

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

May 15, 2024 • Volume 100 • No. 16

To young men in Christ

Rev. Steven Key

Elders knowing the sheep

Prof. Brian Huizinga

Alleged mistranslation; Missing evidence; Solar eclipse

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God a stronghold

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Follow the leader

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This cover format is one with which most of you are very familiar, having graced the covers of all regular SB issues since October 2017. This cover style includes a curated table of contents of featured articles, as well as a background image of the RFPA tulip logo. This tulip logo was a redesign following the previous diamond logo. Stay tuned for the June SB issue, when the RFPA will be unveiling a brand-new SB cover design AND a brand-new logo



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Editorial office

Prof. Barry Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business office

Mr. Dwight Quenga
1894 Georgetown Center Dr
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
616-457-5970
dwight@rfpa.org

United Kingdom office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

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Meditation

Rev. Steven Key, emeritus minister of the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado

To young men in Christ

I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.... I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

I John 2:13b, 14b.

First John 2:12-14 is divided into two sets of three addresses each. The two sets are divided by a different tense of the verse, where John first says, “I write unto you,” and then, “I have written.” The inspired apostle stands at the end of his earthly sojourn, speaking as a pastor to those whom he loves in the Lord. “I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one.” But even as he writes, he would have them realize that the words he writes are words that will abide, even though he will soon pass from them. He writes to them the Word of God. So he changes his perspective and says, “I have written.” “I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.”

Those are amazing words, are they not? You might even be inclined to question them. But these are the words of the Holy Spirit to you. They describe you. They describe your spiritual life in the midst of all the challenges you face. They remind you of the fellowship that you have with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And therefore they are meant to encourage you in your Christian walk, that your joy may be full.

The challenges you face

As young men you face significant challenges. Both verses speak of the assaults of the Wicked One, Satan, our great adversary. His name speaks of hardship, of *peril*. He has another name, *Devil*, which exposes him as one who endangers us by deception. So we are warned in the graphic language of I Peter 5:8, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.”

Especially in youth those challenges and threats posed by the Wicked One are manifold and intense. To use the language of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 6:16, Satan is

always throwing *fiery darts* at you. Today we might picture Satan using missiles, with incendiary devices in the warheads, so that when they strike they explode with a raging fire that also consumes. Satan and his hosts throw such *fiery darts* at *us*. We do not fight evil as something abstract, something ‘in general,’ something ‘out there somewhere.’ He is the one set on corrupting us, the one who seeks to destroy us! He is equipped with the whole host of devils to assist him; he has the world at his disposal; and he enlists also our own sinful flesh. And the implication of the text is that he begins to focus his personal attacks most intently not upon the little children, nor upon those who are well-established in the faith, but upon young people, *young men*.

These challenges do not belong to youth exclusively. But many of the forms of those temptations and much of the intensity are things that the younger children have not yet faced, and that we who are older have now passed. Many of those temptations have to do with activities and relationships of youth. You are at a time in life when you begin to break away from the family structure. You begin to seek your independence. That desire for independence is the natural development of life. Parents recognize that too, and have begun to entrust more and greater responsibilities to you, just to help you learn some of the things you need to learn in order to be on your own. Independence has limits, you must realize. We never stand on our own. We are dependent upon God for everything. We are dependent upon our relationship with Christ. We are dependent upon relationships with those who also belong to the body of Christ. Do not forget those things. Remember that also in your determination to be independent. The Devil would like you to think that you are on your own and can do as you well please. That is one of the great challenges that you face in your Christian experience.

Then there are all the ambitions that you have, the things you want to do. Satan would set before you many things and activities, even the pleasures of sin, and attempt to show you the desirability of seeking what he would have you seek. And who in youth is not faced with the challenging temptations of being carried away

with pride and discontent and vanity? The fiery darts of Satan are directed at your thoughts. He attempts to get you to rationalize sin, to put your focus only on the present without regard to the future. These are some of the challenges faced especially in youth.

In the face of these significant challenges, you also find yourselves in a rather vulnerable position. The Devil recognizes the vulnerability of young men. You are young, inexperienced in battle. Young men (and young women) often underestimate the fierceness of the Devil's attacks and overestimate their own ability to stand against them. Furthermore, there is found in young men quite generally a lack of stability that is found in those who have seen more spiritual development and maturity. Satan recognizes that this is the particular time in your life when you are trying to put everything together in your own mind. You need to know how your faith and life fit together. You need to understand what is so significant about your Reformed upbringing. Why should you believe this? "Why?" is the prevalent question of young men as well as young women.

There is nothing wrong with that. That is the natural development of youth. But critically important it is that you take all those questions to the Scriptures. The Word of God stands before us with the authoritative answer to all our questions of doctrine and life. The Wicked One knows that. That is why, if he can get you to cast aside that truth for the sake of a relationship, he is thrilled to do so. That is also why he levels bold attacks upon that Word of God. He denies its historicity. He denies its authority. The Wicked One knows that if we leave the foundation of our reasonable faith to enter a rationalistic argument, he will have us in the same position as Eve when she fell. You see, young believers need to know the subtle attacks of the Evil One. You need to know how readily he would call into question your faith. You need to understand that the pleasures of sin, while attractive, are snares that lead to death. You need to see what is at the root of the challenges you face. And above all, you need to live in fellowship with your Redeemer.

The strength you possess

As the apostle looks at you in your relationship with your Savior, he calls your attention to the strength you possess. He says of you, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong."

Youth is the period of strength—from a natural point of view. But such natural strength is not the focus of the apostle. That natural strength, after all, is easily your weakness rather than your strength. The one who is all caught up with his natural strength is generally strongly tempted to sins of the flesh. So the apostle Paul in II Tim-

othy 2:22 calls you to "flee youthful lusts." And the book of Proverbs is full of instruction that you who have the natural strength of youth be not ensnared with drunkenness and fornication and other sins that might easily ensnare you if you do not have a right spiritual perspective.

The strength that is yours, writes the apostle, is spiritual strength. Your strength is not in yourself, but in the Lord. The ferocity of the battle of youth requires spiritual strength. You are not participating in a game. But the strength you possess makes you strong to endure. This is not to say you will never be wounded. This is not to say that your faith will not be put to the test. This is not to say that you will never stumble in the battle or experience suffering. But you who are Christ's will endure in your strength. You must live in this confidence. The apostle wants you to know that you are stronger than you think, stronger in a different way than you think! You are strong to believe, strong to resist the adversary, strong to bear your trials, strong to suffer, strong to attack, strong to endure in the battle of faith. Again, your strength is not in yourself. If you look to yourself for strength, you will surely fall. Your strength is in Christ and in the power of His might.

The proof of your strength is seen in this, that "you have overcome the wicked one." Notice, he does not say, "You *shall* overcome the wicked one," but "you *have* overcome the wicked one." That speaks of victory! That speaks of victory already accomplished. So sure is your accomplishment that John sees you in glory!

The apostle is not writing here in an attempt to get you to do something or be someone you are not. He would remind you, rather, of who you are and of what God has given you in Christ Jesus! He would do so because it is easy for you to forget these things in the face of your many trials and temptations. There are many times when you feel anything but strong. And yet the apostle, speaking the Word of truth under the inspiration of the Spirit of truth, says, "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the Word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." How reassuring, how empowering, must be this Word to you!

Christ has bought you, body and soul, with His precious blood. By His Holy Spirit He has drawn you into a living relationship with Him, even calling you His friend. The entrance of the Holy Spirit into your heart has expelled Satan. He attacks you yet, indeed he does; but he fights as one defeated, and therefore desperate. There are times when he strikes you down and you grieve. Why is that? Because you have offended and hurt your Lord and Friend. When you confess your sins and flee from them, you show the work of the Spirit in your heart. That you resist the Wicked One is evidence

that you are no longer held in his bondage. You are victorious in Christ. Yes, we look for the completion of the fighting and the victory to be revealed to all. But the victory is ours. You have experienced not only the deliverance from sin's punishment, for it was borne by Jesus for you; but you have also been delivered from the power of sin. You have overcome the Wicked One. The victory is yours! Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. That is the essence of the Christian life—life in God's covenant. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong."

The source of your strength

The source of your strength is set forth in no uncertain terms in verse 14, with this truth: "the word of God abideth in you." The *word of God* is first and essentially Him who is from the beginning, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word become flesh. With peculiar purpose Scripture refers to Him with the name *the Word of God*. He is the One by whom the very mind of God is expressed. He is the One who interprets the Father's mind to us, who reveals the eternal counsel and will of the infinitely holy Divine Being. God determined your salvation, and the Word spoke and so worked in your heart by His Spirit. He abides in you. By His Spirit He dwells in your heart, fulfilling and upholding

the wonder of God's grace in your life, defending and protecting you against all the onslaughts of the Wicked One. Think of that! The Word of God abideth in you! Christ is your mighty Protector!

But the same Word has spoken and continues to speak. He speaks by His gospel, which you know as the power of God unto salvation. By it, the Spirit working in your hearts, you have been given eyes to see and ears to hear the wonder of God's sovereign and irresistible grace. You have been taken into the covenant fellowship of God. That is your strength. That is always your strength. By the Word and by the Word alone you can face all the questions that the Devil will throw at you in his attempt to overthrow your faith. It is the Word that God has given to comfort us when we are down. It is that Word by which God girds us up with strength from on high. For it is by the Word that the Holy Spirit works in us. It is by the Word, therefore, that we live in the knowledge of faith, the knowledge of our fellowship with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ.

Remember who you are. You are the one in whom the Word of God abideth. You belong to your faithful Savior Jesus Christ. You are His. "I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one." Live in that confidence.



Editorial

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

Elders knowing the sheep

Elders as shepherds

Jesus Christ is the "chief Shepherd" (I Pet. 5:4), "that great shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20), "the good shepherd" who "giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10:11). In His church He has appointed pastors as "spiritual shepherds who are set over the church, which God called unto salvation, and counts as sheep of His pasture" (Form of Installation of Ministers). We are familiar with this identification and count our pastors as "under-shepherds" of Christ.

