material that needs to be shouted from the rooftops—not kept hidden and secret. It is invaluable material, for it contains and sets forth the truth that is the means for the salvation and gathering of the elect of God from all the nations of the world.

May the RFPA and its supporters be encouraged to

continue publishing solid, Reformed materials. And may this be done also for the sake of our fellow believers in the PRCP. As the following comments show, this is their heartfelt desire.

It would be extremely useful if the availability of Reformed literature was maintained in the Philippines, particularly for our young children. As a parent who did not grow up in the Reformed Faith, I am grateful that my children can already read literature on Reformed doctrines. This has assisted us parents in teaching and leading them in their daily life and building in them the foundation of the Reformed faith.

The present generation is imbibed with much junk literature available either in bookstores or online. We need to continue writing good, solid, engaging, heart-penetrating, soul-soothing Reformed literature. The benefits are insurmountable as far as training our minds to think biblically and thus guide and motivate us to have a Christ-centered life for God's glory and for the sake of the continuing generations of believers and their seed. The only time that Reformed literature is no longer useful is when Christ comes again for the church.

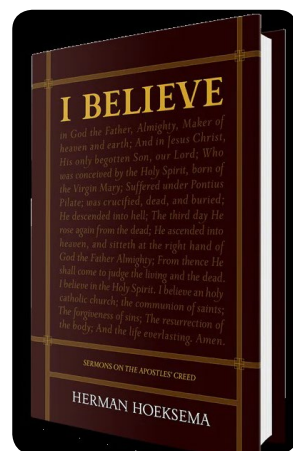
## RFPA annual secretary report

When our children enter the Christian day school, teaching them how to read well is one of the primary goals for both parents and teachers. This is because reading is a skill that we utilize throughout our entire life in the home, in the church, at school, and at work. But not only is it important that God's people know how to read well, it is also important that they read good Christian literature. The RFPA is committed to producing books and material that are not only Christian, but also Reformed, edifying, and God-glorifying. By God's grace, the Reformed Free Publishing Association has been a witness to the Reformed truth since its inception in 1924. This past year has been no different. Our mission remains the same: to glorify God by making accessible to the broadest possible audience material that testifies to the truth of Scripture as understood and developed in the Reformed tradition.

We are thankful and excited to report that we published the following eight books in the past year. A heartfelt thanks goes out to our authors, editors, and designers for the time and effort put into these wonderful volumes.

### The four new annual releases

- *Ecclesiastes: A Reflective Exposition* by Thomas Miersma
- *Life in the Covenant: in Family, Church and World* by Wilbur Bruinsma
- *Reformed Lord's Supper Form Commentary* by Bastiaan Wielenga
- *I Believe: Sermons on the Apostles' Creed* by Herman Hoeksema



### Four additional publications

- *Say Among the Heathen the Lord Reigns: Evidences in Southeast Asia* by Jean Kortering
- *Believing and Confessing: 365 Meditations on the Belgic Confession* by various authors
- *I Belong: Heidelberg Catechism Question and Answer One for Children* by Joyce Holstege
- *Ten Commandments for Children* by Ronald L. Cammenga

In addition to producing books, the RFPA continues to oversee the publication of two periodicals, the *Standard Bearer* and *Ignited by the Word*. The *Standard Bearer*, which currently has about 2,160 subscribers worldwide, continues to explain and defend Reformed doctrine as well as promote the Reformed life of the church and believer.

All the articles are made possible by a staff of forty-two writers and three editors who each contribute to the various rubrics that are a part of each issue. We extend our thanks to each writer for the time and effort put into the work of writing in the various issues and encourage them in the upcoming year. Quality writing is characterized by careful meditation and diligent study. It is obvious to any astute reader of the *Standard Bearer* that the author of each article displays both of these traits in his or her writing.

We are also grateful to Professor Gritters, Professor Huizinga, and Rev. Josh Engelsma for their editing labors of the magazine, and encourage them as well, as the *Standard Bearer* begins Volume 100, the Lord willing, in October.

Our children's periodical, *Ignited by the Word*, has recently entered its third year of publication. A staff of nine editors and writers work very hard to gather and write material for the four quarterly issues sent to over 800 subscribers. A hearty thanks to David Harbach, the editor-in-chief of *Ignited by the Word*, as he continues to lead the magazine in its early years. This magazine is a tremendous blessing to families with children as they take up their calling to raise their children in the fear of God's name.

