

THE *October 1, 2003* STANDARD BEARER

A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

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This cover was used from October 2003 to March 2010. Upon the occasion of the October 2003 issue's publication, editor David J. Engelsma wrote, "Eighty years of continuous publishing of the Standard Bearer! Eighty years during which the message of the magazine has not changed! In October 2003, as in October 1924, the message is the riches of the Reformed faith and life as set forth in the 'Three Forms of Unity' on the basis of inspired Scripture." May the same be said of the magazine today in 2024 and for years to come.

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REFORMED
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Meditation

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

Jehovah's deliverance through Shamgar

And after him [Ehud] was Shamgar the son of Anath, which slew of the Philistines six hundred men with an ox goad: and he also delivered Israel.

Judges 3:31

The history of the judges in Israel followed a certain pattern. Israel would fall into sin, serving idols. God would then cause an enemy nation to bring suffering to His people. Jehovah would use this trouble to lead Israel to sorrow over their sins and cry for deliverance from their enemies. Next, God would send a judge to save them. This judge would rule for a time in Israel, but then he would die and the cycle would start over. Israel would sin, suffer consequences for their sin at the hands of an enemy, sorrow, and God would send another judge to save them. This pattern continued for around 450 years.

These judges, like some other prominent Old Testament figures, pointed Israel to Jesus, the coming Savior. The judges were sent by God to deliver His people from their earthly enemies (Judg. 2:16). Jesus was sent by God to save His people from their spiritual enemies like sin and Satan.

Judges 3:31 tells us about little-known Shamgar, Israel's third judge. This short, yet important account of what Shamgar did to deliver God's people directs us believers to Christ's saving work.

Who was Shamgar?

Shamgar lived in Israel at a time when the Philistines were attacking God's people. The Philistines lived in Canaan, on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, on land promised to Israel. God had commanded His people to fight and defeat these idol-worshiping Philistines, but they had not obeyed (Judges 1). As a consequence for this disobedience and because of Israel's return to idolatry after judge Ehud's death, God sent the Philistines to trouble Israel. Judges 5:6-7 indicate that the Philistines crept up to Israelites traveling on the highways and stole their things. At harvest time, they raided Israelite fields, took what they could carry, and sometimes burned the rest so that the Israelites were left with little food. They

may have attacked Israelite homes too, hurting and even killing women and children.

In His grace, Jehovah chose and equipped a man named Shamgar to save Israel. God gave him faith. Shamgar saw that the idol worship into which Israel fell, and in which he himself had probably participated, was foolish. He looked to the promised Messiah as the only One who could save them from their sins.

What did Shamgar do?

One day, a group of 600 armed Philistines came towards Shamgar's property while he labored in his field. We think Shamgar was working in his field because verse 31 reveals that he held an ox goad, a wooden pole about 8-feet long with a metal point at one end. It was used to poke oxen so they kept moving in the field. As Shamgar worked his land, the Philistines approached looking to cause trouble and maybe even kill him.

Seeing these armed men coming towards his farm and home, and knowing what the Philistines had been up to lately, Shamgar must have gripped his ox-goad tightly. They descended upon him, but he started stabbing them, knocking down one, and then another, and another. They kept coming and coming, but in the end 600 Philistines lay dead in his field.

Shamgar "delivered" Israel (v. 31). "To deliver" is to save from something bad and unto something good. By killing these 600 men, Shamgar saved the Israelites from the bad, namely the Philistines. He put fear in them so that they stopped bothering Israel for a time. Shamgar also saved Israel unto something good, namely, rest in the land. God's people were now free to travel to the tabernacle for worship.

We must keep in mind a few things from this miraculous story. First, an ox goad was an unlikely weapon to use in delivering Israel. Shamgar did not have a machine gun, sword, or spear, but held a farmer's tool used to prod oxen. That certainly would not seem to help a man facing 600 armed enemies, and yet it is what Shamgar used.

Second, Shamgar delivered Israel without any other man's help. No one helped him fight these 600 ungodly men.

Third, Shamgar's deliverance of Israel was by God's strength. He could never have done it in his own might. Left to himself, he would never have lifted his ox goad to fight, but likely would have knelt in front of these Philistines and begged them not to touch his family. If he would have tried to fight in his own power, he would have been captured in a moment. It was 600 versus 1. If it was even two versus one, and he was fighting in his own strength, he would have lost. Jehovah empowered Shamgar to fight these many Philistines. God gave him faith so that he believed Jehovah would give him the victory. That is why he gripped the ox goad and started battling. In order that Shamgar could fight and prevail over 600 armed men, Jehovah also gave him much physical strength. Some of you may know how tiring it is to wrestle even one other man. God gave Shamgar great power in his body so he could take down an army.

Whom did Shamgar picture?

Shamgar pictured Christ, and did so especially in three ways.

First, as Shamgar saved Israel using an unlikely weapon, Christ saves us believers from all our spiritual enemies by an unlikely weapon, the cross. The Devil worked in men to put Jesus on the cross supposing this gave him the victory over Jesus. He and the wicked Jews thought, "He is dying. This means we win." However, by dying on the cross, Christ saved us from the guilt of sin and gained righteousness for us in God's sight. By taking away our guilt, Jesus also saved us from the power of sin and the power of the Devil within us. Satan lost the right to rule our hearts and take us to hell.

Christ continues to deliver us from all our enemies through another unlikely weapon, Scripture. Jesus defeated our enemies at the cross, but the enemies still fight. The Devil cannot win, yet he still wants to bring us into sin, make us love sin, and continue in impenitence to our destruction. He tempts each of us to commit sins that our sinful nature is especially attracted to, sins like gossip, drunkenness, lust, and discontent. One hears of those sins and might think, "What is the *Word* going to do to turn me from those ways?" Yet, Christ uses it to deliver us. He uses it

to lead us to say, "I will serve God!" The Word is "quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword" (Heb. 4:12).

Second, as Shamgar saved Israel without any help from another man, Jesus saves us without any help from another man. He delivered us from our enemies at the cross single-handedly. He did not need anything man does to assist Him in paying for our

sins. Today, Christ delivers us by His Word without our help. He brings us to trust in Him and serve Him by His irresistible grace.

Third, as Shamgar's saving of Israel was done by the power of God, Christ's saving of us from sin is done by the power of God. Someone who is only a man would be crushed by God's wrath against

sin and could not pay for all the sins of God's people. However, Jesus is very man and very God. Being divine, He had the strength to suffer under God's great wrath against our sins all the way to the end and pay for every one of them. Being very God, Christ can deliver us today too, working in us to believe in Him and turn from sin. No mere man can do that, but Jesus can and does. As God saved Israel, God is our Deliverer in Christ.

Thanks be to our wise God for this picture we have of our Savior in Shamgar. Jehovah wonderfully provided Old Testament characters like Shamgar to point Israel to their coming Deliverer and to show us today who our great Savior is.

May God use this text as a weapon to strengthen our trust in Christ alone and our desire to serve Him in gratitude.

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Editorial

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

God is God! Explanation and use

The principle

The simplest theological statement that can be uttered about God is the truism, “God is God.” We cannot define God in the strict sense of the word because we cannot assign Him to a class of beings to which He belongs in distinction from other beings in other classes, and then provide differentiating characteristics that distinguish God from others in His class.

Suppose, for example, that Adam wanted to define what we know as a “dog” for his little boy Cain. First, Adam would identify the class to which that creature belongs by saying something like this, “Cain, a dog is an *animal*” (or to use the language of Genesis 1, “a living creature”). That would distinguish the dog from other visible creatures such as the firmament, dry land, seas, different plants, and humans like his father and mother. A dog is none of those things. A dog is an “animal.” Then, Adam would give the differentiating characteristics that distinguish the dog from other animals (“living creatures”) like the fowl of the sky, the fish of the sea, creeping things on the earth, cattle on the earth, and other animals of the earth. Adam would probably describe the dog’s size, shape, long snout, coat, bark, and more, to distinguish it from other land animals like the ox or the rabbit.

We can define creatures, but we cannot define God. We cannot put Him into a class with other creatures because He is not like anything else. He is something in Himself that no created being is. He possesses what nothing else possesses. There are not even other gods to which He can be compared. In fact, we cannot even put God into a class of His own. He is unclassifiable. He is beyond all classes. He is the incomprehensible God, infinitely exalted above the classifying mind of man. We know Him through His self-revelation, but we shall never be able to understand Him fully—not in the incarnation, not at Pentecost, not at the completion of the canon of Scripture, and not at our final glorification when we see Him face to face instead of through a glass darkly. God knows Himself perfectly, but the finite creature can never wrap his puny human mind

around and fathom his infinite Maker. Then what do we say of God in answer to the question, who or what is God? God is God! Scripture allows us to say much more than that in describing our God, but we say that first.

When we say, “God is God,” we are communicating two things. First, God is not a creature, God is *God*. Because He is not a creature, God is not finite, weak, and limited. In the creation, and more clearly in the Holy Scriptures, God has revealed that He is absolutely sovereign, independent, eternal, and infinite, and therefore, worthy of unending worship, adoration, love, and service from all creatures. God is *God*—sovereign and majestic. God extols His own sovereignty in Isaiah 46:9-10, “Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else, I am God and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” God extols His majesty through the apostle Paul in I Timothy 6:15-16, “Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlastingly. Amen.”