Elders are also shepherds. In Psalter #214, stanza 7, we sing of David in his kingly office of rule in the Old Testament, "So David, their shepherd, with wisdom and might, protected and fed them and led them aright."

In Ezekiel 34, God pronounces judgment against the sheep-scattering shepherds of Israel who included the elders of the nation. Paul counts the elders of Ephesus as shepherds and exhorts them: "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost has made you overseers, to feed the church of God..." (Acts 20:28). Similarly, Peter addresses "the elders which are among you" (I Pet. 5:1), and exhorts, "Feed the flock of God which is among you..." (v. 2). Our elders are shepherds among us in the congregation.

Elders knowing the sheep

The calling of a pastor/minister is "to feed, guide, protect, and rule the flock committed to his charge"

(Form of Installation of Ministers). This calling can also be applied to elders since they are *shepherds* and they share many duties with the ministers in their care for the flock. However, before the elder can perform the various tasks of a common shepherd, he must *know* the sheep. This is first and basic for every shepherd. Shepherd Jesus said, “I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep” (John 10:14). When the elder is installed into ecclesiastical office, he must be committed to knowing the sheep so that he can say, “I know Jesus’ sheep.”

The elders will never know the sheep as comprehensively and intimately as Jesus does. Elders cannot know the heart of a sheep unless it is revealed, and some sheep are hard to get to know. There may be a sheep who goes to his grave with a deep wound he never speaks of and for which he never asks for help, and so the elders never know. There may be a sheep who appeared to be very humble and pious but was living a double life and ensnared in some hideous work of darkness. For years, until God exposed the hypocrisy, the elders never knew that a sheep was dying with a spiritually rotten soul. Although there will be plenty about the sheep that the elders do not know, and some things they do not need to know, it is their calling to get to know the sheep as well as they can. Good shepherding requires a personal knowledge of love so that shepherds can faithfully feed, guide, protect, and rule in the name of Christ.

Elders knowing the sheep congregationally

It is the duty of elders to know their own congregation. While congregations united in a denomination, or united as sister churches throughout the world, possess a deep and rich unity in the faith, each individual congregation is unique. Every congregation has its own unique history, personality, and characteristics. Each congregation is situated in a certain local community with its members living in a social, political, economic, and cultural context that may differ significantly from that in which another congregation is situated. The original Christian congregation in Jerusalem was different from the one in Corinth. A congregation in Pittsburgh, PA is different from a congregation in Lynden, WA. A congregation in Holland, MI is different from a congregation in Singapore. It is not the calling of the elders in one locale to know intimately the sheep of another congregation, but to know the flock Christ has entrusted to their care. It would not be wise, but neither should it be possible, for a church in Lynden WA, to swap consistories with a church in Pittsburgh, PA. The elders of the one do not know the sheep of the other.

Knowing the congregation, the elders will know that their work is more than a bare administrative task con-

sisting of monthly meetings, special meetings, reports, deliberations, decisions, minutes, schedules, and highlighting or bookmarking pages in the Church Order or a commentary on it. What is the point of such activity if the shepherds do not know the sheep on behalf of whom they meet and work? It is possible for a receptionist to work at a call center for a massive health care organization, receiving and redirecting phone calls from needy patients, without ever meeting or having a personal knowledge of a single patient. That may not happen in the church. Christ calls the elders to a personal knowledge of the sheep so that when the elders make decisions on behalf of the congregation, they do so with understanding and for the good of the sheep.

Knowing the congregation, the elders can advise the pastor on specific petitions that may be important in congregational prayer for *this* congregation *right now*. They can advise regarding applications that may be important for *this* congregation to hear in the preaching *right now*, including warnings about specific dangers and illnesses that are particularly threatening. They may decide to organize a special midweek prayer meeting during a time of crisis. Doing so, they will tailor the structure and content of that meeting for their own sheep, asking themselves, “What does *this* congregation need *right now*?”

Knowing the congregation, the elders will have both an on-the-ground and an on-the-mountain view of the fold. With their on-the-ground view, they walk among the flock and are aware of events and circumstances that come and go. For example, when a congregation has assumed the wonderful responsibility of hosting an upcoming Young People’s Convention for hundreds of youth, and many members are feverishly planning and working, the elders want to be cognizant of that enormous undertaking and the impact it is having on the life of the congregation. But soon it will all be over. The elders also want to take an on-the-mountain view and get up high to see the fold as a whole and how the congregation is positioned today relative to her history. If the congregation has a lengthy history, the elders want to know how she walks and talks and thinks today compared to the past. Any changes, for the better or for the worse? For example, regarding evangelism efforts and outreach, how does the congregation behave compared to a generation ago? Better? Worse? Why? The younger elders will want to glean knowledge from the older elders about the history of the church.

Knowing the congregation, the elders can sometimes answer questions from the church visitors better than the minister. If the minister recently accepted a call to the congregation, he is new and may not be able to answer the question, “What is the spiritual

condition of the congregation? Is there unity, peace, and love?" The elders must know and be able to give an answer.

Elders knowing the sheep individually

As important as it is to know the sheep *congregationally*, elders cannot function faithfully without being committed to knowing the sheep *individually*. Elders are called to watch for each soul of each sheep as they that must give an account (Heb. 13:17).

Thinking of the congregation, the elders can consider: Are all adhering to the doctrines of the faith? Are there any young people coming of age but not making public profession of faith? Is anyone failing in their confession of faith right now and not trusting God? Why not? Are all deporting themselves faithfully and walking in holiness? No? Why not? Who is healthy? Who is physically sick? Who is spiritually sick? Why? Who is suffering? How? Who is continually agitated? Why? Are any wandering? Is anyone falling through the cracks? Who needs a call, a visit, an ear, an expression of love, a rebuke, a word of thanks for their service? Who has a history and background outside of this congregation, or this denomination? What impact does that have on them? A sheep is not a solitary animal. It needs the flock as much as it needs food. Who in the congregation chooses isolation and separation? Why? Are any isolated against their will, due to age or infirmity? How can they be helped? Are any going off to college this fall? Is anyone getting married soon? Have any been laid off from work, or changed careers? Do any have a family member who is suffering a grievous affliction or living in sin? What impact is that affliction having upon our member?

Often elders are assigned a particular district of "x" number of families in the congregation so they can give special attention to those members. The elder can study his own personal copy of the church directory to make sure he knows the names of everyone in his district (others also, but these first). Then he can frequently page through that directory to remind himself of the individuals and families, and whether there is anything he should know about them. After conversations in which he learns of occupation, interests, tendencies, unique circumstances, family history/connections, a significant anniversary (such as the day a toddler named ____ passed away), he can jot those notes down in his directory to aid his memory. Or he can go through his directory page by page and ask himself: How well do I know him/her, and how he/she fits in this body? Then next Sunday, there may be someone he wants to catch and converse with, being genuinely interested in that person.

The elder can make an effort to move about the fellowship hall or outdoors after the church service and converse with different groups of people each week. He can aim to mingle with the young people and young adults. What are they doing these days? High school? College? Work? Dating? How is it going? What is enjoyable or challenging?

Before the elders enter a home for family visitation, they can ask themselves, "How well do we know them?" Let's be sure we *know* them after we leave. Then family visitation will not be a Bible study but shepherds learning, encouraging, and directing sheep with the love of Christ.

When the elders get to know the sheep and show a real personal interest, care, and concern, the sheep will be more likely to look to the elders for counsel, comfort, and guidance. If the only time a sheep has ever been approached by an officebearer was when that sheep asked for his membership papers and was already out the door, it is too late.

Elders are often very busy with challenging and exhausting cases that consume much of their time, in addition to time needed for their own home life and occupation. But even in busyness they need to *know* the sheep. Perhaps they discover that ninety percent of their time is devoted to ten percent of the sheep. What about the other ninety percent? What if a young woman in the congregation is getting married (the biggest day of her life so far!) but it is not on the radar of any consistory member? What if a single young fellow has not been in church for eight consecutive Sundays and no one noticed or reached out? We do not want to miss the joyful or alarming moments in the life of the sheep. As elders let's keep encouraging each other to *know* the sheep, *all* the sheep. As sheep, let's keep praying fervently and daily for the shepherds who bear a responsibility weightier and a workload heavier than we often realize or will ever know.

Elders knowing themselves as sheep

One sheep each elder must know best: himself. Before he can know and care for the others, he must take heed to himself (1 Tim. 4:16). He is also a sheep who needs to be known, fed, protected, and ruled in the body. He must first ask himself, "Do I know *myself*? Am I relying upon Christ? Do I take time to commune with God in prayer? Am I living antithetically, and avoiding temptation? Do I truly love these sheep? Do I need help? Am I approachable?"

The humble shepherd who knows he is a weak and sinful *sheep* redeemed by the great Shepherd's blood and made strong by His Spirit will serve the sheepfold well.

Regeneration, saving faith, and union with Christ

Dear Rev. McGeown,

I am looking for clarification regarding some statements in your recent article in the *Standard Bearer*, “Saving faith: Given to Believe” (March 1, 2024).

I understand faith in its activity, which the article explains well, and faith as a bond. My concern regards the section on the faculty of faith regarding our ingrafting into Christ and the role of faith in this “process,” especially viewing faith in its activity. My understanding of ingrafting as referenced in Romans 11 is that we who were branches, dead in sin, are ingrafted into the living tree that is Christ. As such, we, being dead, have no ability to engraft ourselves into Christ, similar to our regeneration being wholly a passive event in the life of the believer. And now being united to Christ, we are partakers of Him and all His benefits (righteousness, justification, sanctification, etc.). And then being ingrafted into Christ, we remain in union with Christ through the bond that is faith, which includes the activity of our believing in, resting in Christ.

