

THE STANDARD BEARER

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A REFORMED SEMI-MONTHLY MAGAZINE

EDITOR'S NOTES

IN THIS ISSUE

Along with other edifying articles, this issue emphasizes the PRCA's Synod 2024. As usual, the pre-synodical sermon is included as our meditation. Rev. G. Eriks, president of last year's synod, preached an edifying sermon on James and synod's need for wisdom. Then, instead of our normal editorial summary of synod's actions, we print Professor Huizinga's graduation speech for our seminary graduate—now “Candidate for the ministry”—Mr. Arend Haveman. Readers who are interested in a summary of synod's decisions may find them at prca.org, under the “News” tab. As Rev. Noorman writes in his article in this issue, reading is important for God's people. May this issue be a blessing to you.

SIGNIFICANT CHANGES FOR OUR MAGAZINE!

After almost 100 years of publishing the *Standard Bearer* every two weeks, our staff (made up of all our writers) has decided to change to a monthly magazine,

with two added “special issues” each year. Thus, we will transition from 21 issues per year to 14. The exception to “every two weeks” was at the very beginning when we published monthly for about 18 months. In April of 1926 it was announced: *Beginnende met April zal de Standard Bearer tweemaal per maand verschijnen*. That is, “Beginning in April, the *Standard Bearer* will appear twice per month.” From 32 pages in each monthly issue, the *SB* went to 24 pages every other week. For almost 100 years. That there are 21 issues and not 24 (2 x 12 months) is because in the summer months the magazine comes out only once per month.

Our new decision to publish monthly had the readers, the writers, and the publishers in view.

For the readers, we hope the magazine's appearance once each month will enable you to get through the articles at a more relaxed pace, without getting behind so quickly when it appears again in only two weeks. We can report that we will be going back to 32 pages per issue. So, although the reduction to once per month



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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

rfpa.org / prca.org

sounds like a significant decrease, readers will still get almost 90% of what formerly was written.

For the **writers**, this will decrease their workload a little. The demands placed on all the writers, and the increased demands on ministers in the busyness of the pastorate these days, make it difficult for our writers to fill up 504 pages each year. They still will write 448 pages, so please pray that the current writers will have the strength to write, and find joy and personal profit in writing well-planned and researched articles.

For the **publisher** (the RFPA), reducing the number of issues and mailings per year may lead to decreases in expenses, although with continued rising costs in both printing and mailing these savings may not be seen in the immediate future. The RFPA is working out those details and will do all they can to keep costs in line with other similar periodicals. And thanks to all of you who support the magazine with your collections and gifts! Without these, it would be much more expensive.

The second significant change for the *Standard Bearer* is the staff's appointment of Prof. Cory Griess as one of the new co-editors to replace the undersigned, who will be stepping down after 20 years as one of the editors. Welcome to Prof. Griess! God grant to you and all the writers to think well and write well. In the words of the Preacher, may you "find out acceptable words," so that the readers find that which is written to be "upright, even words of truth." May your words serve "as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies..." (Eccl. 12:10, 11).

To all our dear friends who read: if you find the magazine worthwhile, please tell a friend. Maybe give a gift subscription. At only \$37, it costs less than I paid for my wife's birthday dinner recently!

Prof. B. Gritters

MEDITATION



WALKING IN THE WAY OF WISDOM*

REV. GARRETT ERIKS

Pastor of Unity PRC in Byron Center, Michigan and president of the 2023 PRC Synod

Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom. But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace—James 3:13-18

Article 32 of the Church Order requires that "the proceedings of all assemblies begin by calling upon the name of God and be closed with thanksgiving." This article is not familiar, not because we do not follow it, but because we do. We would not think of opening a consistory, classis, or synod meeting without prayer. In these opening prayers at assemblies, the petition I hear regularly is a plea for wisdom. I trust that this was our frequent, fervent prayer as we prepared for this synod. We pray for wisdom because this is what we are taught in James 1:5, "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...and it shall be given him." The idea is not that if a few of us poor saps lack wisdom, we pray for it. We all lack wisdom because we are sinners. In our dependence on God, we pray that God would supply it.

* This is the text of the pre-synodical sermon given on June 10, 2024 in Trinity PRC.