Second, when we say “God is God,” we are communicating the truth that no *creature* is God. *God* is God. Angels are not God. Man is not God. The heavens above and the earth beneath are not God. Gold and silver are not God. Bread and water are not God. The idols of the nations are not God. None of these creatures is sovereign and worthy of worship. Never will the creature be deified. Not even at his final glorification will man become God. Creatures are always creatures and under God. *God* is God and God alone. “Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else” (Is. 45:22).

Only by the power of the gospel of the Mediator Jesus Christ will anyone say, “God is God.” Apart from the gospel, all men disdain God as something less than God, and extol themselves and other creatures as God.

By the power of the gospel, believers confess, “God is God, and for Jesus’ sake He is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and my God in the everlasting covenant of grace.”

All true worship, right doctrine, and holy living begin and continue with this principle that keeps God on the throne where He belongs. God is God! All irreverent worship, false doctrine, and ungodly living have as their initial departure any alteration of this principle, thus making God something less than God and the creature something more than creature.

God is God!

The *Standard Bearer*

Thanks to God’s preserving grace, this principle, God is God, has been the testimony of the *Standard Bearer* for 100 years now. Gracing the front cover of the very first issue of the *Standard Bearer*, published by the RFPA in October of 1924, was Herman Hoeksema’s well-known meditation on Psalm 145 entitled, “Jehovah’s Goodness.” However, that first issue also contained a lesser-known article written in the Dutch language by Henry Danhof. It was entitled “God is God.” This magazine *began* with the testimony “God is God.”¹

In that article, Danhof recounted the events at the CRC Synod of 1924 where H. Hoeksema and he were under scrutiny for their views in the common grace controversy. Danhof told how the synod was deadlocked for quite some time in its discussion on the doctrine of common grace. Then the president of synod, Idzerd VanDellen, stated, “My Reformed antennae tell me that Danhof and Hoeksema proceed from a wrong concept of God, and therefore their teaching is to be considered dangerous for our churches” (p. 4). Danhof saw this as the president’s way to steer the assembly out of its trouble, for if the two ministers “were not pure in their conception of God; then by consequence the conclusion would be obvious, that they also erred in their presentation of the grace of God, as well as in other principal parts of the doctrine” (p. 5). After all, wrote Danhof,

it is a fact that one’s conception of God always forms the basis for his whole worldview and conception of life. His concept of God rules his life. Our believing consciousness of the fundamental relation in which we stand to God, gives steering and direction, shape and color, content and quality to our life of knowing and willing in all its relations (p. 5).

The president’s statement became the impetus for Danhof’s article in the first issue of the *Standard Bearer*, where he articulated the God-concept that stood behind the theology of the opponents of common grace who would form the Protestant Reformed Churches. Danhof’s God-concept was “God is God.”

Danhof and Hoeksema stood opposed to the doctrine of common grace adopted in the three points at CRC Synod 1924 because they insisted that “God is God.” If God is God, then God cannot be a God of common

grace. To the ministers objecting to common grace, the most egregious element of the doctrine of the three points was the teaching of the well-meant offer of the gospel in the first point. This is the idea, now very popular in Reformed and Presbyterian churches, that in the preaching of the gospel God is graciously inclined toward every hearer, elect and reprobate alike, sincerely desires to save

them all, and offers to each of them salvation in Jesus.

On the basis of their God-concept, Danhof and Hoeksema rejected the teaching of the well-meant offer of the gospel. First of all, if God is God, then His grace is *sovereign*. God’s grace is His saving power flowing out of His favorably inclined heart, through the cross of Jesus Christ, and by the Holy Spirit to the heart of the sinner. God’s *sovereign* grace cannot be resisted, as it is by many according to the conception of grace articulated in the doctrine of the well-meant offer. God’s grace never fails to save those whom God desires and intends to save. If a sinner becomes the object of God’s saving grace in the preaching, then there is nothing surer than the everlasting salvation of that sinner. Why? God is God! His grace is not impotent and resistible like the grace of man, but irresistible and effectual. Praise the Lord it is so or who could be saved!

Secondly, if God is God, then God’s grace is *particular*, to the elect alone. Danhof and Hoeksema saw

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¹ *Standard Bearer*, vol. 1, no. 1 (October 1924), 4-7. The translations that follows are mine.

in the teaching of the well-meant offer a confused and double-minded God of contradictions, who eternally desired and decreed the salvation of some (the elect in Christ), but in the preaching of the gospel desires and proclaims a salvation for *all* who hear, elect and reprobate alike. But God is not a man that His will should be divided, that His heart should be torn, and that His Word should be unstable. God is God. God is that “one only and simple spiritual Being” (Belgic Confession, Art. 1) of perfect and beautiful unity whose gospel word saves the elect and hardens the reprobate according to the decrees of His eternal counsel.

God is God!

Herman Hoeksema and the PRCA

The God-concept set forth in the very first issue of the *Standard Bearer* was a principle that Hoeksema carried through all his preaching and teaching in the Protestant Reformed churches. When the Reformed Witness Hour began its radio ministry out of Grand Rapids, MI in 1941, Hoeksema agreed to be the radio minister. What message did he insist must be broadcast over the airwaves to all who would listen? Hoeksema was convinced that too many radio programs were delivering man-centered drivel, so he entitled his first address, “God is God” and proceeded to deliver a whole series of messages developing that theme.

In that first radio message Hoeksema declared,

The supreme and, in a sense, the only task of the church in the world, is to preach the word of God. If there is a word of God to be proclaimed by the church, however, it needs to be a word that God Himself speaks, and that He speaks concerning Himself. If God speaks concerning Himself, the basic and all-pervading note of that speech must inevitably be, “I am God.” God is God. Unless the church proclaims this truth in all its implications, in all its purity, and without compromise, she cannot preach, she has nothing to say.²

Hoeksema’s writings indicate he was fond of exclaiming, “God is God!”³ That was no sounding brass (noisy gong) the people heard, but the spirited cry of a man whose soul was bound in love to the Word of God.

Calvinism

The confession “God is God” is not unique to the *Standard Bearer* and the PRCA. It is the confession of

Calvinism, whether known, defended, and consistently maintained by each professing Calvinist or not. In his book, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism*, H. Henry Meeter asserted that the fundamental principle upon which the whole system of Calvinism is built is the absolute sovereignty of God in both the natural and moral spheres.⁴ Meeter explained that when the Calvinistic Reformed faith emphasizes the sovereignty of God, it does not minimize the responsibility of the creature man. But is not this a contradiction? A sovereign God *and* a responsible creature? By no means! Since God is God, we must submit to the authority of *His* Word. Meeter argued that the Calvinist

wants to let God be God. He discovers that God in His written Word has stressed the responsibility of man, and that He is in no wise accountable for the sin of man, even though He is Ruler of all. It is just because the Calvinist would let God be God, that is, the final Authority for his thinking, even when his own logic fails to give an adequate account of things, that he accepts the full responsibility of man, as God has informed him in His Word. The sovereignty of God, it will then be seen, is a prior thought to the responsibility of man.⁵

One of the most widely known, read, and acclaimed books in Calvinist circles is *The Sovereignty of God* by A.W. Pink. Pink represents the Calvinist conviction identified by Meeter: God is God! Already in the beginning of his book, Pink stated,

In these opening paragraphs we have indicated the lines of thought followed out in this book. Our first postulate is that because God is God, He does as He pleases, only as He pleases, always as He pleases; that His great concern is the accomplishment of His own pleasure and the promotion of His own glory, that He is the Supreme Being, and therefore the Sovereign of the Universe.⁶

God is God! Having explained the principle with which the *Standard Bearer* began, and noting some historical uses of it, I intend to apply it to worship, doctrine, and life next time.

2 Herman Hoeksema, *Knowing God and Man* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2006), 4.

3 Pages of quotes could be given from Hoeksema and others also throughout the history of the PRCA.

4 H. Henry Meeter (1886-1963) is former Calvin College Bible Professor and the man after whom the Meeter Center at Calvin University and Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI is named. The Meeter Center contains one the most extensive collections of Reformation material on John Calvin anywhere in the world.

5 H. Henry Meeter, *The Basic Ideas of Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1967), 38-39.

6 Arthur W. Pink, *The Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2007), 17.



All around us

Rev. David Noorman, pastor of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

Conscription in Myanmar Artificial wombs Abortion reversal

Conscription in Myanmar

Civil war in Myanmar has brought much hardship to believers in that part of Southeast Asia. Many readers of the *Standard Bearer* are likely aware of recent developments through reports and correspondence from Hope Protestant Reformed Church (Walker, MI), which has maintained contact with Rev. Titus and his congregation in Myanmar for many years. Rev. Titus and members of his congregation have been preparing to flee if the warfare comes too close. The most recent news (as of early February) is the military government's activation of conscription law, which applies to several men and women in the congregation.¹

A previous military government in 2010 made provision for conscription (draft), and the present military government has now activated it. The law stipulates that males from age 18 to 45, and females between 18 and 35, can be drafted into military service for two to five years. According to the news report, if military service is refused, individuals may be subject to fines, imprisonment, or both. The military government claims the conscription will serve as a show of strength, while others view it as a desperate response to a successful resistance.

The war and unrest in Myanmar involves several different entities. The current military government took power from the elected civilian government in 2021, but the military government has faced resistance from “freedom fighters” who support democracy, as well as the well-armed forces of various ethnic minorities. The resistance to the military government has been effective in many instances, but not yet to the point of driving out the military government.

The fear is that those drafted under this law will be in immediate grave danger, either by being forced to serve on the front lines unarmed (lest the arms be used against the military government), or by being required to clear mine fields or to work in labor camps.