My concern is that some of the statements in your article, specifically in the section on “the faculty of faith,” may imply to some readers something different. You write, “We become members of Christ’s body or one plant with Him by believing in Him” and “in summary, the Holy Spirit unites us to Jesus Christ in the mystical union by kindling in our hearts the mysterious gift of faith, so that we consciously receive Him.” These statements imply to me that our ingrafting into Christ occurs after we believe in Christ or that in the process of believing we are ingrafted into Christ. This raises some serious questions in my mind. How is it that an elect child of God who is dead in sin outside of his union with Christ first believes and then is joined to Christ? If believing must occur before ingrafting or even in order to be ingrafted, how are young children, or even those who die in the womb, in union with Christ when they have not believed?

To me it is a basic difference between being made one with Christ *and then* receiving all His benefits, including faith (belief), as opposed to believing *and then* being made one with Christ.

I would appreciate your thoughts.

In Christ,
Tim Pipe, Jr.
Wyoming, Michigan

Dear Mr. Pipe,

My point is that the Holy Spirit creates a spiritual,

living connection between Christ and the sinner at regeneration. That union with Jesus Christ takes place not when we believe, but when we are regenerated, that is, when we are given new life by the Holy Spirit and cease to be dead in trespasses and sins. That union, however, is *not* faith. It is a confounding of concepts to call it faith. We should reserve the language of faith for the activity of believing.

You write, “How is it that an elect child of God who is dead in sin outside of his union with Christ first believes and then is joined to Christ?” You misunderstand me. The elect must be spiritually alive (regenerated) *before* they believe, and one who is in union with Christ believes because he has already been regenerated and united to Jesus Christ. Union with Christ, which is the mystical union (which is not faith), occurs *before* the activity of believing. The Canons of Dordt teach that “all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner [both adults and children] are certainly, infallibly, and effectually regenerated and *do actually believe*” (Canons, III/IV, 12). God works by His Holy Spirit to bring about *our* believing in Jesus Christ. This is to be contrasted with the Arminian view condemned in Canons, III/IV, Rejection of Errors, 6: “Faith, through which we are first converted and because of which we are called believers, is not a quality or gift infused by God, but only an act of man.” Faith is, *before it becomes an act of man*, a quality or gift infused by God. The Arminian error was not to teach that faith is an act of man—it *is* an act of man—but to teach that it is *only* an act of man and to deny that, before it becomes an act of man, it is primarily a divine gift or a power infused into man.

I express faith as an activity because I believe that it is the biblical presentation. Everywhere in Scripture—and I am open to correction on this point if a reader can point me to a passage that I have overlooked—faith is the activity of believing in God, trusting in Jesus Christ, and having personal assurance of salvation.

That, too, is how the creeds explain faith: “What is true faith?” asks the Heidelberg Catechism in Q. 21. Notice the question is “What *is* true faith?” We expect, therefore, a definition. “True faith *is...*” states Answer 21. True faith is defined in the Catechism not as a bond, but as true knowledge and confidence, that is, as the activity of the believer of knowing and trusting. Before we believe, however, we must be given the gift of faith, which is the spiritual power to lay hold of Jesus Christ for all of our salvation.

The Belgic Confession, Article 22, does not define

faith but describes it as an activity that is produced in us *after* the Holy Spirit has kindled it in our hearts: “An upright faith, which embraces Jesus Christ with all His merits, appropriates Him, and seeks nothing more besides Him.” Embracing, appropriating, and seeking are unquestionably activities. By those activities we are united consciously to Jesus Christ, just as a husband and wife are consciously united when they embrace one another in love. That union the Heidelberg Catechism also describes in Lord’s Day 28, Answer 76: “[It is] to become more and more united to His sacred body by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us, so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding *flesh of his flesh*, and *bone of his bone*; and that we live and are governed forever by one Spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.”

I use that word *conscious* advisedly because subconscious, unconscious, passive embracing is impossible. Embracing, appropriating, and seeking are conscious activities of the soul, of the heart, of the mind, and of the will. Belgic Confession, Article 35 says about faith that “[it is] the hand and mouth of our soul,” by which we “apply and receive” Jesus Christ. Again, the hand and mouth of our soul are active when we believe. The unbeliever has no hand or mouth of his soul; therefore, the unbeliever does not believe and cannot believe.

The Canons also describe faith as an activity. Canons I, 4 uses the word “embrace.” Canons II, Rejection of Errors, 4 speaks of faith accepting the merits of Christ (the Latin verb is *apprehendo*—to grasp, lay hold of, or embrace). Canons III/IV, 12 insists that “man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received.” Canons III/IV, 14 teaches that faith is “conferred, breathed, and infused” into us and that God “produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.”

You ask about children. “How are young children, or even those who die in the womb, in union with Christ when they have not believed?” I would not quickly assume that children do not believe. The faith of children—the manner in which God works faith in their young hearts—is, I confess, a great mystery. We read in Answer 74 of the Heidelberg Catechism that “the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, is promised to them,” which does not mean, “God promises to save them if they fulfill the condition of faith,” but that God promises to give them faith, which is part of their salvation, so that they believe. Canons I, 17 speaks of “the election and salvation” of children, so that elect infants are united to Christ in the mystical

union before they consciously believe, that is, before they consciously trust in and embrace Jesus Christ, although this occurs often much earlier than we imagine. “Thou didst make me hope when I was upon my mother’s breasts” (Ps. 22:9) “Thou art my trust from my youth” (Ps. 71:5). Hoping and trusting—also by children—are the activities of faith.

Finally, my concern is that faith is understood by some—erroneously—as a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond or connection to Jesus Christ that is divorced from the activity of believing. Then faith is a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond (which the Bible and the creeds do not teach), while believing (the activity of knowing and trusting God in Jesus Christ) is an entirely separate idea. Then a person might be engrafted into Christ with the subconscious, unconscious, passive bond of faith; or a person might imagine that he does not need to believe because, supposedly, he is saved by the bond *even without believing*. That leads to people supposing that they are saved—and can be saved—without believing in Christ, so that they claim, “I have the bond; believing is not necessary;” or “I have the bond; believing is inevitable or automatic.” That is a dangerous error because when the Bible says that we are saved through faith, it means that we are saved *through believing* in Jesus Christ. In some cases, people have been led to the conclusion that the Holy Spirit *is* faith: “We are united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit; we are united to Jesus Christ by faith; therefore, the Holy Spirit is faith.” I am sure you will agree, that is absurd. It is Biblical and confessional to teach that we are united to Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit, who creates faith in our hearts with the result that *we believe*.

Faith, then, is a “quality or gift infused by God” (Canons III/IV, Rejection of Errors, 6), the spiritual power to lay hold of Jesus Christ and receive all His benefits. God, by the operation of the Spirit in our hearts, infuses into us the power to believe (Canons III/IV, 14). When God works such faith in our hearts, we embrace Jesus Christ, we are engrafted into Jesus Christ, and we enjoy conscious communion with Him (Belgic Confession, Art. 22).

Rev. M. McGeown



All around us

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

Alleged mistranslation; Missing evidence; Solar eclipse

Alleged mistranslation

A documentary film called *1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture* has been making its way through the film festival circuit since 2022, and its creators hope to make it available for the whole world to watch.¹

Last February, an unofficial group of progressive Christian Reformed members called “The Hesed Project” sponsored viewings of the film in Christian Reformed churches all across Canada. The Hesed Project, which derives its name from the Hebrew word usually translated “mercy” in the King James Version (KJV), provides resources for “those with questions about the way the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC-NA) is responding to current concerns” about human sexuality, specifically about the Human Sexuality Report approved by the CRC Synod in 2022, which maintained that homosexual activity is a sin.² They want more “safe spaces” in the CRC where members of the LGBTQ+ community can be welcomed and affirmed. They are promoting the above-mentioned film in the CRC.

So what is this film about? 1946 was the year that the New Testament of the Revised Standard Version (RSV) was published. The RSV became more popular and influential than the previously published Revised Version (1885) and American Standard Version (1901). A main thesis of the film is that the RSV mistranslated I Corinthians 6:9 when it originally used the word “homosexuals” (later changed to “sexual perverts”). According to a scholar in the film, “1946 is the first time in any language in any translation the word homosexual ends up in the Bible.” The film tries to persuade viewers that this alleged mistranslation transformed the Bible into a sacred weapon to use in the culture war against homosexuals. Other modern versions followed the precedent of the RSV’s original translation. For example, the New King James Version (1982): “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sod-

omites...will inherit the kingdom of God.” The English Standard Version (2001): “Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality...will inherit the kingdom of God” (vv. 9-10). This alleged mistranslation, the film claims, changed the course of history, and not for the better.

The film aims to deceive people to believe that darkness is light in regard to homosexuality, and it will be successful with many. In our age when conspiracy theories pop up all around us and travel through society at the speed of light, thanks to our almost endless connection to the worldwide web, many seem ready to fall for anything that sounds a little bit credible. A documentary with “expert” scholars, “shocking” discoveries, and emotionally manipulative music will surely do the trick for some.

Let’s keep ourselves rooted and grounded in the whole Word of God. God created one man and one woman in the beginning and designed the sexual union of that man and woman as an expression of their marital love and oneness. God clearly reveals in both the Old and New Testaments that He considers it an abomination for a man to do that with a man, or a woman with a woman. Mary Lambert, one of the creators of the film who calls herself a member of the LGBTQ community *and* a Christian, wickedly tries to persuade people to call darkness light when she says, “In many Christian churches we’re still being told that being gay is a sin and that we’re unworthy of God’s love. So I couldn’t be more passionate about this life changing project that’s seeking to set the record straight...two consenting adults that love each other is not a sin. But many Christians still believe that.”

Paul obviously did not write I Corinthians 6:9 in our modern context. There is truth in what the CRC campus minister at Western University in London, Ontario writes in his review of the film: “The Bible isn’t an abstract, timeless document that emerged from a vacuum. It comes from a context. We receive it in our context. Part of how the Bible functions authoritatively is through paying close attention to context.”³ But he

1 <https://www.1946themovie.com>. The trailer of the film and a promotional video message from Mary Lambert, one of the creators, can be watched on this website.