Many of you are also aware of the content available on our blog. We encourage you to continue reading the weekly content as well as sharing the links to articles with family, friends, or other contacts who may be interested. Engaging blog material includes book reviews, interviews, doctrinal topics, pod casts, and more. There are numerous names that could be mentioned here, but at the risk of forgetting someone, we thank all those who contributed to our blog this past year.

There are currently five full-time staff members working at the business office, three of whom are new

in the past year. We welcome Vicki Zolen and Ashley Mulder to the RFPA staff, as well as Dwight Quenga who replaces Alex Kalsbeek as business manager. Alex was with us for five and a half years, and we are thankful for everything he did for our organization. We pray for God's blessing on Alex as he moves on to different employment.

Our five current staff members are each involved in and oversee the day-to-day work of the organization. This work includes continual correspondence with authors and illustrators of books at different stages of the publishing process; reading manuscript samples of potential books; working on the production and marketing of upcoming books; attending staff meetings and conferences; producing invoices for new books, the *Standard Bearer*, and *Ignited by*

*the Word*; keeping careful records of customers' leveled memberships, and many other important behind-the-scenes activities. As Association members, most of us are not aware of the work the staff does each day, but all of their work assists in one way or another toward fulfilling our mission and purpose. We are very grateful for staff members who work diligently and also work together well. Please pray for them as they continue this valuable work in the year ahead.

The RFPA Board, consisting of twelve members, does its work through several subcommittees. The Books and *Standard Bearer* Committee is chiefly responsible for acquiring book content and overseeing book production. This committee works with authors and sets the course for new book releases. This committee also communicates with the *Standard Bearer* editorial committee to maintain a good working relationship between the editorial committee and the RFPA Board. The Membership and Marketing Committee works to promote the RFPA and its writings, as well as to oversee sales and advertising. The Finance and Operations/Children's Books Committee is responsible for the finances of the RFPA and monitors the state of the RFPA building's physical structure and its office equipment. This committee is also responsible for acquiring content for children's books, as well as managing the books' production. The

**The *Standard Bearer*, which currently has about 2,160 subscribers worldwide, continues to explain and defend Reformed doctrine as well as promote the Reformed life of the church and believer.**

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current Board is extremely thankful for the unity that we experience as we work together at both the board and committee levels. This unity is very evident at each of the monthly meetings. This year's outgoing Board members are Josh Hoekstra, Gary Nienhuis, Rodney Rau, and Jordan VanBaren. Thanks to these men for their interest in the work of the RFPA as well as for their time and involvement at both the committee and board level. God has given each of these men different strengths and these talents were evident from month to month in our labors together.

Finally, we ask that you as RFPA members and supporters bring our needs to God in prayer. We truly long for your prayers because we understand that God gives His grace and Holy Spirit to those who desire them and are thankful for them. Please pray for the RFPA staff

and Board in our work. Pray as well for our many authors that God will give each one a clear mind, as well as an attitude motivated by God's glory instead of their own recognition. Give thanks also to God in prayer for what He has allowed us to have as an Association for the past 100 years. Pray that He will continue to give us the earthly ability and means to accomplish our purpose of publishing biblical, Reformed literature and therefore spreading the truth of the gospel through the printed word.

Revelation 1:3: "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

In Christ's name,  
Rick Gritters  
RFPA Board Secretary

## Announcements

### Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express our Christian sympathy to Tom and Kathy Verbeek in the death of Tom's father, **Mr. Anton (Bud) Verbeek**. May they be comforted with God's Word found in I Thessalonians 4:13, 14 "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Rev. D. Lee, President  
Tom Kiel, Vice-president

### Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2024, at 8:00 A.M., in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 12, 2023.

Rev. C. Spronk,  
Stated Clerk

### Reformed Witness Hour

[reformedwitnesshour.org](http://reformedwitnesshour.org)

#### Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

- December 3—God's Promise to His Church Confirmed (1)  
Acts 2:39
- December 10—God's Promise to His Church Confirmed (2)  
Acts 2:39
- December 17—The Song of Angels  
Luke 2:13, 14
- December 24—God's Faithfulness  
I Thessalonians 5:24
- December 31—The Lord Revealed from Heaven  
II Thessalonians 1:7-10