Several of our friends in Myanmar are subject to this

law. Recognizing the danger, they hope to avoid military service by way of paying the fines, if possible. Let us pray earnestly for wisdom, patience, and spiritual strength to be granted to our brothers and sisters in this trial. Let us pray for the sparing of their lives, for the preservation of God's church in Myanmar, for a God-honoring witness through this trial. What a mystery, and what a comfort, that this too shall work together with all things for good to them that love God (Rom 8:28)!

Above all, may we all hold fast to the hope of God's kingdom come: “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Daniel 7:27).

Artificial wombs

A recent (January) edition of Tim Challies “A La Carte,” a daily survey of noteworthy news and stories, included a link to a 2018 article with an intriguing headline: “Artificial wombs intended to save premature babies—for now.”² That article introduced “Biobags,” described as “giant, translucent, polyethylene sacks filled with synthetic amniotic fluid.” The article explained that scientists successfully used the “artificial womb” to preserve developing fetal lambs:

Surgically removed from their mother's wombs at 105 to 115 days, the lambs spent a month swaddled inside what looked a lot like freezer bags, their blood flowing from their umbilical cords to an outside “oxygenator” as they breathed, swallowed and grew from pink, hairless creatures to white, woolly wonders.

When the article was published in 2018, the potential applications of such a device were obvious, and potentially life-saving. Developers of the “Biobag” hoped to apply this technology to human babies, for the treatment and survival of premature newborns.” Since then, scientists at other institutions have worked on developing similar technology,

¹ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/myanmar-ap-bangkok-people-yangon-b2494157.html>

² <https://nationalpost.com/health/artificial-wombs>. (Unless noted otherwise, the quotations in this section are from this article.)

including at the University of Michigan and in other countries around the world. Without question, this would be an amazing and beneficial development that might someday serve as an answer to prayer for believing parents!

In late 2023, that goal appears to be inching closer. In September the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) met with independent advisors “to discuss the regulation, ethics and possibilities of creating an artificial womb to increase the chances that extremely premature babies would survive—without long-term health problems.”³ The research on humans has not yet begun, but it appears to be imminent.

Alongside of the honorable, life-saving applications of such an invention, selfish and sinful applications are also anticipated and lauded. Developers of the technology expressed they had no intention of replacing the reproductive process (ectogenesis, or gestation outside the body), but this was met with disappointment. The author summarizes that response: “For others, an artificial womb would be the ultimate gender equalizer—freeing women from the inconvenience, pain and sometimes significant risks of pregnancy and childbirth, and giving single or gay men an alternative to surrogacy.”⁴

That reaction helps shed light on the agenda of the worldly feminist movement and sexual revolution: It is rebellion against God’s design for marriage and for childbearing, and a struggle for autonomy contrary to God and His ordinances. For the worldly woman, the artificial womb is an equalizer, a liberator. God designed the woman for childbearing, and called this very good, but the worldly woman considers her design to be oppressive and her calling to be bondage. The worldly woman feels the burden of God’s curse in childbearing (Gen. 3:16), but will not place her trust in God’s Christ (the Seed of the Woman!) who bears that curse. The worldly woman seeks another escape from the curse, but believing women must not be ashamed to confess that there is only one way of escape, the Way, Jesus Christ. May godly mothers be encouraged to press on through all the joys and sorrows of childbearing, knowing that they shall be saved *in it* (I Tim. 2:15).

Abortion reversal

Another interesting development in medicine is a potential treatment to “reverse” the process of a chemically induced abortion. Obviously, there is no “reversal” of an abortion once the unborn child has been killed, but a new treatment aims to interrupt the

abortion process and potentially preserve the life of the unborn child.⁵

The proposed “abortion reversal” has been met with strong resistance, with an appeal to a lack of medical research into the effectiveness and safety of the treatment.⁶ If there is a need for more testing or research, then by all means let it be done, and let this treatment be held to the same standard as every other.

Sadly, but unsurprisingly, the resistance to “abortion reversal” often sounds more like “never” than “not yet.” The politics surrounding “abortion reversal” indicate that an unwavering pro-abortion spirit accompanies (or drives) the resistance. “In Colorado, there has been extensive back-and-forth between lawmakers, the courts and the state medical board on this topic and whether abortion reversals could be banned or if the practice constitutes unprofessional misconduct by doctors. In Kansas, state lawmakers approved a bill that would have required healthcare providers tell patients that medication abortions can be reversed once started, but it was vetoed by its governor.”⁷

As Christians, the world’s hesitancy to promote the development and availability of such a treatment is mystifying and grieving, but we should recognize that our answers to the evil of abortion will not ultimately be found in politics, science, or even a medical treatment to “reverse” it. Rather, we find answers in the truth of God’s Word.

God’s Word explains the presence of the evil of abortion when it reveals the total depravity of the whole human race. God’s Word also gives us a clear response to this great wickedness. We respond by confessing God as the Almighty Creator of all things, who made male and female in His own image and likeness, and who is an omniscient and righteous Lord and Judge. We respond by confessing Jesus died so that His people (including little ones!) might live. And we respond by embracing our sacred duty to love our neighbors (especially little ones!), and seeking the promotion and preservation of their lives to the utmost of our power.

As we give such a response, let us be humble (acknowledging our own murderous hearts), let us be thankful (acknowledging our own natural ignorance and God’s abundant mercy), and let us speak the truth in love.

3 <https://www.cnn.com/2023/09/19/health/artificial-womb-human-trial-fda/index.html>

4 <https://nationalpost.com/health/artificial-wombs>

5 You can read a first-person testimony from a woman who successfully used this new treatment to preserve her daughter’s life, posted on *The Aquila Report*: <https://theaquilareport.com/abortion-pill-reversal-gave-my-daughter-and-me-a-second-chance-at-life>

6 <https://pbswisconsin.org/news-item/what-is-abortion-reversal-and-where-do-doctors-stand-on-its-practice>

7 <https://pbswisconsin.org/news-item>



Search the Scriptures

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

Nahum (2)

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2023, p. 85.

God is jealous, and the LORD revengeth; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and he reserveth wrath for his enemies. The LORD is slow to anger, and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked: the LORD hath his way in the whirlwind and in the storm, and the clouds are the dust of his feet. He rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers: Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth. The mountains quake at him, and the hills melt, and the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein. Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger? his fury is poured out like fire, and the rocks are thrown down by him.

Nahum 1:2-6

God's anger

These opening verses of Nahum's prophecy are a vivid and frightening description of God's anger. The passage speaks of jealousy, revenge, fury, wrath, anger, and indignation. God is described as reserving wrath, as a Judge who will not acquit those who stand before Him, as a whirlwind that sweeps all before it, as One whose coming dries the seas and brings famine, shakes the mountains, melts the hills, burns the earth and its inhabitants, and throws down the rocks.

God's anger brings earthquakes and storms, volcanic eruptions, and all sorts of so-called "natural" disasters. These things are God's judgments and a revelation of His wrath. Most refuse to acknowledge that God shows His anger in these ways with the wickedness of the world in which we live. They either consider it a result of things like "global warming" and "climate change" or they ascribe such things to the Devil.

We do not deny that there are such things as "climate change," but whether the scientists are right in describing these things and their cause, makes no difference. If they are real, they are God having "his way in the whirl-

wind and in the storm." Drought and climate change, if real, happen when "he rebuketh the sea, and maketh it dry, and drieth up all the rivers." When famine and pestilence come, global warming may be a factor, but the truth is that they "are the dust of his feet." When "Bashan languisheth, and Carmel, and the flower of Lebanon languisheth," then "his fury is poured out like fire."

When thousands are killed in earthquakes, something in which we find no delight, then "the mountains quake at him" and "the rocks are thrown down by him." When volcanoes erupt and destroy property and lives, then "the earth is burned at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein."

The passage uses a number of different words for God's anger, many of which are very vivid and descriptive. The word "revenge" means "hold a grudge." We should not hold grudges, but God does—holds them for thousands of years until the end comes. The word "furious" is two words in Hebrew that refer to God as a "man of poison."

The words translated in the KJV, "he will not acquit," do not really give the force of the Hebrew, which says something like "not acquit, no never acquit," or "in purity will not hold pure." The word "indignation" in verse 6 is a word that means "to froth at the mouth." The word for anger in these verses is a word that describes a person's nose expanding and the person breathing hard in anger.

That God's "way" is in the whirlwind means that this is His ordinary course of action, something we see to be true in the creation around us, as the creation groans and travails (Rom. 8:22). That He rebukes the sea means that He makes it ashamed, that is, ashamed to give anything to the sons of men. That Bashan, Carmel and flower of Lebanon, the most fruitful parts of the land of Canaan, languish, means that they are sick, something easy to see in the creation after 6,000 years of man's "dominion." When the mountains quake before Him, then they are "afraid." When the hills melt, they faint at His presence.

The word “world” refers especially to the inhabited world and shows once again that God’s anger is not against the creation itself, but only the means to reveal His anger against the wickedness of men. In the beginning He cursed the ground “for man’s sake” (Gen. 8:21), and Romans 8:20 tells us that “the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope.”

God’s anger is revealed in the creation and in the lives of men, though men refuse to tremble before Him. His anger is dreadful and will in the end destroy all that stand unacquitted before Him as well as the world in which they live.

This is not the God preached and worshiped by many. The god of modern Christianity loves everyone, wants everyone to be saved, sent Christ to try and save as many as he could, and who, only reluctantly and against his own will, sends anyone to the place of eternal punishment.