2 <https://www.hesedprojectcrc.org/about/>

3 Michael R. Wagenman, “1946: A Text in Context,” *Christian Courier*, January 24, 2024 (<https://www.christiancourier.ca/1946-a-text-in-context/>).

shows which context he cares more about by his obvious excitement over the film. Regardless of what we might know about the historical context of Corinthian life in the first century, it is a grievous mistake to say that Paul did not mean to condemn romantic/sexual relationships between two consenting adults of the same sex. We must not merely interpret what Paul says in I Corinthians 6:9 about “effeminate” men and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (KJV) in the historical context of his day, but most importantly in the context of the whole Bible. When we search the whole Bible, we find that God not only condemns male prostitution and child abuse, but all kinds of homosexual relationships (Gen. 19:5ff.; Lev. 18:22; Rom. 1:26-27; I Tim. 1:10).

Mary Lambert tries to manipulate our emotions by the false claim that Christians say gay people are unworthy of God’s love. What we actually believe is that no one is worthy of God’s love, including us. But we also believe amazing good news that God loves us sinners who trust in Christ, and that He also loved some formerly homosexual Corinthians who came to Christ, so that Paul could write with joy, “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11).

Missing evidence

If you ask a ‘Christian’ LGBTQ activist about their view on creationism versus evolutionism, they will almost certainly adhere to the second position. After all, if you can get rid of the doctrine of a literal Adam and Eve and all the truths that flow out of it, it becomes a lot easier to claim that one can be a homosexual or affirm homosexuals *and* be a faithful Christian. But if God really created one man and one woman and brought them together in the prototypical marriage, as Genesis says, you have a problem.

I recently received a copy of the magazine *Reformed Perspective*, and among other good articles, I enjoyed the one by editor Jon Dykstra on three wild evolutionary theories that have arisen due to a *lack of evidence* for evolution.⁴ First of all, in modern mainline science, some have apparently noticed a lack of evidence for the idea that life emerged from non-life (abiogenesis) *here on earth*. That has led some unbelieving scientists to concoct the theory known as *Panspermia*, without a shred of evidence, that life must have emerged out of

non-life somewhere else in space and time, because it seems for various reasons that life could not have originated on earth as formerly thought. Life must have then been transported, somehow, to the earth.

Secondly, it has been noticed that there is a lack of evidence in the fossil record for living creatures in transition from one species to another. This has given birth to the theory, also without any evidence, known as *Punctuated Equilibrium*. That is the idea that since we do not see transitional forms in the fossil record, evolution must be able to happen in quick spurts that leave little evidence behind.

Thirdly, the amazing fact that the evidence seems to show that this world was designed for human life (the Anthropic Principle) has led some to form the theory of the *multiverse*. That is the make-believe notion that there must be an infinite number of universes, because the chances of human beings coming into existence are almost zero, and yet we exist, so we must live in the one universe where everything came together just right.

It is amazing what we human beings will come up with in our desperate attempt to suppress the knowledge of God, if we have not been given the eyes to see the truth that God has revealed in His Word: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.... And God said, let the earth bring forth grass.... And God said, let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth.... And God said, let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind.... And God said, let us make man in our image.... And God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good....”

Solar eclipse

“And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night.... And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night...to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good” (Gen. 1:14-18).

On April 8, many of us experienced the fascinating heavenly phenomenon of a solar eclipse, in which the lesser of those great lights, the moon, passes in front of the greater light, the sun. Here in Wingham, Ontario we were not quite in the path of totality, the area in which people could see what it looks like when the moon blocks the whole sun, causing a “sunset” and “sunrise” in the middle of the afternoon. But we were not far from it. Some Christian brethren traveled all the way from Alberta, worshiped with us on Sunday, and headed south on Monday to experience the full impact of the eclipse. They were among thousands of others

⁴ Jon Dykstra, “My Dog Ate the Evidence for Evolution,” *Reformed Perspective*, Vol. 43, Iss. 2 (Mar-Apr 2024): 42-46. *Reformed Perspective* is a magazine that is popular among conservative Reformed believers, schools, and churches in Canada. See <https://reformedperspective.ca>

who flocked to key Canadian cities in the path of the eclipse, including Niagara Falls. We contented ourselves to stand on our back deck with our kids, donning cheap protective glasses from Amazon, and watch as the moon gradually covered 97% of the sun. Earlier that day, we were not sure if we would be able to see anything because of a cloudy sky. But that afternoon, the Lord cleared the clouds away and gave us a beautiful blue sky so we could see it all, including the eerie dimming of the light and sudden drop in temperature.

The world did not come to an end that day, as some thought might happen. When it does, the sun will not

just be blocked by the moon, but it will become black as sackcloth and fizzle out in complete darkness (Matt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12).

For me, the eclipse was a beautiful sight, a special movement in the grand symphony of the heavens whose director is God, a marvel that inspired the heart to praise the One who moves all creatures great and small in their courses at all times. “When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him?... O LORD our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!” (Ps. 8:3, 4, 9).



Search the Scriptures

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

God a stronghold

The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.

Nahum 1:7

It sometimes seems that prophecies such as Nahum's are remote and without application to Christians today. A God who is jealous and angry is unrecognizable. The idea of wrath and judgment on enemies is distasteful to many. That Christians need a refuge in God seems of little use to those who are comfortable, warm, and well fed.

Perhaps we will have to wait until the end of time to see the value of Nahum's prophecy. When the enemies of the church seem triumphant once more, when the horrors Judah experienced in the days of Nahum are experienced by God's people once again, and when we find the things that are so important to us now to be no refuge in trouble, then perhaps we will learn that God is the only stronghold in times of trouble.

In any case, the Word of God in Nahum 1:7 is one of the few words of comfort to be found in the book. It is also the theme of the book. All the words about judgment and wrath, all the descriptions of Nineveh's downfall, come to this: “The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him.” The rest of the book, whether we see the need for it or not, is designed to impress on us the truth of this verse.

Charles Spurgeon in a sermon on Nahum 1:7 described the verse as an island refuge in a rushing flood of judgment: “Have you read this chapter through? It is a very terrible one, it is like the rushing of a mighty river when it is nearing a cataract. It boils, and seethes, and flows with overwhelming force, bearing everything before it, yet right in the middle of the surging flood stands out, like a green island, this most cheering, comforting, and delightful text.” Spurgeon's description is especially apt in view of Isaiah 8:5-8, where Assyria's coming is compared to a flooding river.

That God is a stronghold for His people is a truth that is found throughout Scripture, especially the Psalms (II Sam. 22:33; Ps. 27:1; 28:8; 31:5; 37:39; 43:2; 46:2; 52:9; 144:2; Is. 17:10; 25:4; Jer. 16:19). Proverbs 18:10 uses a slightly different figure, but the idea is the same: “The name of the LORD is a strong tower: the righteous runneth into it, and is safe.”

The word *stronghold* is sometimes translated “rock” or “fortress.” Here and in a few other places it is “stronghold.” Nahum 3:11 translates the word as “refuge.” More often the translation is simply “strength.” God is strength for His people: not *has* strength, but *is*. Psalm 27:1 also translates the word as “strength:” “the LORD is the strength [stronghold] of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?”

He is sovereign, the One who rules over all, including

Sennacherib and Assyria. He is almighty. There is no power in heaven, on earth, or in hell that is not His. So it is that even in troubled times He is a stronghold to His own—a stronghold who holds their enemies and all their troubles in His own almighty hands so entirely that nothing can lift a finger without Him. He is the One whose strength turns even the wickedness and plotting of wicked men to their salvation. His strength arranges and brings to pass even the times of trouble. *He is strength on behalf of His own.*

We need Him as our stronghold because of our enemies. The enemies of God's people are always many more than they are. Those enemies have the wealth and power of the world in their hands. They rule the kingdoms of this world and make the laws. They control all the military might, or think they do. The thinking and perceptions of the world are manipulated by them. In our own societies they control politics, the media, the universities, and so the whole course of the world is directed by them and through them by the great Deceiver and enemy himself, the Prince of this world.

We delude ourselves if we think that what happened when Nineveh dashed the covenant children of God's people to death on the stones and ripped up the women with children, torturing and destroying, cannot happen in our civilized society. It not only *can* but *will* when the words of Jesus are fulfilled in the last days: "For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be. And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened" (Matt. 24:21, 22).

We need God as a stronghold also when His judgments on the wicked world touch our lives as they often do. Faith in Christ does not provide immunity from earthquakes, floods, famine, war, and the other judgments God sends. In such times God is the stronghold of His people when He uses these things too for their good. If no other good comes from these things, God's people find in the face of these things that nothing can separate them from the love of God.

We need God as our stronghold also because we are sinners, no less worthy of His fury than the ungodly. For us, lost sinners, He is a stronghold in Christ, providing Him as our protection when He reveals Himself as an angry Judge and a consuming fire. A cross of wood, some nails, and a superscription are the greatest refuge ever built.

Those for whom God is a stronghold are described in the verse as those who trust in Him. They believe in Jesus, the Son of God, the revelation of God as the only Savior. They are those who are safe in God as strong-

hold, not because they distinguish themselves from others by believing but because faith unites them to Jesus and through Him to God. They are, by faith, *in* Christ, and *in* Him have God as their stronghold. But because they could never find their way to Christ by themselves or put themselves in that stronghold named Christ, God not only commands them to believe but graciously gives them the faith they need, and so they come to Christ and are in Him by faith, in a stronghold that no enemy can destroy. So the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled: "And a *man* shall be as an hiding place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land" (Is. 32:2).

It is beautiful that the word for trust is a word that means "to flee for protection." God's people flee to Him. Those who would otherwise come under His sentence as Judge, who would be destroyed by Him the executioner, flee to Him for refuge. They do that because there is nowhere else to go but God. In fleeing to Him, they find that He is a stronghold no earthly or hellish power can break.

That God knows those who trust in Him does not mean that they come to His attention because they believe in Him and in His Christ. That is the heretical notion that we somehow make ourselves the objects of God mercy and saving grace. That He knows those who trust in Him means, rather, that His eternal knowledge of them is the reason they trust in Him.