What is this wisdom we pray for? This is what James is teaching in this passage.

This wisdom is needed because of what is found in the verses preceding and following the text. We need wisdom because we all have a tongue problem—not that we have a speech impediment—but we cannot tame our tongues. In worship we use our tongues to sing sweet-sounding praises to God. Then we turn around and use our tongues for great evil in harming others (cf. vv. 1-12). We need wisdom for the use of our mouths in our discussions during synod.

But we also need wisdom because conflict is real. This is the beginning of James 4: “From whence come wars and fightings among you?” We have been through conflict and controversy in the past years. In the synodical agenda we face disagreements in protests and appeals that need to be answered. What do we need for all of this? Wisdom. Much wisdom. We need wisdom from above.

THE MEANING

James begins with a question: “Who is a wise man and endowed with knowledge among you?” What is wisdom? Wisdom is right conduct by right thinking. Wisdom is the action of godly living. It is *knowing* what is truth and error, right and wrong according to God’s Word, and *doing* what is right because this glorifies God. Wisdom is not education or a head full of knowledge. You can know many facts about science, history, math, even theology, and not be wise. Wisdom is not found in a library, but is lived out in life. James teaches this activity of wisdom in verse 13, “showing out of a good conversation works...with meekness of wisdom.” Wisdom is doctrine lived out in godliness and in the fear of the Lord. This is what Herman Bavinck says: “Genuine wisdom is not the product of human intellect, but is rooted in the fear of the Lord and consists in the moral discipline that conforms to the law of God and manifests itself in a moral life.”¹ Wisdom is not simply knowing truth or the right thing, but wisdom consists in doing the right thing before God.

What is the importance of this for synod? Synod has knotty doctrinal matters to settle; protests and appeals

to answer. Why consider wisdom? Certainly we need the right answers to complicated issues and decisive action must be taken. But the church today needs men who stand up to do the right thing in their conduct at synod. The way we get to the answer is as important as the truth we defend.

James not only explains that wisdom is to be displayed, but he also shows what is in the heart of the man who is wise. Wisdom is conduct that finds its source in meekness and not pride. A wise man is not focused on self and the service of self. Such a man is proud. A proud man believes he is the source of all that is good, right, and worthy of praise. He thinks he has all the answers. He thinks everybody should think the way he does. Such a man is not wise, but a fool; a proud know-it-all who will not listen to others. A man who is proud pursues self-recognition and self-exaltation. This is evident from what James writes in verse 14: “strife” could be translated as “selfish thinking.” The worldly term for this is narcissism. We all have this in us, which is why we must be on guard against this selfish pride.

The wise man is not proud, but meek. What is meekness? While the proud man is focused on self, the meek man is focused on serving others because He fears God. There is a vertical aspect and a horizontal aspect to meekness (the New Testament word for humility focuses on the vertical relationship to God and the New Testament word for meekness focuses on the horizontal relationships with people). Meekness is a life lived under the authority of Jesus Christ, forgetting self and self-promotion for the sake of serving others. The ultimate example of this meekness is Jesus Himself, who came to this earth as a servant. Jesus explains that He came not to be served, but to serve (Matt. 20:26-28). In humility, He gave His life a ransom for many. To be wise in meekness is to be like our humble Savior. True wisdom begins with this meekness. This does not mean being indecisive or always bending to what others want. The wise man stands by his convictions, but with the attitude of meekness.

THE SOURCE

What is the source of this wisdom? According to James this wisdom is from above, which is another way of saying it comes from God. This takes us back to James 1:5. We pray for wisdom because the only wise God

¹ Bavinck, Herman; *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 2:203.

is the only source of true wisdom (Rom. 16:27; I Tim. 1:17). Jesus Christ is the source of wisdom as the One who is wisdom (see Prov. 8).