Such a god is to be despised, and when his helpless love is preached as the gospel, that “gospel” only encourages the unbelieving and ungodly to say, “Why worry: everything must be okay; no need to repent and believe.” He is not the God of whom Nahum speaks, nor the God of the Scriptures.

We must remember, however, that the mere knowledge of God’s anger will never turn the sinner from his sin. A sermon like Jonathan Edwards’ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” may for a moment make the unconverted fearful, but it will never change them. To say to the sinner what Edwards said is not enough:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath towards you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

Only the work of the Spirit in giving repentance and faith will change men’s hearts. The Spirit works that change both by the preaching of Christ crucified and by a spiritual re-creation that takes place in regeneration.

The sinner in his unsaved state must be awakened and made alive by the Spirit of God and then must hear the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” He must hear the call of the gospel to believe in Jesus Christ and must be given the gift of faith.

This has application to us. Anger in the home and marriage and in the church will not change those to whom it is directed. They, too, if they are to change, must hear the gospel of grace and see it imitated in those who are over them. That is a reason to avoid all unnecessary anger, anger without cause (Matt. 5:22), especially against fellow believers. Anger, angry words, angry actions, and angry arguments will not change them. There are times when one must be angry and examples can be found in Scripture, but it is also necessary to

pray for others, who appear to us to be wrong and sinful, that the Spirit of God will change them.

Why then does Nahum seem to speak exclusively of God’s anger?

Nahum’s prophecy is directed against Assyria and Nineveh, the sworn enemies of God’s kingdom and people. Thus he speaks especially of wrath and judgment, and so also does the

rest of the Word when it speaks of those who will perish under the wrath of God. But Nahum’s prophecy would also be read in Israel where God had His people. Would they not need to hear the gospel and have some assurance that Assyria’s might and cruelty would not separate them from the love of God?

The answer is that Nahum’s prophecy, though briefly, does speak of the truth that God’s destroying anger is directed against His enemies and not against His people. Even in these verses there is a hint of God’s unchangeable and eternal love for His own, and what we find in these verses is made more explicit in the verses that follow.

Nahum speaks of God’s jealousy, and His jealousy is first for Himself and for His glory, but it also includes His people. “So the angel that communed with me said unto me, Cry thou, saying, Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy” (Zech. 1:14). His anger is an expression of that jealousy: “Thus saith the LORD of hosts; I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy,

The sinner in his unsaved state must be awakened and made alive by the Spirit of God and then must hear the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, that “there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.” He must hear the call of the gospel to believe in Jesus Christ and must be given the gift of faith.

and I was jealous for her with great fury” (Zech. 8:2). O. Palmer Robertson puts it nicely: “Because idolatry, covetousness and brutality insult his honor, God shall destroy the wicked—and also shall save his rebellious people.”¹

Nahum tells us, too, that the Lord is slow to anger. He is slow to anger, not because He is weak, for He is also “great in power.” Because He is great in power, He *can be* slow to anger, using even wickedness for His own ends. He does not immediately reveal the fullness of His anger against His enemies because His people must be gathered out of the nations, out of Assyria as well and through Assyria’s evil deeds. Nahum may have been thinking of Manasseh, the king, whose repentance and conversion was brought about through the Assyrians, who took him into captivity (II Chron. 33:10-13).

The Lord is slow to anger towards His people, so slow that His wrath, when revealed, falls short of them and falls on His own beloved Son. These verses are not then a bare expression of God’s wrath and fury against evil. Nahum’s words echo those of Jonah when Jonah complained of God’s mercy to Nineveh 150 years earlier: “I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil” (Jonah 4:2).

Nevertheless, the emphasis of these verses and of the prophecy is on wrath and judgment and the prophecy, though directed against Nineveh, is part of God’s Word to His people. Why is that?

Does He intend to frighten them, after all, to scare them out of their sins and into the way of obedience to Him? That, as we have seen, is never enough. Why then?

There is this, first, that God’s description of Himself through Nahum gives us some insight into His own holiness, justice, and righteousness. As Calvin says, “Nahum begins with the nature of God,”² where indeed everything must begin. Our times show the need for that emphasis, times in which not even church members and believers seem to have any idea of who and what God is. We cannot live our lives and understand all that happens around us without knowing God.

Second, Nineveh had repented in the days of Jonah and then returned to its wicked ways. So Nineveh becomes an example of what God’s wrath will do to those

who, in their generations, have heard the gospel and believed but turned again from God. Nineveh is like our western society, once nominally Christian and the place where the gospel was preached and the church gathered, but now a post-Christian society and worthy of God’s burning, destroying wrath.

Third, God’s anger against wicked Nineveh teaches us that we ought to tremble before Him, we who are Ninevites by nature and worthy of the worst of His wrath. Remembering His wrath against Nineveh, we ought to be thankful that it fell on Christ. Verse 6 asks, “Who can stand before his indignation? and who can abide in the fierceness of his anger?” The answer is, of course, that no one can, except for the One who is not only man to take man’s place before an angry God, but One who is also God, able to bear the burden of God’s wrath and come through it without being destroyed. He is the only Deliverer from God’s wrath and anger, the only Shelter in a time of storm.

Fourth, this hair-raising description of God’s wrath reminds us of what Christ endured on the cross. It was not so much the agonies of being crucified and dying that made Him say, “My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death” (Matt. 26:38). It was not the thought of dying that wrung out of Him the bloody sweat in the garden, nor the whips and nails and shame that made Him cry, “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me.” It was the outpouring of God’s anger against the sins of His people, and when that was finished, the nails and the shame were forgotten and He died victorious.

Nahum’s vivid description of God’s coming in wrath and judgment should leave us wondering and amazed when we think of Calvary and the death of our Lord there. There He came as a whirlwind to deal with our sins and there we found Him so slow to anger that His anger missed us entirely, though it fell swiftly and like fire on His only-begotten.

The question must be asked then, “Who shall stand?” for that question will be answered once and for all when Jesus comes again in the great day of God’s wrath (Rev. 6:17). Then it will be evident that only those who are in Christ by faith will stand in that dread day, and they are always those who are standing now.

Will you stand? Are you standing now? If you stand, you stand in the shadow of the cross.

1 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1990), 61.

2 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Twelve Minor Prophets*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 419.



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. James Laning, home missionary in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Zion PRC in Jenison, Michigan

Our calling regarding the church institute

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2024, p. 250. [Note: The previous article was supposed to *follow* this present article. We apologize to Rev. Laning and the readers for this mix-up.]

The first two articles in this series have been on the church as the elect body of Christ. The first one was on the church as the kingdom of Christ, and the second one was about the church as God's one, chosen, covenant people. In this article we begin to consider our calling regarding the church institute.

Two subjects that will often come up when witnessing are the importance of church membership and the calling to gather for worship. When the opportunity arises, we should be prepared to discuss them both.

Church membership and church attendance are not the same. There are those who attend church services regularly, but do not have their church membership anywhere. Some of them even continue that way for a long period of time. Then there are others who are members of a church, but who rarely, if ever, attend the worship services.

So there will often be a need to address one or both of these subjects.

First, there is church worship. On a typical Sunday in this country (and others) a relatively small percentage of those who are physically able to gather for worship actually do so.¹ Yet a significant percentage of those who do not gather for worship would say that they are Christians. Some of these might argue that gathering with others for worship is unimportant. They might say something like what one woman said to my wife, "I can worship God while walking in a forest. I do not need to go to church to worship Him."

Then there is the subject of church membership. Many think that this also is unimportant. What is important, they might say, is that we believe in Jesus, but whether or not we are actually members of some sound church makes little or no difference.

Scripture addresses both of these subjects. There is much instruction in Scripture about the church insti-

tute. The God who has unconditionally chosen His people also gathers them together. He calls us to dwell together and to sing His praises as those united in Christ, agreeing in true faith.

So what are we to say when we are talking with someone about our calling regarding church membership and church worship, both of which have to do with the church institute? The Belgic Confession is a good guide for us to follow. In this article we consider three of the reasons it lists for why we must join the church institute and also, when able, gather with the members for worship:

1. We are called to maintain the unity of the church.
2. We must submit ourselves to the doctrine and discipline of church, submitting to Jesus Christ who speaks to us and governs us through her.
3. We are called to use our gifts for the advantage of the other members.²

Before discussing those reasons, let us consider briefly what the church institute is.

What is the church institute?

The Bible speaks of the church in more than one sense. At times Scripture speaks of all the elect together as the church. Ephesians 5 speaks of the church this way: "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it" (Eph. 5:25).

² These three reasons are mentioned in Article 28 of the Belgic Confession. I have added numbers to indicate where they are mentioned: "We believe, since this holy congregation is an assembly of those who are saved, and out of it there is no salvation, that no person, of whatsoever state or condition he may be, ought to withdraw himself to live in a separate state from it; but that all men are in duty bound to join and unite themselves with it, [1] maintaining the unity of the church; [2] submitting themselves to the doctrine and discipline thereof; bowing their necks under the yoke of Jesus Christ; and [3] as mutual members of the same body, serving to the edification of the brethren, according to the talents God has given them." Another point mentioned in this article is that since there is no salvation outside of the church, everyone is bound to join a true church institute. That point, however, I am leaving for a future article.

¹ There are, of course, those who very much desire to gather for worship but who are unable to do so due to old age, illness, injury, or some other legitimate reason. In this article I am not referring to such saints. Rather, I am referring to those who are able to gather, but do not.