The word "knoweth" is the Old Testament word that describes a very intimate and personal knowledge and is sometimes used to describe the intimacies of man and wife (Gen. 4:1). It means, therefore, not only "know" but "love," as does the word foreknowledge in the New Testament: "For whom he did foreknow [that is, whom He loved], he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29).

Election, and the love of God revealed in election, are the fountain and cause of faith in those who believe. Canons of Dordt, I, 6 says: "That some receive the gift of faith from God, and others do not receive it proceeds from God's eternal decree, 'For known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world,' Acts 15:18. 'Who worketh all things after the counsel of his will,' Ephesians 1:11. According to which decree, He graciously softens the hearts of the elect, however obstinate, and inclines them to believe, while He leaves the non-elect in His just judgment to their own wickedness and obduracy."

Pondering this, we do well to remember that those whom God knew and who trusted in Him are not such

by birth or by their own attainments, but by the eternal love of God alone. This was vividly illustrated not long before Nahum prophesied. In the days of Jonah the city of Nineveh abruptly and surprisingly repented at the preaching of Jonah while the majority of Israelites continued in unbelief. There is no other explanation of what happened in the days of Jonah but God's eternal and loving purpose. Truly, the Lord knoweth those who trust in Him.

This is all ascribed to the goodness of God. Goodness in Scripture and in everyday speech means that something serves its purpose. A meal is good when it nourishes and satisfies. A good man or a good woman is a person who serves a purpose in family and society and is not a useless and worthless wastrel and parasite as so many are today. All things work together for good when in God's sovereignty they serve the purpose He has in the salvation of His people.

That God is good means, then, that He Himself in all His works serves His own glory and the salvation of His people. He is good in prosperity as well as in adversity, in health as well as in sickness and death, in the coming of Nineveh to make war as well as in the salvation of the Ninevites a generation before. In all of it He glorifies Himself and saves His people. All things, under His direction, serve His purpose and so He is always good, in judgment as well as in salvation.

The name, Jehovah, is used here to underline His goodness as the Friend and covenant God of His people, who has established with them an unbreakable covenant that He keeps forever. We would usually speak of His faithfulness when we speak of His covenant, but His faithfulness is the root of His goodness and His goodness the outworking of His faithfulness. He makes all things serve His purpose because He is Jehovah.

The word *trouble* has the idea of being squeezed or of being in a very tight place. The reference is to the affliction that had come through Assyria, but is often used for persecution or other troubles. It seems to be used most often in Scripture to describe not the actual event through which trouble comes, but how we feel "squeezed" in trouble, not knowing where to turn. The word is, therefore, often translated *distress*: "in

my distress I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me" (Ps. 120:1).

The day of trouble was for Judah the coming of Assyria, used by God to chastise them; but there is always a day of trouble. The day of trouble is not only one day but many. If we are not living in that day of trouble, it is always just ahead on God's calendar.

The day of trouble or day of the Lord is not in Scripture a reference to a single twenty-four hour day. It refers rather to the time that God comes for judgment and for salvation. It is the same in Scripture as the day of the Lord. It may be a short time, but it may be as long as the whole of the New Testament. It is the day in which the Lord finishes His work and cuts it short in righteousness (Rom. 9:28).

That day as a day of judgment the prophet Zephaniah describes: "That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers" (Zeph. 1:15, 16). But it is also a day of salvation, for "it shall come to pass in that day, that the remnant of Israel, and such as are escaped of the house of Jacob, shall no more again stay upon him that smote them; but shall stay upon the LORD, the Holy One of Israel, in truth" (Is. 10:20).

The day of trouble will continue to come until that last great day of trouble is reached at the end of time. That will be the day of which Jesus speaks in Matthew 24:21, 22, though He mentions *days*, not just *a* day. Then there will be persecution and scattering for the church. Then the ungodly will reach the limit of God's forbearance and He will come as He came to Nineveh. Then, too, He will come to deliver His people forever from their Ninevehs and be forever for them a refuge and a fortress from which they will no longer go out.

Until then, He will be a stronghold in troubles great and small, and for everyone He has loved with His everlasting affection for Christ and for those who are in Christ.

The name, Jehovah, is used here to underline His goodness as the Friend and covenant God of His people, who has established with them an unbreakable covenant that He keeps forever. We would usually speak of His faithfulness when we speak of His covenant, but His faithfulness is the root of His goodness and His goodness the outworking of His faithfulness. He makes all things serve His purpose because He is Jehovah.



Ministering to the saints

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

Calling our neighbors to trust in God

The following is a piece I wrote for evangelism here in Wingham, Ontario. Prior to writing it, the substance of it was a sermon that I preached on Prayer Day. I asked my elders to suggest sermons that would work well as tracts we could give to most anyone. After I preached that sermon, one of them thought this might be a good one to use. So I revised the wording, formatted it into a trifold leaflet, made some copies, and placed a label with our church name and website on the back. This is not, of course, some extraordinary new method of outreach. But it is an example of one way we busy pastors can quickly and easily produce new material for evangelism and “equip the saints for the work of the ministry,” in particular, their work of witnessing to their neighbors.

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.

Proverbs 3:5-6

These words of Holy Scripture show us the way of sweet peace for our anxious hearts as we walk down the path of life.

One of the many things that can make us worried in life is the fear of not having enough money to feed ourselves and our families. When our income is not enough to pay our bills, and the cost of living keeps rising, we get stressed out. We know that our food comes from the farm, and the farmers depend on the weather and market forces, which can be good or bad, but are out of their control. How are we going to make ends meet? What if the whole economy crashes? What if we go broke? But a much more serious thing that frightens the hearts of many is the thought of death, because we all have a sense deep down that death will not be the end of us because we know that we have a spirit within us. We are going to meet Him who created us when we die. Does that fill your heart with dread?

We humans are not just bodies that decompose when we die. We did not spring to life and evolve to our present state by chance. We are the creatures of God. We depend on the almighty hand of God who created the

billions of twinkling stars and galaxies, who also created life on earth, plants, animals, and human beings, and who gave each living thing the power to reproduce after its own kind. Therefore, we need to trust with all our heart in the almighty God who created the heavens and earth.

The passage of Scripture above teaches us to trust in the LORD with all our heart and not to lean on our own understanding. In the beginning, Adam and Eve had much greater powers of understanding than we do. But they did not lean on those powers at first. They leaned on God who is the Rock of all creation because they knew that He supports every breath we take and every cell in our bodies. But later Adam and Eve turned against God and began to trust in themselves. After they fell into sin, all of us have come into the world with a natural tendency to do the same, to lean on our own understanding, to trust in our own ability to figure things out and make decisions that will lead to happiness and success. But the Bible tells us, do not lean on your own understanding, but trust in God!

Trusting in God is a deeply spiritual activity. We tend to put our trust in the persons and things we can see, like a paycheck, insurance, doctors, government, technology, and such like. But the secret to true peace of mind is something that goes against our nature: trust with all your heart in one whom you cannot see. “It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes” (Ps. 118:8-9). Lean on the One who created the whole universe and holds the whole world in His hands. That does not mean we stop working, cancel our insurance, avoid the doctor, and just wait for God to drop everything into our lap. No, what it means is that while we work hard, buy insurance, go to the doctor, get good exercise, and take our medicine, we put our *trust in God*, knowing that He can take away all our stuff and our health in the blink of an eye, if He wants to, or prosper our work and give us all that we need. Trust in the LORD *with all your heart*. We are tempted to trust partly in God and partly in ourselves. But we need to trust in God with *wholehearted* faith.

In all your ways, acknowledge Him. The most serious matter in life is our relationship to God. We have all sinned against God. God punishes sinners with never-ending death. But in His rich grace and mercy, God has sent His Son into the world to give His life as a ransom for many, to die that terrible death on a cross in the place of many sinners, so that they would not have to suffer never-ending death. Jesus is the Way to God and eternal life. There is no other name by which we can be saved. Trust in the name of Jesus with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. Believe in Christ alone as your hope in life and death, and you will be saved.

In all your ways. Each of us walks down a way that began when we were born and that will end when we die. It is the way of our personal life. There are many forks in the road, many gates that lead into various paths, and God already knows all of them. But we do not. In all of our ways, we must trust in the Lord and acknowledge Him. He is the One who has given us everything that we have, all our health and strength, all our money and material things, all of our food and drink, our clothes and houses and vehicles.

Trust in God on your way to work. What do you do for work? Maybe your work involves swinging a hammer, driving a truck, plowing a field, making bids on projects, seeking new customers, going to an office, or opening a shop each morning. In all your ways, lean not on your own understanding, experience, education, skills, or intelligence to get what you need in life. We should use all our God-given gifts to the best of our ability. But we should not lean on them. Can we control the choices of our boss, the choices of our customers, the economy, the stock market, the value of the dollar? Can we stop a random electrical fire from burning down our barn? The fact is that we all depend on forces out of our control, forces directed by the invisible hand of God. We ought to trust in Him! He is the fountain of every blessing.

There are other ways in life. Think of the doors that stand before us when we are young people, the doors to various colleges and various careers. It is so important to trust in the Lord when we are young people! How can a young person figure out what he or she is supposed to do in this life? How can they make all these huge decisions? By talking to their parents and seeking their advice? For sure! By talking to a guidance counselor? Why not? But above all, young people should trust in the Lord with all their hearts and lean not on their own understanding. They should pray about it, ask God to guide them, to show them what they are good at, what they are interested in, how they can be useful in

the world, how they can support a family. God has a path all planned out for each one of us. We need to seek that path through prayer. We need to pray for help to find our way through this world. We need to pray for wisdom and courage to walk down that way.

“In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6-7).