How does God, the source of all wisdom, give this wisdom? Does God simply infuse this wisdom into our hearts by some wondrous work of the Spirit? Of course not. The Holy Spirit works through the means of the Word. God gives wisdom by the Spirit who reveals the true wisdom contained in Scripture. But it is even more than this. It is not simply that we glean from the pages of Scripture nuggets of wisdom and then implement this wisdom. But through Scripture, by the Spirit, we come to know the living God, who is all-wise. Wisdom arises out of an intimate knowledge of God. Wisdom is found in an intimate relationship of love and friendship with God. The more we know and see the only wise God, the more we reflect His wisdom in the power of the Holy Spirit. I have read from many authors that the way to grow in humility and wisdom is to spend time with one who is humble and wise. We grow in wisdom when we spend time in the Word of the only wise God.

Remember how God gave wisdom to His servant Solomon. God came to Solomon at the beginning of his reign over Israel and asked Solomon what he wanted. What did Solomon request? Not riches or strength or a strong army, but wisdom. Solomon, overwhelmed by the responsibility of ruling over Israel as a young man, asked for a discerning spirit to discern between error and truth, right and wrong. And the Lord gave him wisdom. But we learn from Proverbs 4 that this wisdom was not something that came out of nowhere. Solomon tells us that he was nurtured and instructed in wisdom by his father. God provides wisdom by the work of the Spirit through the means of instruction in Scripture.

The Devil today is seeking to poison our hearts and pervert our lives with foolishness that is masquerading as wisdom. The text speaks of a wisdom from below that is earthly, sensual, and devilish (demonic). One of the greatest threats of the church today is a departure from true wisdom and an embracing of the world's perspective on things. One danger is that we attempt to mix godly and devilish wisdom. As a synod, may we remind ourselves constantly to go back to the Word of God as the standard of truth and wisdom. Along with Scripture and on the basis of Scripture's authority the church has inherited a rich heritage of biblical truth as summarized in the confessions. May our major decisions

be clearly grounded in Scripture and the confessions because this is the standard of truth and wisdom.

THE DESCRIPTION

What exactly does this wisdom look like at synod? What does it look like when we disagree in our discussions? What does it look like when we disagree with a decision? What are the “working clothes” of wisdom? James describes this wisdom with eight characteristics.

The chief characteristic of wisdom is purity, which James lists first. Purity is holiness. The word means literally “free from contamination and defilement.” The wisdom from above is holy because God, the source of wisdom, is holy. Because God is holy, those who are wise walk in purity. This is what Jesus teaches in the Beatitudes: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

Wisdom walks in this purity even when there are conflicts or disagreements. So often there is an attempt to solve problems with earthly wisdom that encourages sin and sinful responses to achieve a desired outcome. In other words, we can become so passionate for a cause that we use conduct that is unholy to produce a desired outcome. A prime example of this is bullying—parents bullying children to obey, or officebearers bullying members to comply. This is not wisdom.

This wisdom, which is pure, is also “peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated” toward others. The wisdom from above is peaceable. The opposite of peaceable is contentious. This is the idea found in verse 14. This is a harsh attitude toward others because they get in the way of what I want, which might be winning the argument or adopting my perspective. True wisdom is not contentious but peace-loving. Those who live in wisdom are humble peacemakers in the church and at synod. They do this because God is a God of peace who makes peace by reconciling us to Himself.

The wisdom from above that is peaceable is also gentle. This is the opposite of quarrelsome. Our God is a gentle Father, knowing our weakness and frailty. So those who are wise, knowing the gentleness of God toward them as sinners, are gentle toward others.

This peaceable, gentle wisdom is also easily entreated (compliant and willing to yield). Wise men are teachable and yield easily to persuasion. A wise son yields to his father, a wise soldier yields to his commanding officer,

and a wise Christian yields to God's truth. He is willing to listen and be persuaded by what is right.

What does this peaceable, gentle, and easily entreated wisdom look like? Those who are considerate give people the benefit of the doubt. They do not make rash judgments about the positions or motives of others. In the church there is a long history of using caricatures, which is a distorted view of another person's position. The man who is wise will listen carefully to others and will be able to state the other person's position in a way that he/she agrees with, without distortion (this was the wisdom I recently heard a man give at a conference).