In other places the word *church* is used to refer to a specific congregation: “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth” (II Cor. 1:1a); “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” (II Thess. 1:1). We tend to use the word in the same two senses: sometimes to refer to all the elect, and other times to refer to a specific church (congregation).

So what did it mean that a group of believers in Corinth or in Thessalonica was a church? We do not call every group of believers a church.

The verb *institute* has as one of its meanings *to establish in a particular position*. When we speak of an instituted church, we are referring to a church that has been established in a certain location.

For a group of believers to be established it must be officially organized. An instituted church is a gathering of believers and their children with lawfully installed officebearers. Elders and deacons must be elected and installed into office in harmony with God’s Word. When a church has been organized, with officebearers properly installed in their respective offices, then you have what we commonly refer to as an instituted church.

Now let us turn to the three reasons mentioned above.

1. Called to maintain the unity of the church

We are called to maintain the unity of the church. One way we are to do that is by gathering together for worship. An exhortation concerning this is found in Hebrews 10:24-25: “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” God warns us here not to be like the multitudes who forsake the assembling of themselves together. It is also stressed here that as we see the day of our Lord’s return approaching, we are “so much the more” to exhort one another regarding this. We are to manifest a genuine love for God and for one another by gathering together with fellow saints to worship our Savior.

Yet in these last days, when the signs of Christ’s coming are becoming increasingly evident, many are doing the opposite. Most have no interest in worshipping God, let alone gathering with others to do so. Others, though they desire to worship God, give in to the temptation to skip worship services every now and then. As they continue doing so, the frequency of their absences tends to increase.

Today there are also some who are physically able to gather for worship, but have become used to watching services online at home. Having done that for some time, they might say that they prefer it. Perhaps they

would say that they are less distracted and can pay better attention when they are watching at home. Yet we must heed what our Lord says here.

If we are able to gather for worship, then that is what we should do. Our heavenly Father did not save us to live in isolation from one another. We have been engrafted into Christ, and as members of His body are called to manifest the unity that He has established. Having one Head and being led by His one Spirit, we are joyfully to gather together to worship Him, expressing our gratitude to Him for all that He has done.

2. Called to submit to church doctrine and government

Secondly, our Lord calls us to submit to the doctrine of the church and the oversight of its elders. God has given all authority in heaven and on earth to Christ, who governs us by means of His church. We are to be members of a sound church, submitting to the authority of the officebearers whom Christ has called to serve in that location.

Proof of this can be found in all the instruction we have in Scripture concerning the work of the elders and deacons. God speaks of those who are over us in the Lord, and the Spirit exhorts us to honor them: “And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you; and to esteem them very highly in love for their work’s sake. And be at peace among yourselves” (I Thess. 5:12-13); “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine” (I Tim. 5:17).

The Lord calls you and me to be members of a church institute, having elders who are “over you in the Lord.” We are cheerfully to submit to their oversight, showing them genuine love, and honoring them from the heart.

An additional proof for the necessity of church membership is found in the passages that speak of church discipline. God calls the church to exercise Christian discipline and to remove from her midst those who remain impenitent (Matt. 18:17-18). It is only from the church institute that one can be removed. In other words, church discipline implies that there is such a thing as a church institute, and that our calling is to be a member of one.

3. Called to use our gifts...

Thirdly, each believer has received gifts from God that he or she is to use for the good of the others in the church. We are, after all, members of a body.

Can a foot live in isolation from the other body parts? Can an eye, an ear, a mouth, and a pancreas,

all live in separate places, each one doing its own thing without interacting with the other members of the body (I Cor. 12:18-21)? God has distributed His gifts among the members of the body of Christ for a reason. Each one of us benefits from the gifts God has given to the others. We are to be thankful to God for this, and are to enjoy working with our brothers and sisters, using the gifts God has given us for their advantage.

One way in which we do this is by gathering together to worship our Lord, and fellowshiping together for awhile after the service. We are using our gifts when we commune with and encourage the other members.

Christ gathers His people, which means He brings us together. Dwelling as one body, we are to assist one another. Together we are to submit to our Lord and Husband, gathering for worship and communing with the saints where the true body of Christ is manifested in an instituted church.

But which church ought we to attend? Lord willing, we will turn to that next time.

[Here the reader should return to the article on the marks of the church published in the February 15, 2024 issue.]



All Thy works shall praise Thee

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

A total solar eclipse—A marvel and a sign

Many readers of the *Standard Bearer* living in North America will have the opportunity to observe a *total* solar eclipse in a few weeks. On Monday, April 8, 2024, observers in specific locations across North America will witness this rare event (observable in locations across central Mexico around noon, and along a path from Texas to Maine and up to the Maritime provinces of Canada from 1:30 CDT to 4:30 ADT). Those outside this 115-mile-wide path in North America will experience some portion of a partial eclipse (for a map with times and locations go to: <https://science.nasa.gov/resource/nasas-2023-and-2024-solar-eclipse-map>).¹



er rare event. While it is true that total solar eclipses occur

every 12 to 24 months, they are considered a rare event for several reasons.

First, a precise alignment of the celestial bodies must occur. Secondly, the shadow cast by this alignment traverses only about 0.5% of the earth's surface, in a narrow 115-mile path. A result of the narrowness of this path, and the rarity of the particular alignment of the celestial bodies, is that a specific location on earth will experience a total solar eclipse only once every 375 years on average. That a location like Carbondale, IL will observe a total solar eclipse twice in seven years (2017 and on April 8, 2024) is the exception, not the rule. Truly to appreciate the rarity of a particular location experiencing a total solar eclipse, consider the following historical records.

In 2017, a narrow band of locations across the United States from Salem, OR to Charleston, SC experienced a total solar eclipse. However, prior to that, the last time the path of a total solar eclipse crossed from coast to coast through the United States was in 1918—from Portland, OR to Orlando, FL. During that hundred-year period only a few sections of the United States have been in the path of totality. A glance at the astronomical records for Los Angeles, CA reveals that the last total solar eclipse there was in 1782.² Between

¹ Map embedded here found at: <https://www.greatamericaneclipse.com/april-8-2024>. Accessed 2/14/2024.

² <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEcirc/SEcircNA/LosAngeles-CA2.html>

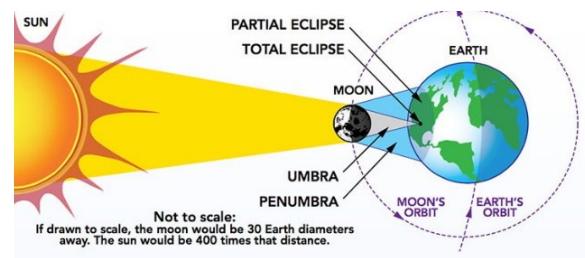
AD 0 to 1782, that area saw only nine total solar eclipses, three of which were in the 1600s (1623, 1632, 1679). Astronomical calculations predict no total solar eclipse for Los Angeles for over 1200 years. The last total solar eclipse for Chicago, IL was in 1806 and the next one is predicted for 2205,³ should the Lord tarry. For the past 2,000 years, the Chicago area has experienced only eight total solar eclipses (an average of one every 250 years). These statistics demonstrate how rare it is that a specific locale will experience a total solar eclipse. And for most locations on earth, another total solar eclipse may not come again for several hundred years.

May these statistics encourage you, especially those in the 2024 path of totality, to take a break from whatever you are doing on Monday April 8, 2024, and witness this event. It will take a little over two hours from the moment the moon first begins to cross in front of the sun until it passes. About an hour after the eclipse begins, the moon will fully cover the sun for about three to four minutes. Take some time to turn off the table saw, or slide away from your cubicle, or put down the laundry and go outside on that Monday afternoon. Put on your eclipse viewing glasses (a safety necessity!⁴) and spend part of your day watching this phenomenon. And then spend time contemplating with your friends and colleagues or with your children the marvels of God's creation. "Praise ye him, sun and moon: praise him, all ye stars of light" (Ps. 148:3). "Praise him for his mighty acts; praise him according to his excellent greatness" (Ps. 150:2).

Types of eclipses

An eclipse happens when three celestial bodies align such that one body passes between the other two, so the view of the far body is obscured by the middle body. This alignment is called a syzygy (si-zuh-jee). In a solar eclipse, the moon passes between the earth and the sun. When this happens, the moon casts a shadow upon the earth. Shadows have two areas: a *completely* dark region (umbra) and a *partially* dark region (penumbra). Some locations on earth will be in the moon's umbra shadow, experiencing a *total solar eclipse*, while other locations on earth will be in some part of the moon's

penumbra shadow, experiencing a *partial solar eclipse*. On April 8, the 115-mile-wide swath across North America will be in the moon's umbra shadow. Areas on either side of this swath will be in the penumbra



shadow and will experience to some degree a partial solar eclipse. Locations closer to the total solar eclipse swath will experience a higher degree of partial solar eclipse.⁵

One of the amazing aspects of a total solar eclipse is that the moon and the sun appear to be identical in size, such that the moon covers the sun's disk so that the sun's light is almost completely covered by the moon. Because the moon's orbit around earth is elliptical (oval), the distance the moon is from the earth changes. Similarly, the earth's orbit around the sun is also elliptical, so that the earth's distance from the sun also varies. When the moon is closer to earth, it appears to us as larger than when the moon is farther away. Likewise, when the earth is farther away from the sun, the sun appears smaller to us. When those two circumstances occur simultaneously, the moon will appear as large as it can while the sun will appear as small as it can. And if, at that time, the orbital position of the moon is in the same plane as earth's orbit around the sun, passing between the earth and the sun, then the unique arrangement is such that a *total solar eclipse* will occur—that is, the moon will cover the entire disk of the sun in our sky. That arrangement is very rare. More often, the moon passes between the earth and the sun when *not* at its closest position to earth and therefore will *not* completely cover the sun in the sky, leaving a small ring of light to appear around the moon, called the ring of fire. This situation is called an *annular eclipse*.