There is the way of dating and marriage. O, how important to trust in God in this whole area of life! We are so inclined to trust our instincts and our feelings. But when we do that, we often end up suffering a lot of pain, such as a broken heart from a decision to be in a relationship with someone who was abusive, or to have a sexual relationship with someone who did not truly love us but selfishly used us, rather than waiting for the right person who promises to walk down the path of life with us until death parts us, and seals that promise with a ring. Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your instincts and feelings! Look to God and ask Him to lead you to the right person. Pray to God to help you remain pure and to be patient, content, and joyful until He brings that person into your life. Trust in the Lord to help you decide whether this or that person is the kind you should be dating and marrying, or not.

Then there is the way of suffering. We sometimes find ourselves walking down a lonely road full of struggles, stress, and sorrow. Perhaps things are not the way we would like them to be between our spouse and us. Maybe we live in a broken home situation or have suffered abuse. Sometimes we deal with mental illness, injuries, and diseases. We lose people we love through death or by the burning of the bridge between us. In all these ways of suffering, we can trust in the Lord with all our heart. We can lift up our eyes to the Lord and put our confidence in Him to help us, save us, comfort us, heal us, and protect us. We can hide ourselves under the shadow of His wings in the midst of the storms of life, and when we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we will fear no evil if God is with us (Ps. 23:4).

The passage of Scripture we are explaining here ends with a wonderful promise of God: *He shall direct your paths*. If you trust in God with all your heart, He will direct your path. He is a Shepherd, and we who trust in Him are the sheep. He is out in front directing our feet to green pastures and quiet waters. He will show us the way we should go when we face a fork in the road. He will guide us through thick and thin, riches and poverty, sickness and health. You will never be alone, for God will always be with you. If you believe in His Son Jesus

Christ with all your heart as your Lord and Savior, God will direct your path all the way through this life to your heavenly home.

Look back at your life. Can you trace the hand of God directing your path? How comforting to know that He will be our guide through death and beyond!

What do you think are some of the best ways, in our modern world, that we busy pastors (sometimes overloaded pastors) could reuse sermons we have already made for our congregations in the work of local evangelism? Send me an email, I would love to hear your thoughts: daniel.holstege@prca.org.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, minister-emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of the PRC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Protestant Reformed missions

Years of rebuilding:

Missions revived, 1954-1961 (4)

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2024, p. 253.

Rev. George Lubbers began his mission labors in Hope Reformed Church of Loveland, CO in May of 1955. This church had before this time severed its ties with the Evangelical and Reformed denomination, the Reformed Church in the US (RCUS), and now existed as an independent congregation under its own constitution and elders. Missionary Lubbers, therefore, actually performed the work of a pastor in this congregation while carrying out the duties of a missionary in other places. During the years 1956 and 1957, he preached and taught catechism classes in Loveland. He also taught catechism classes in Denver, CO to about six families who were members of the Loveland church. He met with families from Sutton, Nebraska and preached in Emery RCUS. During his absence from Loveland, the congregation there heard preaching from Rev. C. Hanko, Rev. H.H. Kuiper, Rev. H. Hoeksema, and Rev. H. Hanko.

The consistory of Reformed Hope Church of Loveland (its new name) expressed their gratitude in a letter addressed to the Mission Committee in March, 1956: “The two oldest members, one an elder, and another an original charter member, 80 and 75 years of age respectively, declare that in all their life they had never heard the truth expressed more clearly and scripturally than it has been preached here....”¹ Such labors continued in this congregation through June of 1958 when the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches received this congregation into its fellowship.

This did not occur, however, without some difficul-

ty. Before this time, the Mission Committee and calling church with the permission of synod organized congregations from groups of saints that requested such. However, Loveland church was already an established congregation with existing elders who were now requesting admission into the PRCA as a church. The Protestant Reformed churches had never dealt with this situation. Technically, the Mission Committee was not authorized to request the admission of the Loveland church into our denomination. The Mission Committee therefore advised the elders of Loveland church to make this request to Classis West. Classis West, in turn, deferred this matter to the synod of the PRCA. With some frustration on the part of the missionary and the Loveland church, the Synod of 1958 finally received this congregation into the fellowship of the PRCA, establishing for future labors the proper path of receiving an established congregation into our denomination. Loveland Protestant Reformed Church, which began with 17 families, now numbers 85 families.

Mission work in the congregations of Forbes, North Dakota (Ebenezer) and Isabel, South Dakota (Hope) *officially* began in 1957. Rev. Lubbers labored in these two churches much the same way that he did in Loveland: preaching, teaching catechism, and leading Bible studies. But Rev. Lubbers was a busy man. He was finishing up his labors in Loveland, CO, 550 miles south of Isabel. In addition, Rev. Lubbers was sent to Canada to investigate a possible labor there, then to Menno/ Tripp, SD, and back once again to the Pella/Sully, Iowa area. For that reason, the Mission Committee sent several

¹ Acts of Synod of the PRC 1956, 79.

ministers to Forbes and Isabel to continue labors there. These men included Revs. B. Woudenberg, A. Mulder, H.H. Kuiper, C. Hanko and M. Schipper, who would preach in these churches usually for three weeks at a time before returning to their own congregations.

In 1960 both Forbes and Isabel requested the synod of the PRCA to be accepted into our denominational fellowship. The Mission Committee advised as follows:

We advise synod to accept these churches into our denomination and inform them of this decision immediately. Grounds:

1. The people in this area have shown a sincere appreciation for the truth and are eager to join us in the defense and maintenance of the truth.
2. There is evidence of a possibility of internal growth in both congregations, even though this growth may not be large and extensive at present.
3. There is also a possibility of further exploration among those of the same Reformed background. A minister stationed in these churches could well do some church extension work in the surrounding areas.²

Synod adopted this recommendation, conveniently adding two more congregations to our struggling, post-1953 denomination.

Two observations/evaluations regarding this last ground.

First, the focus of evangelism work for a minister who might accept the call to one of these churches was with those who were already of Reformed persuasion. In other words, evangelism work consisted only in church reformation and not in a diligent attempt to reach out to others in the vicinity of our churches. Talk about stymying the possible growth of these churches! Their outreach was severely limited by sharing the gospel with people of Reformed persuasion.

Second, and again this is disturbing, exploration for future growth was to be done, more narrowly yet, among churches of “*the same* Reformed background” as that of the Isabel and Forbes congregations. The Mission Committee and synod advised that future evangelism work should be done among other RCUS churches in the Dakotas. Again, not only did this stymy any future growth, but it meant we as churches would continue to follow the same pattern of mission work as we did in Forbes and Isabel.

The congregation in Forbes organized with six families and one individual, though the town did “not offer much growth from those in the immediate vicinity.”³ Seventeen years later, the synod of the PRCA was in-

formed by Ebenezer PRC in Forbes that the congregation was officially dissolved on May 22, 1977. The total membership of the congregation was two families and two individuals. The explanation given was that “from the time we as a congregation were accepted into the Protestant Reformed churches in 1960 until the present time, there has been a consistent decline in our membership, so that it has become clear that we are no longer a viable congregation.”⁴ During her seventeen years of existence she was without a pastor for 14 years. She had one pastor, Rev. Mark Hoeksema who, after three years of labor there, accepted a call elsewhere, then advising the church in Forbes to disband.

The congregation in Isabel organized with seven families and three individuals, though, as was true of Forbes, the town did not offer much growth from those in the immediate vicinity. Isabel, however, fared better than the congregation in Forbes. In the early 1970s the church grew to ten families. Between 1968 and 1987 she was blessed with four different pastors: Revs. R. Moore, R. Miersma, R. Flikkema, and D. Kuiper. Despite the efforts of these pastors, the congregation slowly declined in numbers. In 1992 Classis West (per synod’s instruction) decided to place Isabel under the care of Doon PRC, since the Isabel congregation could not legally exist with one elder. The next year Doon reported to Classis West, which, in turn, sent its recommendation to Synod 1993 that Hope PRC of Isabel be dissolved. The synod approved and the congregation of Isabel with its three families ended its thirty-three year existence.

The younger generations of our churches are probably not even aware of the mission work that resulted in the organization of Isabel and Forbes, since these churches themselves ceased to exist long ago. For a few born out of the generations from these churches that are still present with our churches today, this is a matter of nostalgia.

There are a number of valuable observations that come to mind when evaluating this particular period of our mission work.

1. The primary consideration is that it is never justifiable laboring in congregations of another denomination. If a congregation is independent, as was the case with Loveland, there can be no offence. The elders of that church made a decision apart from any denominational ties. Neither is it necessarily wrong for a minister or missionary to preach in a congregation of another denomination as long as his motive is not to “steal sheep.” A number of our ministers have consented to do this. To put a positive slant on what was done in the Forbes and Isabel churches, our denomination must avoid in its

2 *Acts of Synod 1960*. Mission Committee report, p. 137. Adoption of this recommendation by synod, p. 29, Articles 65 and 67.

3 *Acts of Synod 1960*, 136.

4 *Acts of Synod 1977*, 126.

mission labors the temptation to labor among churches that belong to another denomination of churches. Even our labors in church reformation must focus on those believers who under conviction withdrew their membership from their church or denomination for principle matters of doctrine or walk. To begin a work with a group of believers who seek to affiliate with us is certainly a legitimate form of mission work. But we ought to refuse to perform the labor of missions in a church while it remains a congregation belonging to a federation of churches—even if their elders request it of us.

2. Mission work ought to be performed in places where there is potential growth from outside of the congregation. The churches of Forbes and Isabel were founded in communities with very few residents. In fact, over the years the residents of these two little towns dwindled in numbers as did our churches in them. Candidate Alvin Mulder urged the Mission Committee several times to move the church from Forbes to Leola, a city nearer to several larger cities in South Dakota. But Rev. Lubbers and the Mission Committee seemed to ignore his pleadings. It is one thing to start with a few families. It is the day of small things. We cannot expect a mission work to result immediately in a large and thriving congregation. These are unrealistic expectations. Neither do churches need to be large to be a viable place of worship. But, be that as it may, there ought to be potential for outreach, and that not only among people who are already Reformed. There is more potential today to grow as a church from people who are outside of the Reformed persuasion than there are from those within.