But also, humble wisdom is teachable at a deliberative assembly. The delegates have studied the material of the agenda and have come to conclusions about what should be decided. However, we must not come to synod with our minds made up. There is a difference between knowing your mind and having your mind made up. Delegates come to synod knowing their minds but not having their minds made up because this is a deliberative body that comes to understanding and decisions together after listening to each other. We should all come to synod with the humble attitude, "I think this, but I may be wrong." Those who bring protests and appeals should come with the same humble attitude: I want to know what is right according to the multitude of counselors who are searching the Scriptures.

Wisdom also includes being "full of mercy." Mercy means that the wise man takes pity on others because God takes pity on me. This is where mercy begins—not with me—but always with God. Our God has withheld from us the punishment we deserve. He has given us what we do not deserve: salvation and everlasting life. Will I withhold it from others, even when they disagree with me or oppose me?

This mercy is active with "good fruits." This reminds us of the figure throughout Scripture—a tree is known by its fruit. The fruit does not determine the kind of tree it is. Instead, the fruit reveals what kind of tree it is. An apple tree is known by its fruit (you do not find bananas, but apples). So also, a good tree produces good fruit, not fake fruit (like you might find in a bowl as a decoration at grandma's house).

This merciful wisdom that produces good fruit is "without partiality." We treat everyone the same,

without special treatment. This can be so difficult in meetings. We can be followers of men or we are afraid of how some will take what we say. Or we might be afraid to oppose someone else. True wisdom is without partiality or special treatment. It does not fear men.

And it is "without hypocrisy." The wise man is not two-faced, but consistent. He is not one way on Sunday and another way during the week; one way with these people and another with those. James is saying wisdom does not pretend to be wise because such hypocrisy is abominable before God.

THE RESULT

The principle of verse 18 is that we reap what we sow. James uses the picture of a garden. You plant bean seeds and do not expect corn to grow, but beans. The same applies spiritually: you reap what you sow (Gal. 6:7). If a man sows the seeds of anger, bitterness, and strife, what will follow? Verse 16 says this will result in confusion and every evil work. Is there anything more unpleasant and more ungodly than this? But if a man sows the seeds of love, mercy, wisdom, and peace, what will follow? The fruit of righteousness (v. 18).

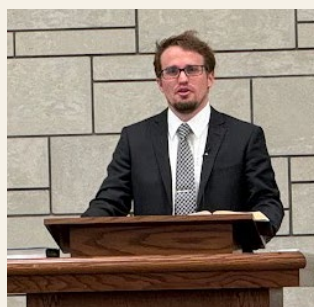
The man who possesses wisdom will sow the seed of peace and will reap righteousness. This righteousness is not our righteousness before God by which we are justified. This cannot be because the righteousness of Christ is full and complete. This righteousness is obedience to God's Word and law. It is doing what is right according to God's law, which the Holy Spirit works in us when we are recreated in the image of Christ.

When we live in peace with each other out of wisdom, the fruit will be righteousness in our lives and in the church. This is a healthy environment and fertile soil for the growth of righteousness. On the other hand, an environment of strife and bitterness will be fertile soil for the weeds of unrighteousness. You will never find righteousness in strife and bitterness. This is the great danger of bitterness, anger, and hatred in our lives. It never produces good fruit. It only destroys.

Thus a healthy synodical environment for each other and the churches is wisdom and peace. May the God of all wisdom grant this. May this be our constant prayer before every session of synod: "O Father, grant us this wisdom."



Rev. G. Eriks
Pre-synodical service



Arend Haveman
Specimen sermon



Examination of
Arend Haveman



Foreign Delegates:
Elder Tang Yoon Chuan (CERCS)
and Rev. V. Ibe (PRCP)



Dr. J. Klautke addressing Synod



PRTS GRADUATION



Speaker: Prof. B. Huizinga



TSC President, Rev. G. Eriks; Candidate A. Haveman;
Rector, Prof. R. Cammenga



Prof. Engelsma offers congratulations



Delegates to the PRC Synod

Left to right: Elder Duane Bruinsma, Elder Tang Yoon Chuan, Rev. V. Ibe, Rev. N. Decker, Elder Robert Brands, Rev. J. Engelsma, Prof. B. Huizinga, Elder Alvern Miersma, Elder Jeff Krosschell, Rev. R. Smit, Rev. D. Kleyn, Prof. R. Cammenga, Elder Rick Gritters, Rev. W. Langerak, Elder Bert Worries, Prof. D. Kuiper, Rev. J. Mahtani, Rev. C. Spronk, Elder Josh Hoekstra, Prof. C. Griess, Rev. A. Brummel, Elder Steve Kuiper, Prof. B. Gritters, Elder Jon Lubbers, Rev. D. Holstege, Elder John VanBaren, Rev. R. Barnhill