The precise conditions required for a total solar eclipse testify to the order and wisdom of God. Besides the exact *orientation* of the three celestial bodies in space at a specific time to cause the moon's shadow to be cast upon the earth, the actual *size* of the sun and moon must also be uniquely related. The sun is roughly 93 million miles from earth and the moon is some 238,000 miles from earth. The ratio of these distances

³ <https://eclipse.gsfc.nasa.gov/SEcirc/SEcircNA/ChicagoIL0.html>

⁴ As the sun darkens when the moon covers it, your eye's pupil will dilate (widen) to allow in more light. Plenty of sunlight can still enter your eye during the darkest parts of the eclipse and permanently damage your retina! Only those who observe the few minutes of "totality" can view the eclipse directly (*only* at that moment of totality).

⁵ Diagram found at: <https://www.nhm.ac.uk/discover/solar-eclipse-guide.html>. Accessed 2/14/2024.

is approximately 400; that is, the sun is about 400 times farther from the earth than is the moon. Interestingly, the sun's diameter of 865,000 miles compared to the moon's diameter of 2,159 miles is *also* a ratio of 400. Because the ratio of their distances and the ratio of their diameters are nearly identical, the sun and the moon will appear to us at times as having the same size, a critical element necessary for the moon to block the sun in a total solar eclipse. A sun or moon any farther away from earth or of a different diameter would preclude a total solar eclipse.

Spiritual truths revealed

Pondering all the details of a total solar eclipse, we marvel at the handiwork of our God. "O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (Ps. 8:1). Considering the work of His hands, "the moon and stars, which [He] has ordained," we are humbled before the great God who formed and governs all these things. We are reminded of the foolishness of our natures to worship the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). In gratitude to God, we give thanks to Him for so graciously opening our spiritual eyes to render praise and glory to Him *alone*.

In an eclipse of the sun we are led to ponder God's holiness and the brightness of His glory. As one cannot look upon the brightness of the sun, so also God has said, "Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live" (Ex. 33:20). Thus, in an event in which the sun, even when shadowed, can damage our eyes with its brightness and powerful rays, we are reminded that after God revealed only His "back parts" before Moses in the mount, Moses' face later shone so brightly the people feared to come near him. So holy is our God that even the angels cover themselves in His presence and cry "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory" (Is. 6:3).

In addition to God's holiness, we are led to contem-

plate the wisdom and order of God and of His changeableness. In Jeremiah 33:20-26 God teaches us that *as* He is faithful in the realm of nature, particularly with regard to His government of the ordinances of day and night, so He is faithful to His covenant. The orderly movements of the celestial bodies demonstrate God's faithful government of the planets and stars, and therefore also His faithfulness to us. As He faithfully governs planetary motion, so He faithfully maintains His covenant of grace with us. He will not break His covenant with us! Ever faithful is our God!

It is in that connection especially that we see what makes a solar eclipse the truly significant event that it is. We are so accustomed to seeing the hand of God darkening our world every evening that we hardly give it a thought. But when the sun is darkened amidst the brightness of the noon day, we take note. An eclipse is a stark reminder that the final judgment of the just and holy God *is* coming. "Behold the day of the LORD cometh...the sun shall be darkened in his going forth, and the moon shall not cause her light to shine. And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity" (Is. 13:9-11).

When we, God's covenant people, witness an eclipse, let us be reminded that King Jesus, the Judge and Ruler of all, comes! It is a sobering reminder that we, as frail and sinful creatures, are ever in need of the Light of the world. As children of God, redeemed in Christ's precious blood and in whom Christ abides by His Spirit, we do not fear His coming, but wait in eager expectation of His return! For us, every eclipse testifies that old things shall pass away and all shall be made new. Christ comes in glory and, as those in Christ, we graciously share in that glorification. We rejoice! King Jesus comes!

"Therefore, we expect that great day with a most ardent desire, to the end that we may fully enjoy the promises of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. AMEN. 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20)" (Belgic Confession, Art. 37).



Strength of youth

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

Ants and you

Let's take a survey! Take out a pen and paper, and answer each of the following questions with a "Yes" or "No."

1. You are given an assignment or project in school. Or, you are told to prepare for a test. Do you find that you

put off this schoolwork to a later time because you do not feel like doing it, instead of tackling it in a timely manner?

2. You are at your part-time job after school lets out, or you are sitting in your bedroom doing your homework. While you are at your wage-earning job or doing your homework, do you discover that you are often distracted by your phone, by communication with your friends, or something else, so that you are not able fully to give yourself to the work right in front of you?

3. It's 7:00 A.M. The ringtone on your phone blares its familiar tone. It's time to wake up. You fumble around for your phone, eyes half glued shut. Finally, your reaching fingers pick it up. With a sleepy daze, you press "Snooze." It's 7:15 A.M. The alarm sounds another time. Slightly more alert, you again touch "Snooze." It's 7:30 A.M. One more alarm—now it's becoming annoying. "Just a few more minutes," you say; "I just need a little more time in bed." Now it's 7:40 A.M., and your mother enters your room: "When are you planning to get out of bed? You need to be gone from the house in ten minutes. Let's go!" Does this scenario, or something like it, describe your mornings?

4. Playing sports, enjoying a hobby, and having a social life are legitimate, even healthy, activities. But do you find that sports, a hobby, or your social life tend to spill outside their bounds so that you are not working like you should be in other areas that are more important—for example, cultivating a healthy devotional life?

5. You are sitting in church. Not every service, but perhaps 50% of the time, you find your eyes heavy during the sermon, your head bobbing in embarrassing fashion. And then, walking out of the sanctuary with everyone else, you have little to no clue what the minister even preached about for the last fifty minutes. Does this describe your experience on the Lord's Day in church?

Now, look at your slip of paper. Out of the five questions, to how many did you answer "Yes"? To how many did you answer "No"? Whether you answered "Yes" to five out of the five questions, or whether you answered "Yes" to only one out of the five questions (I'm not sure I believe you), then you, along with me, need Proverbs 6:6-11,

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provideth her meat in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest. How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, and thy want as an armed man.

The sluggard

The command found here is to consider the hard-working ant. We need to consider the ant because we are sluggards by nature. A sluggard is one who is lazy or slothful; the word means to be slack or to lean idly. The reason for the survey at the beginning of this article was to show you that sluggards are not merely people "out there" in the world—the pampered, entitled, couch-potato types who have never worked a day in their lives but watch TV all day; rather, *each of us* has the sluggard inside, an aspect of the sinful nature that dwells within.

Let's listen in on a conversation in Proverbs 6:9-10.

It is as if Solomon enters the bedroom of the sluggard, sees the man sleeping the day away in bed, and asks, "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?" (v. 9). You can detect in these questions a tone of rebuke. "How long" implies that the lazy man has been sleeping too long already, and that he should have arisen before this point. It was not wrong that the man slept in his bed. But it was wrong that he slept *too long* and at the *expense of his work*.

How about for us? Whether it's too much sleep, or too much of something else, the question of Solomon spans the centuries and confronts us powerfully: "How long wilt thou _____, O sluggard?" Consider the wise man's question carefully, young people!

In response to this admonishing question, the sluggard replies, "Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep" (v. 10). The slothful man has already been in bed too long. But now, as Solomon rouses him from sleep, the lazy man voices his need for a little more sleep, a little more time to fold his hands idly as he sleeps. Sleep is his god. This man is like the slothful person in Proverbs 26:13 that makes excuses, or like the lazy person who turns on his bed as a door on its hinges (Prov. 26:14).

Sometimes we joke about procrastination, but it really is no laughing matter: this man shows himself to be a procrastinator. Do you ever find this man's answer to Solomon on your own lips? Perhaps it's sleep, or perhaps it's something else; but you find yourself saying in sloth, "Just a little more _____."

Sloth is sin, and sin has consequences: Proverbs 6:11 teaches that the sluggard will come quickly and forcibly to poverty or lack. It is good to remember that sin has consequences. If you are slothful in your work at school, or in your devotional life, what consequences might that have for you even right now? If you are lazy during high school, what will be the result of that when you get a full-time job or go to college after high school? Questions like these are good to consider.

Laziness is a sin, and that is exactly why we need Jesus. We need the Jesus who was never a sluggard, but who always worked hard. We need the Jesus who diligently, willingly, and zealously did the will of His Father, laboring under the load of our sin in our place, atoning for our sin, and living in obedience to the law of God as our representative. We need to turn from our sin of sloth and take refuge in the cross of this Savior. And then, strengthened by His indwelling Spirit, we must heed the command to...

The ant

...go to the ant and consider her ways (Prov. 6:6). We are called to consider, observe, or learn the ways or habits of the ant. Let us not be so often indoors, eyes glued to screens, that we fail to appreciate the creation around us, studying all the lessons God has embedded in it. How marvelous it is that from eternity the infinitely wise God determined to make an ant, partly so that we could learn the lesson of hard work from this tiny creature!