3. Strenuous effort must be made to nurture very carefully, not simply through indoctrination, but by paying considerable attention to and pouring extensive care upon

the children and youth of the church. This must already be true in the mission work, but also once the fledgling church is established. The church once organized *must* grow from within as well as without. A sign of the continuation of God's covenant in that church is found when the children of the church grow up, marry in the Lord, and begin the next generation of believers in the church. Where none of this takes place, God's blessing does not rest upon that church and it is doomed to cease.

4. Extensive evangelism work must be continued during the work of missions but also after the church is established. God's blessing rests on that congregation who is willing to share the precious truths of God's grace with others. To hoard that gospel and not share it with others is selfish and self-centered, and will stymie growth from without for sure, but also from within. Such a congregation will turn in on itself and shrivel away.

5. One other matter we can learn from this history. Where a church is finally established through arduous labor, families and members of sister congregations ought to consider seriously whether God is calling them to move to these smaller churches. Consider the church in Loveland. It started as a small congregation. Young people remained and married in the church and growth from within was established. But, consider this too: many individuals and families moved to this congregation from other of our churches. This congregation thrives today in its diversity of members from various of our churches that have moved there to become a vital part of the church. Is it a sacrifice? Yes! Especially this is true of those pioneers who first decide to make this move. But it is worth the sacrifice. Ask them.

In the next article we consider the beginning of our mission labors in a foreign land.



When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Sherry Koole, wife, mother, and grandmother in Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Follow the leader

Previously in this rubric (Jan. 1, 2024) we looked at the life-long calling and privilege we have as Christian parents to instruct our children in the commandments, statutes, and judgments of our God (Deut. 6:1). We looked at the simple game of “Hide and Seek” and saw how young children learn the game after being given

verbal instruction, observing others, and having hands-on guidance while playing the game. We also made spiritual applications to the lives of our children and young people, stressing how important it is that they be personally seeking and searching the Scriptures and hiding God's Word in their hearts. And as parents

giving this instruction and making these applications, we noted how vitally important it is that our children see in us what we as parents desire to see in them.

This time, I would like to look at the simple game of “Follow the Leader” and have us do the same. Though the game is simple indeed, it is an activity that can be utilized by parents, grandparents, teachers, and others to teach and instruct young participants in such an enjoyable and delightful way that they fail to realize that their *leader* is engaging them in the activity of learning as well. I believe that under the guidance of an engaging *leader*, this activity can be used as a beneficial tool in the instruction of young children.

“Follow the Leader” not only promotes active involvement on the part of young participants, but through their involvement, as they repeatedly imitate the movements of their *leader*, they are immersed in learning. Not only are they learning to *follow* directions, but they are developing their abilities to concentrate and achieve certain goals as well. Most children have a competitive spirit when it comes to playing games and do their best to come out “ahead of the rest.” With a game such as the one we have before us, children will give an energetic and honest effort to concentrate on *following* directions while striving to imitate any and all of the activities of their *leader*. As a result, a skilled and experienced *leader* (teacher, parent or otherwise) can make use of this game to enhance the motor skills of his or her young *followers*.

Although I do not profess to be the most experienced of *leaders*, as a grandmother, and with the help of several other able-bodied volunteers, I have the privilege of working with kindergarteners for one hour each week for a class period we refer to as Motor Movement. The purpose of this program is to help in the advancement of each child’s motor skills with the hope, that in doing so, it will be advantageous to his or her learning in the classroom as well. Though we try to make our time with the children as fun and enjoyable as possible, they are taught to view us as teachers, and it is their calling to listen and do their best to *follow* and perform whatever activity we may *lead* them to do.

We begin by *leading* them in some very simple exercises that many of them can already do to some degree or another; exercises such as skipping, hopping on one foot, or marching in place while tapping the opposite knee. As the weeks go on, they are *led* to try more difficult things. We make use of many different types of equipment as we progress to more difficult activities; equipment such as jump ropes, balance beams, rocker boards, trampolines, kick-a-flicks, bats and balls, hula-hoops, and more. The children work as individuals, in pairs, and in groups. While instructing and encouraging all of them to do their

best, we find that what is easy for some can be rather difficult for others. And for this reason, I find great joy and accomplishment when hearing squeals of delight and seeing the joy of triumph on the faces of my little *followers* as they conquer each new level of difficulty.

“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Prov. 22:6).

Though the game of “Follow the Leader” can be used as an enjoyable and helpful way in developing the motor skills of our young children, it is anything but a game when making spiritual application to our lives within the home, church, and school. We know that ultimately the raising of children in the fear of the Lord is a God-given *calling* placed upon parents. Yet, in faithfulness to their baptismal vows, godly parents employ the help of *leaders* within the church and the Christian day school to work with them in this rearing. As parents, elders, ministers, and teachers, we have the *calling* to *lead* our children, the sheep of our congregations, and the students in our classrooms in the ways of the Lord. Children, students, and sheep have the *calling* to obey and *follow* the instruction of their *leaders*. And it ought to be the prayer of all that we be found faithful in our respective callings.

At the heart of *leadership* lies the desire that one’s followers *follow* wherever he or she may *lead*. This desire lies also at the heart of godly parenting. God continues His covenant in the line of continued generations, and when we as parents teach our children about the majesty and goodness of God, His holiness, His wondrous works, His redeeming love, His commandments, and His judgments, we do so with the desire that our children will *follow* in our footsteps and become *leaders* themselves—teaching the same to their children and to their children’s children. Be encouraged then when you hear the comment from others that they think your children are so very much like you. Rather than saying something akin to “That poor child,” this should be something we as parents are desiring and happy to hear.

Leading our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord requires much work and effort on the part of us parents. We are commanded by God to be working diligently in this regard—all day, every day (Deut. 6:6, 7; Deut. 32:7; Ps. 78:5, 6; Eph. 6:4 and many others). From infancy on we *lead* them. And as we *lead* by word and example, much of this *leading* can fill our lives with joy—their first steps, their first words, their first attempts at feeding or clothing themselves, diligently applying themselves to studies at school, confessing their faith, marrying in the Lord, and so on.

And yet, we know that not all of life brings joy. Rather, *leading* our children through life will also involve

the heartache of *guiding* them through many trials and hardships. Just as my motor movement *followers* are *led* to attempt more difficult activities, we and our children will be *led* to experience many hardships in life—those involving sickness and disease, academic struggles, financial problems, strained relationships, conflict, controversy, and more. Difficult as it may be, we as parents must *lead* our children through these troublesome and painful times. Yet, as we do so, they must be *led* to understand that though we have taught them to be independent in some things, they and we together are *totally* dependent upon our *Leader* King Jesus for *all* things.

“If any man serve me, let him *follow* me; and where I am, there shall also my servant be: if any man serve me, him will my Father honour” (John 12:26).

As we stand in positions of authority and *leadership* over our children, they need to see that we do so as those who are also *followers*, totally dependent upon our *Leader* Jesus Christ. We are given the calling to raise our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. And although we must diligently work in obedience to our calling, we know that it is in no way a result of our work when our children and the generations to come *follow* in our footsteps. Rather, it is by the power of our Lord and *Leader*, Jesus Christ working in their hearts. We are nothing other than the instruments He chooses to use. May we never be found boasting in our own work, but be found constantly and prayerfully depending upon and seeking the grace of God that enables us to do the work of parenting (and other types of *leading*) that He has called us to do.

Our children need to see that as we *lead* them, we do so as *followers* of Jesus and as those who have a sincere love for God and for His Word. As we raise them in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, it is our desire that they will be *led* to view family fellowship and devotions within the home, studies taught in the light of God’s Word within the schools, and worshipping together under the lively preaching of the Word, as well as catechism instruction within the church not only as priorities in our lives, but their lives as well. And that they not only see us as *leaders*, but as fellow *followers*, *following* alongside them as we journey through life together under the *leadership* of Jesus.

Following Jesus *leads* to humility. Jesus says in John 10:27-28, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they *follow* me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand.” Is that not humbling? To know that Jesus calls, we hear His voice, and we *follow* Him? *Jesus chooses* who will *follow* Him. Is it not humbling then to know that in choosing who will follow, He has chosen us? Just as He chose and called His disciples of

old, He chooses and calls us to be His disciples (*followers*) today. That is humbling! Humbling indeed! Humbling to know we choose to love and *follow only* because *He first* loved us and called us to do so.

Following Jesus means imitating His *lead*; that is, we are to be like Him—having a disposition of humility and a servant’s heart. Jesus fed the hungry, healed the sick, raised the dead, taught the people, washed His disciples’ feet, and suffered and died the agonizing death of the cross for His own. With Jesus as a living example, His disciples learned first-hand how to serve. And they *followed* their Master’s *lead*. They, too, taught the people, healed the sick, and suffered persecution, imprisonment, and violent deaths for the sake of the gospel and the Lord whom they loved and served.

We, too, are to be imitators (*followers*) of Jesus. With an attitude of humility we are to be serving others. The question is, are we? Do we minister to the sick, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, help the stranger, and such? Serving others may be as simple as giving a smile or a kind word of encouragement, bringing a meal, befriending the lonely, helping the elderly, or any other type of kind and loving deed. To put it more simply, serving others means putting others first. Jesus says, “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me” (Matt 25:40).

“For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should *follow* his steps” (I Peter 2:21).

Jesus also teaches us that *following* Him—living the life of the antithesis as we journey here below—will come with a price. Although *following* Jesus may bring the child of God much joy, it does not always mean traveling the easy path of peace and tranquility. Rather, we are told that *following* Him will be costly, very costly. There are many passages in Scripture that speak of the price we will pay for *following* our Lord and Savior. To cite just a few: Psalm 34:19, “many are the afflictions of the righteous”; II Timothy 3:12, “Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”; and I Peter 4:14, 16, “If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye.... Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.” Jesus Himself says to us, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18).