Consider four characteristics of the ant, gathered from Proverbs 6:7-8.

First, the ant *works*. It prepares food in the summer. It also gathers its food during the harvest, collecting nourishing crumbs in preparation for the winter months.

Second, the ant works *hard*. Proverbs 30:24-25 point out that ants are little and, relatively speaking, not strong. Notice that Proverbs 6 does not send us to the big and strong *lion* as a lesson of hard work, for then we would not be as impressed. But Proverbs directs our attention to the *ant*, which is small and not strong, yet works very hard and can do much.

Recently, I read that ants can lift twenty times their own body weight; if a second grader was as strong as an ant, that little boy or girl could pick up a *car*. A few months ago, I was taking a stroll with my children around a local lake in Iowa; as we walked on the pathway, I observed an ant dragging a spider about ten times its size. Hard work!

Third, the ant *plans*. To gather food during harvest in order to have something for the winter months requires forethought. The ant does not wait until the last minute, nor will it be caught unprepared. Rather, the ant plans.

Fourth, an ant does not have a guide, overseer, or ruler. It does not need to be guided, looked over, or kept accountable. It just does the work before it. Considering these four characteristics of the ant, no wonder that Proverbs 30:24 calls this little creature of God “exceeding wise”!

We must go to the ant and study its habits, because God will teach us important lessons in this way.

There is a twofold reasoning or logic in the text.

First, the ant is small and not strong, yet it works hard and plans. How much more ought *we* to work hard and plan—after all, we *are* big and strong, and have good minds and ability to reason.

Second, the ant does not have anyone telling it what to do, yet it does its work immediately. How much more ought *we* to do our work immediately—after all, we *do* have people above us (parents, officebearers, teachers, boss at work) who tell us what to do. How easily the ant can put us to shame.

The main lesson we learn from this six-legged creature of God is that we must work. We learn that we must give ourselves wholly and without distraction to our home, school, and church life, seeking to do justice to each. We are taught that we must not push labor off but do what needs doing *now* without procrastination. The example of the ant reminds us that we must plan for the future as good stewards of what God has given to us.

But seeing this instruction on the ant in the light of the whole Bible, the lesson is not merely that we work, but that we do so *to the glory of God*. We must not be industrious to show off before others, or out of personal ambition, or to get rich. Rather, we belong in body and soul, in life and death, to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ. God gave us to Jesus in eternity, Jesus purchased us with His blood, and Jesus indwells us by His Spirit. Now you want in your work to serve your Master, whom you love and to whom you are thankful for saving you from death and hell. As Colossians 3:17 says, “And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him.” That is the distinctly *Christian* viewpoint of work.

Wisdom

Young people, as Proverbs 6:6 commands, be wise!

Wisdom comes as a gift from God. Wisdom has been earned for you on the cross.

What is wisdom? It is the ability to apply the Word of God to your life. And this is wisdom: that you go to the ant, consider it, and follow its example by working hard—and do so to the glory of God and in thanks to Him, serving Him with all you have and all you are.

God gives wisdom to those who ask (James 1:5). Giving wisdom, He enables you to work to His honor and praise. God give us wisdom!



Church and state

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Threats to Christians and the church—Which are current and real?

For some time now, the *Standard Bearer* has published the occasional article about legal issues facing the church. More broadly, these articles discuss how the civil government's actions affect the calling of the Christian and the function of the church in this world. In general terms, these governmental actions are initiated by 1) orders from our president or governor, 2) laws enacted by the legislature, or 3) decisions of the courts. Some of these developments are assurances, albeit temporary, that Christians in our country are able to worship biblically on the Lord's Day, or may continue their employment, or operate their Christian schools in obedience to the commands of our Lord. However, as made clear by God's Word and by our experiences and observations, the trend is and will be for the state to ostracize and eventually persecute faithful believers.

An awareness and understanding of dangers and threats to our Christian life is necessary

Before engaging in a study or discussion of how the state affects our Christian life and the function of the church, we should seek an understanding of why this issue is important and what is the proper frame of mind when we think and talk about these matters. Otherwise, we run the risk of speaking or acting rashly, or with sinful pride. We will be inclined to follow emotional leaders or become combative rather than humble.

When we contemplate the future and what circumstances await Christians, the all-important and central event is the second coming of Christ. "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Our Lord is coming again, and what could be more important than eternity with our Savior? When He returns, we "shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 5:4). This is our hope. Scripture is filled with beautiful prophecies and assurances.

Of course, we are also familiar with God's Word about what is to happen before Christ's return. The true church will not be large. Satan will dominate the earth. The Antichrist will rule the nations. The Antichrist will have immense political power and significant influence over churches.

Many will be enticed by false prophets (see John 16:33; Rom. 8:36). Tribulation is coming, there can be no doubt. It will involve the lie, and also most certainly the true church will be directly persecuted by the government of the nations.

When teaching His disciples about the signs of His coming and the end of the world, Jesus mentions wars, famines, and earthquakes as "the beginning of sorrows" and then tells them, "Then they shall deliver you up to be afflicted and shall kill you; and ye shall be hated of all nations for my name's sake" (Matt. 24:8, 9).

We are expressly told in God's Word about the tribulations that are on the way. Christians are called to recognize the start of such things and prepare themselves and their children for what is on the horizon. Much has been written by Reformed theologians about the lies and false teachings that are here now and will prevail in the end times. We have been taught much about the great deception to come. Scripture tells us of a coming time when man will not endure sound doctrine and shall "heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears" and the church shall "turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Tim. 4:3, 4).

The deception of the church is without doubt a primary concern for the faithful. A false gospel is promoted even today in a prominent way. The infallibility of God's Word is ignored and worship is corrupted. However, we must also be informed and watchful of the trials to come which are not necessarily doctrinal deceptions, but more direct actions, frequently taken by the government. These actions constitute harm to the Christian's livelihood and worship of our God. The hatred of God's people is evident. The agenda is there. We cannot ignore these things and we are called to respond in faith.

Throughout history, the world has hated and persecuted Christ's true church. At certain times, a Reformed Christian in our country might say he is persecuted by the world, or by our government. Perhaps there may be some truth to this, but compared to the tribulations others have had in history, and even now, we need to have a sense of perspective. We have not faced death or torture if we refuse to deny that Christ is our Lord. We encounter no obstacles when we buy food or other goods. No one

bothers us if we are legally traveling from state to state. Our housing is more than adequate; none of us lives in shacks or tents. For the most part, we have little difficulty qualifying for employment. Our Christian schools freely teach the Bible and other subjects from a scriptural viewpoint, to students whose parents must be unified in the truth. We “have it good” and we tend to relax and perhaps complain occasionally about “the world.”

However, make no mistake, the world hates the Christian. Because we follow Christ, it can be no other way. Jesus taught us about the attitude of the world toward His elect: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you”(John 15:18, 19).

The threats and trials are coming. As far as our country is concerned, those who revile us and seek our end are already within the gates. Unless the Christian condones the wicked lifestyle, allows that the Bible is not the actual inerrant Word of God, and avoids mention of sin or hell, the persecution is coming soon.

The question then is what to look for, and how do we respond? The focus of this article is primarily on ways our government is preparing to act against the true Christian.

Some current and likely future movements exemplify the arrival of governmental threats to daily living of the Christian family, and the true worship of the church

In recent years, our country has experienced what might be called a transgender movement according to which a person must in all ways be treated as whatever he or she decides is their preferred gender, when that gender is opposite of how they were created. The farcical use of “pronouns” is promoted as a requirement for those who do not wish to be labeled “transphobic.” To disagree means you are a bigot. This movement permeates academia and has thus spread to public school districts through teachers and administrators. It is now finding its way into the workplace, and we can assume its adherents would like nothing better than to bring this into the Christian school. The godlessness of this whole idea and the related LGBTQ+ agenda should be clear and will not be explained here. It is discussed in other *Standard Bearer* articles and the approach here is more toward the implications for the true child of God. Proponents of this movement without a doubt are enemies of the church.

Issues that might be faced in the workplace

A method of promoting transgenderism, and the similar

LGBTQ+ agenda, is termed “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion,” abbreviated as DEI. Employees encounter DEI frequently in the context of alleged racial inequities and what is called “white privilege.” While one might disagree with the extreme nature of some aspects of this concept, especially having it forced into the workplace, the racial aspect of DEI is not really a direct threat to the Christian. However, the DEI concept also categorizes transgender and LGBTQ+ persons as an oppressed minority. The promoters of DEI are aiming for elimination of all forms of their self-defined “social oppression” and the Word of God means nothing to them. All people must agree with and support transgenderism and the total acceptance and approval of any LGBTQ+ ideas. Failure to do so should be illegal. Oppression is no longer defined as a tyrannical rule or even an unfair exclusion, but rather failure to support an agenda. This movement will logically hit first at the workplace. For most people, employment is necessary to support self and family. Keeping a job can potentially be conditioned on acceptance of and compliance with their mandate.

DEI in the workplace is presented in things such as mandatory training and forced agreement, the apparent final goal being excluding from a profession any person who does not “agree with” or approve the transgender/LGBTQ+ movement. The approach is to include transsexuals as a protected class and require mandatory “diversity and inclusion” training consistent with the promotion of this agenda, with the underlying basis that disagreement is unacceptable bigotry.