Though being *followers* of *Jesus* will have us traveling through many trials and afflictions in life, we need not fear. For we have the joy of knowing we are being *led* by the hand of our loving and faithful Savior, Jesus Christ. Joshua 1:9 reads, “Have I not commanded thee? Be strong and of a good courage; be not afraid, neither

be thou dismayed: for the LORD thy God is with thee whithersoever thou goest.” What comfort! He *leads*, and *guides*, and never forsakes us! Though trials come, we still sing with joy and confidence. Just read here a short compilation of comforting titles from our much loved and treasured Psalter—there are more, many more. “The Guardian Care of God” (#52), “The Safety of Believers” (#91), “The Fearlessness of Faith” (#71), “Our Support Amidst Distress” (#117), “The Confidence of Faith” (#73) and “The Saviour’s Constant Presence” (#56). What comfort to know that as He *leads* us, God is ever with us, promising never to forsake us.

And our Lord and *Leader* is coming again. He is coming soon! The signs of His coming are all around us. They are increasing both in number and severity. The persecution of God’s people is one sign that has become more vividly real to us these past months as we follow the news of fellow saints in far-away lands experiencing in an alarming and very terrifying way the extremely high price one may be forced to pay for being a *follower* of

Jesus. While living under the rule of an ungodly military government and experiencing civil unrest and war, they fear for their very lives! As they *follow* this path of uncertainty that our *Leader* is *leading* them on, we pray that God will preserve them both physically and spiritually by giving them the grace to endure what has been and continues to be a lengthy and difficult trial. May they *follow* the path God has chosen for them with the assurance that they are not alone; and that in *following* Christ, the victory is theirs. May they and we find comfort in knowing that every joy and every hardship the Lord may choose to *lead* us through brings us ever closer to the day of His return. “Fear not, little flock; it is the Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32). May they and we be *led* to sing with joy and confidence the words of the well known hymn, “*Lead on, O King Eternal, We follow not with fears, For gladness break like morning Where’er Thy face appears. Thy cross is lifted o’er us, We journey in its light; The crown awaits the conquest; Lead on, O God of Might!*”



Strength of youth

Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh, pastor of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada

How to study the Bible (2)

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

The Ethiopian eunuch was sitting in his chariot. He was reading Isaiah 53. But he did not understand what he was reading. The angel of the Lord sends Philip to help this man understand the Word of God. That’s our desire whenever we approach any passage in the Bible. We want to understand what we are reading. We want to soak in and digest that Word of God and remember that Word of God.

The history of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch is instructive in many ways. One of the ways is this: it instructs us as to the steps we ought to employ in our study of Scripture. Last time (Dec. 1, 2023) we noted the first two steps in studying the Bible. First, you must read the Bible. This is what the Ethiopian eunuch was doing while he was sitting in his chariot. Second, as you read, you must desire to understand the words you are reading, as demonstrated by the eunuch who had such a strong desire.

Let’s continue to explore Acts 8 and the steps it sets forth for good profitable Bible study.

Step #3: Ask the right questions

In order to study the Bible profitably you need to ask the right questions about the passage. The danger is that when you study a particular passage of the Bible you get sidetracked. The danger is that you start asking the wrong questions—questions that may be somewhat relevant to the passage—but questions really that only distract and lead you away from the meaning of the passage.

For example, I remember years ago studying the book of Job in young people’s society. We were studying Job 40 and 41. In these two chapters God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind and teaches us of two great creatures—behemoth and leviathan. Naturally, our human curiosity is piqued, and we want to identify these creatures. Hence the question and speculation that follows. “What are these two creatures? Behemoth? It’s got to be an elephant. No, it’s a hippopotamus. No, it was a bronto-

saurus! Leviathon? It must be a blue whale. No, it was a giant crocodile. No, it was some ancient sea creature!”

Let me be clear. Surely there is a place for those kinds of questions and that type of discussion. But if that's the only kind of question you ask about the passage, “what kind of a creature is this,” then you are missing the whole point! The right questions would be along these lines: “What is God's *purpose* in speaking of these animals? What would God *teach* Job and *teach* us in describing these great creatures?”

If you want to get at the meaning of a passage, then you must ask the right questions.

The Ethiopian eunuch did not get sidetracked with foolish questioning and speculation. On the contrary, he asked a good question. “Philip, who is the prophet Isaiah speaking of when he says ‘he was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb so he openeth not his mouth.’ Is the prophet speaking this of himself, or of another?” That was a good question. It was a question that strikes at the heart of the passage.

The difficulty implementing step #3 is wondering whether the question I ask is a good question or a question that's not very helpful. That's an understandable concern. You may have the assurance that the more you study the Bible, the more confident you will become in asking the right kinds of questions. But know this—you can never go wrong when you ask questions that have to do with Jesus Christ. “What does this passage teach me about Jesus? How is Jesus foreshadowed in this Old Testament passage? What does this New Testament passage teach me about the perfect obedience of Jesus, about His suffering, His death, His resurrection, His ascension? What blessing of salvation that Jesus merited for me does this passage explain?”

The key to profitable Bible study is to ask the right questions.

Step #4: Compare Scripture with Scripture

After asking the right questions, now is the time to go to other places in Scripture. Compare Scripture with Scripture. That's what we see happening in Acts 8:35: “Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.” Philip *began* at the same Scripture, namely, Isaiah 53. That implies Philip then proceeded to other passages. Philip went to other passages in Isaiah that speak of the Messiah. Then perhaps he went to Moses. Then Philip went to the Psalms and to the other prophets. Philip went to many other places in Scripture to help explain and interpret Isaiah 53. Compare Scripture with Scripture.

This is the great Reformation principle—*scriptura scripturae interpretes*—Scripture interprets Scripture.

What does that mean for us? It means when you're having a difficult time understanding a passage, go to other passages that shed light on the one you're studying. That's what we call comparing Scripture with Scripture. In other words, let Scripture interpret itself! Don't try to come up with some unique and novel understanding of a text. Always ask yourself “Does what I think this passage teaches fit with the rest of Scripture? Does it fit with the teaching of the whole Bible?”

To help you compare Scripture with Scripture, it's helpful to have a Bible with cross referencing. Those cross references will point you to parallel passages, point you to other passages where the same word is used, or point you to passages where the same doctrine is taught. If you don't already have a Bible with cross references, I would encourage you to look into purchasing one. You don't necessarily need a Bible with a commentary at the bottom, but it would be helpful to get one with cross references. This will help you in studying the Bible. You must compare Scripture with Scripture.

So you've performed steps one through four. You've read the passage. You read it with a strong desire to know its meaning. You've asked good questions about the passage. You've compared Scripture with Scripture. And yet after all that you're still having difficulty as to what the passage means. This brings us to step #5.

Step #5: Get help

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading the Bible, trying to understand it. He was asking the right questions. But for all that he still had a hard time at it. God sent Philip to help him in his study. Philip explained what the passage meant and made it clear to the Ethiopian eunuch.

That's instructive for us. When you're having difficulty studying the Bible and understanding a particular passage, don't be hesitant to seek help! You may seek the help of commentaries. Commentaries can be very useful. What did John Calvin say about this passage? What does Matthew Henry say? What did Herman Hoeksema write on this passage? You can ask your minister. Ask your elders. You can search in old volumes of the *Standard Bearer* for commentaries on particular verses. The Spirit of God has worked in the church of the past and we do wrong if we would not stand on the shoulders of others. The Ethiopian eunuch received help studying the Bible. And so may we.

However, don't get this one out of order. This is so very important. I have this listed as step #5. Do not put this as step #2. In that case you would first read the Bible and then immediately resort to the commentary without even bothering to make an attempt to under-

stand it for yourself! That's when a person says "Well, I read the passage, and now I'm going to get help and see what somebody else says." That's the wrong order.

I do wonder at times if that happens too often in our circles. There is a lack of critical thinking when a person says, "Just give me the answer and tell me what the passage means." That's a temptation we all must guard against. And that temptation can come even in the form of a study Bible—where the words of Scripture are on the top half of the page and a commentary on the bottom half of the page. The author of the commentary might be a Reformed man. The commentary might be highly regarded. But I trust you see what the temptation is. The temptation is that I read the Bible passage on the top of the page, and go right down to the commentary at the bottom, without first thinking about and wrestling with the passage on my own.

Commentaries are useful. Commentaries have their

place. When you are studying the Bible, there comes the time when you may seek help. But don't seek that help too quickly without doing some of the hard work yourself first!

Step #6: Pray

Lastly, pray. You must pray. I have this listed as the last step. Perhaps it should be the very first step. Better yet, this step ought to be interspersed throughout all your studying of the Bible! If you will ever be a serious student of God's Word, you must be a man, a woman, of prayer. You must acknowledge that unless God reveals the Scriptures unto you, you will know nothing. Therefore petition God that He will open your mind. Petition God that He would grant you the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit would open the Scriptures and lead you as you study the Word of God.

These are the few, simple, and basic steps we learn from Acts 8. Follow these steps and discover from God's Word treasures both old and new.

Announcements

Resolution of Sympathy

The Consistory and congregation of Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta, express their sincere sympathies to Janny Molenkamp upon the death of her beloved husband, **Herman Molenkamp**, who was taken to his heavenly home on April 3, 2024, at the age of 83. We also express our sympathies to Marvin and Marsha Molenkamp, Amelia Molenkamp, and Jacob and Colleen Zylstra, in the death of their beloved father, grandfather, and great uncle. May they find comfort in the words of Jesus from John 11:25, 26: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh, President
Rodney Wierenga, Clerk

PRCA 100th Anniversary Celebration

With gratitude to our faithful God, the PRCA look forward to our 100th anniversary. All the members of the PRCA, our sister churches, and close contacts are encouraged to come together at Calvin University in Grand Rapids, MI from June 2-6, 2025 to participate in this commemorative week. Visit prca100.org for basic event information and to sign up for email updates.

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2023 appointed Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan the calling church for the 2024 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2024 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11, 2024 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church.

The pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. G. Eriks, president of the 2023 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Terry Dykstra, email: terry.dykstra96@gmail.com. Phone: 616-293-3156.

Consistory of
Trinity Protestant Reformed Church
Terry Dykstra, Clerk.

Reminder:

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* is published only once a month during the months of June, July, and August.