The practice of law is certainly susceptible to pressure from groups pushing the DEI agenda. For example, the State Bar of Wisconsin in early 2023 petitioned the Wisconsin Supreme Court to adopt an American Bar Association rule making it professional misconduct for a lawyer to “engage in conduct that the lawyer knows or reasonably should know is harassment or discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity...related to the practice of law” (*In the matter of the Amendment of Supreme Court Rule SCR 20:8.4*). This proposal would expand the existing anti-harassment rule by adding “discrimination” to the realm of professional misconduct, expanding the protected classes to include “gender identity” and adding the vague “reasonably should know” standard. Mandatory training by third-party social justice “experts” will follow. Those who disagree must be taught and corrected. It is not a stretch to look forward to the next step of regulating speech outside the context of a person’s profession, and exclude from that profession the Christian who is faithful to God’s infallible Word. The aforementioned

petition was denied by the Wisconsin Supreme Court; however, that Court has since been reconstituted and the chances are high that it will ultimately be granted.

This is merely an example of a profession that will present difficulties for the Christian. Any profession that is regulated will be targeted, especially if that profession influences the direction of society. This could include educators, physicians, and other professions where decisions are made and actions taken which might affect families or children in particular.

Currently, discipline or exclusion of a worker by the government for holding to a biblical stance on a matter such as transgenderism is probably unlikely due to the number of involved professionals who would make a stand against any retribution or exclusion of a colleague. This being said, be assured that this path is only at its beginning. The faithful Christian will have to be excluded, and the Bible is clear that God's people will be hated more and more. Repercussions for regulated professionals or employees who express or affirm their Christian faith on the above issue or similar movements, even outside the workplace, are certainly part of the DEI goals and should be expected in the future.

Potential concerns in the area of education

It would be difficult to argue persuasively that the public education system has not completely surrendered to an anti-Christian agenda. You might say this does not affect your family because your Christian school is solidly Reformed. Why worry about a public school? We have no choice but to pay attention. The Devil will not stop at the public school when his aim is the child of God.

Colleges and universities that consider themselves Christian are already well into denial of biblical truth in the area of transgenderism and LGBTQ+. A student body of a university that at least once considered itself Reformed in its mission elects an openly gay student body president. However, this discouraging development has more to do with wayward private colleges. The concern in this article is how the *government* threatens the Christian. That fear is realized in the government's dealings with Christian grade schools and high schools.

The clear and chilling threat on the horizon is directed straight at the Christian grade schools and high schools. In the state of California, the Department of Education has issued guidance to schools in that state recommending that school officials and staff do not “out” transgender students to their parents, in other words, lie to the parents if necessary. The State of California, through its attorney general, is petitioning the court to force at least

one public school district to stop a policy of informing parents if a child is changing gender identity, even when the child is changing his or her name (*State of California, et al. v. Chino Valley Unified School Distr.*, San Bernardino County Superior Court, CIV SB 2317301). The court temporarily ordered that the district must not inform the parents of any transgender identifying by students and the case remains in litigation.

In another case, two teachers were terminated when they refused to lie to parents about gender transitioning of their children. The public school district had a policy that “gender-dysphoric” children must be affirmed in all respects and teachers may not tell parents if a child is trying to change gender at school. The policy was—no parent involvement. The teachers were initially successful in a court challenge and were reinstated while the case proceeds (*Mirabelli, et al. v. Olson, et al.*, U.S.D.C., Southern Dist. of Calif. 2023). One can assume that their continued employment at this school district will be made as miserable as possible.

The Christian parent might conclude there is no need to worry because they would not send their children to a public school and the Christian school has the right to operate their school without governmental interference. For the most part, this might hold true so long as the U.S. Supreme Court remains primarily conservative. However, the signs are unmistakable and not reassuring.

In our country, the right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their own children is longstanding. It is fundamental and deeply rooted. As described above, the attorney general of California, the state's top law enforcement official, believes otherwise and is acting on that belief in a manner directly opposed to the Christian faith.

In the national context, the Human Rights Campaign is the nation's largest “civil rights” organization and its pro-LGBTQ/transgender agenda and lobbying have significant influence over like-minded politicians. A few years ago this organization released a document entitled *Blueprint for Positive Change 2020* in order to provide guidance to the current administration. As to education, this document demands that the administration mandate that “non-discrimination policies and science-based curriculum *are not undermined by religious exemption to accreditation standards* [emphasis added].” They demand that governmental accrediting agencies not accredit schools that do not meet their “nondiscrimination and scientific curriculum requirements.” Is it a stretch to contemplate a day in the near future when our schools cannot be accredited and no graduates may be admitted to a college, or even our schools being

forced to close? The Christian must consider what life will be like under these circumstances.

As to hiring teachers, exceptions to “anti-discrimination” laws have been recognized for Christian schools who for sincere faith reasons will not hire or retain a teacher that is homosexual or transgender, but the issue continues to be litigated. When the day arrives that a Christian school has no say on this issue, what can the school do?

Christians must be ready for direct government actions in the workplace and education of our children. Other areas of our day-to-day lives also are open to government interference. For example, when an authority follows the anti-Christian tenets outlined above, court-ordered placement of children based on whether a parent agrees to these ideas will likely become a reality.

How do we respond to these developments?

The purpose of this article is not to raise some sort of false alarm bell about things that are not now affecting the Reformed believer and might very well have no direct effect in your lifetime. Many Christians may live their entire lives making a good living, sending their children to a truly Christian school, and worshiping faithfully each Lord’s Day, all without interference from the government. But it is short-sighted to assume this will always be the case for the next generation, for others who live in a state or country that is threatening Christian education, or for fellow Christians in a profession that is regulated by the government. To not consider these issues will be harmful in the future.

In the work life, not every Christian is a business owner or employed in a field that involves no real challenge to obedience to God’s law. Many are or will be working in a field that requires licensing or is significantly regulated by the government. Fairly recently, florists and cake bakers have successfully challenged anti-Christian government actions against their livelihood. This might be encouraging, but it will certainly not always be the case. The fact that these people had to take court action against their government is telling. Avoiding employment in areas that might be challenging is not necessarily the best route, especially if you have been given certain skills and abilities. However, it would be wise to recognize that at some point, a change might have to take place. If you are ordered to confirm your support for and agreement with a principle that runs contrary to God’s Word, how will you respond? Litigation has been a means of contesting governmental interference with religious freedom, but the results

are uncertain and the process will be costly. The better course may be to evaluate other options throughout your life.

As to Christian schools, there are things that should be considered now in order to hopefully mitigate future situations. Popular school-choice policies (vouchers) are making their way through state legislatures across the country, and payments the schools receive from the government will result in governmental control over private and Christian schools. In this scheme, the school receives money from the state to cover tuition of a student who meets certain need-based requirements. Typically, the school will not be able to consider religion or church membership in the eligibility determination. Also, the school must excuse participating students from religious instruction and exercises at the parents’ request. Involvement in this program would be selling out the parent-run Christian school for money, plain and simple. Any program that involves schools accepting public dollars puts them at risk of government control. School boards should be adding to the school bylaws a requirement that at no time shall the school participate in these programs. In addition, Christian schools should contemplate the real future possibility of losing tax-exempt status and prepare accordingly.

In summary, the faithful Christian must be vigilant and not dismiss these warning signs. This does not mean unlawful disobedience to government demands that do not force us to compromise our faith, even if these demands are discriminatory and unfair. We might lose money or perhaps a job for which we are qualified, but we must not attach ourselves to movements that encourage civil disobedience or proud attitudes.

One command from the Word is to love one another and love the Lord. Jesus told us that the great commandment of the law is to “love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” and to “love thy neighbor as thyself” (Matt. 22:37-39).

We must seek the truth of why we might be concerned about how the state is affecting our faith and our obedience to the commands of the Lord. “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13). Our approach is to fear God, not man, and to obey.

God has already made foolish “the wisdom of this world” (I Cor. 1:20). Our comfort is in the Savior alone, who will return. Until then, we may boldly say, “The Lord is my helper and I will not fear what man shall do unto me” (Heb. 13:6).

Announcements

PRC Synod 2024

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2024, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. A signed hard copy as well as a Word/PDF version is appreciated. Please send material to:

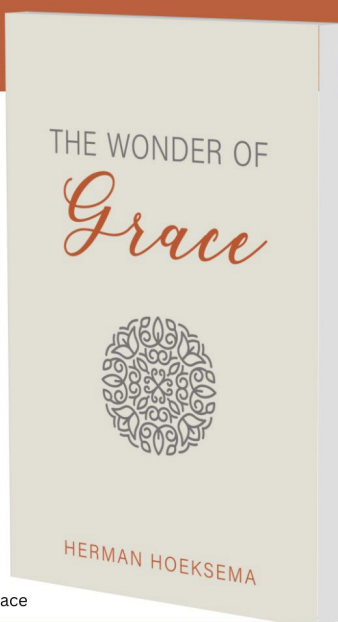
Doug Mingerink, Sr., Stated Clerk
(doug@mingerink.com)
4949 Ivanrest SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

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Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2024-2025 academic year should make application at the March 21, 2024 meeting of the Theological School Committee. Older men from the PRC who wish to apply under the new Special Seminary Entrance Program (SSEP) should approach the secretary of the TSC or the registrar (C. Terpstra) to review status and pre-seminary requirements (cf. *PRC Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 348ff.).

Accompanying the application must be a testimonial from the prospective student's Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript.

Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. Those older men who apply under the new SSEP may be exempt from some of these requirements, which will be determined on a case-by-case basis. The requirements for the regular course of entering seminary and for the SSEP are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the seminary's website (prcts.org/admissions).

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 21 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

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

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