Officers:

Rev. J. Engelsma, 1st clerk; Rev. R. Smit, vice-president;
Rev. W. Langerak, president; Rev. C. Spronk, 2nd clerk



Committee 1

Prof. R. Cammenga, Rev. N. Decker,
Rev. R. Smit, Elder A. Miersma, Elder S. Kuiper



Committee 2

Elder D. Bruinsma, Rev. J. Mahtani,
Prof. B. Gritters, Rev. R. Barnhill, Elder J. Lubbers



Committee 3

Prof. B. Huizinga, Prof. C. Griess, Elder J. Krosschell,
Rev. D. Holstege, Elder R. Gritters, Rev. J. Engelsma



Committee 4

Prof. D. Kuiper, Rev. D. Kleyn, Elder B. Worries,
Elder J. Hoekstra, Rev. C. Spronk



Committee 5

Elder R. Brands, Rev. W. Langerak,
Rev. A. Brummel, Elder J. VanBaren



THE MINISTER'S FIXED HEART

PROF. BRIAN HUIZINGA

Professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Grandville PRC in Grandville, Michigan

O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory—Psalm 108:1

Blessed be the name of the Lord, for He has given to us another seminary graduate, and therefore, another laborer in the vineyard where laborers are few. Congratulations, Arend, after four years of intense study in seminary. It is our fervent prayer that by the end of this calendar year you will not only be installed into office in one of our congregations, but already be feeling settled in, getting to know your new church family, and counting it all joy to serve in the ministry of our Lord.

With this graduation address, I would like to go to the heart. There is nothing in the vast creation of God more important than a man's heart. Originally, the whole creation was consecrated to God through the heart of Adam. Although the minister is not the head of the church, and the congregation is not devoted to God through the heart of their minister, his heart is very important as he does his work in the congregation. We need seminary graduates for the ministry, but not just any graduate who has an acceptable GPA, who passes a synodical exam, and who can preach, teach, and give good counsel. He must be daily, properly oriented all the way down in his heart.

There was a time in David's life when the Spirit elevated him to such a lofty spiritual state that he wrote Psalm 108 and began, "O God, my heart is fixed!" His heart was not always fixed. There were many times of spiritual weakness. However, in writing this psalm his heart was fixed. The central concern of our ministry must be the proper care and orientation of our heart so that we can say with David, "O God, my heart is fixed."

Before proceeding, I want to illustrate the main

idea of the text. The word *fixed* does not mean "repaired" but "firmly established," and it implies some object. God is the object. "O God, my heart is fixed," means "O God, my heart is sharply focused and firmly established *on Thee*." Now, imagine a professional photographer standing in the path of totality on April 8, 2024, intending to capture a photo of the total eclipse of the sun. He sets up his tripod and when it is perfectly balanced and positioned, he tightens the screws on each of the three legs (it is fixed). Then to the tripod he attaches and securely fastens his expensive camera with its solar filter (it is fixed). Then he aims that super-telephoto lens directly at the sun, zooms in to max zoom, and tightens the camera in its position. That camera is fixed on the sun. The sun represents God. The camera represents David's heart. When he says, "O God, my heart is fixed," he means, "My heart is locked in on Thee."

May Jesus Christ, who said all His lifelong, "O God, my heart is fixed," work in Arend and in all of us, what He worked in David so that we too can say, "O God my heart is fixed."

THE FIXED HEART ITSELF

"O God!" begins the psalmist. Upon no higher or more glorious object could the heart be fixed than on God. God is great in *glory* (v. 5, "Be thou exalted, O God, above the heavens, and thy glory above all the earth"). Above all the glory of the earth with its kings, wealth, and manifold creatures, above all the glory of the spacious heavens with the sun and manifold galaxies, and above all the glory of the highest heaven inhabited by angels and the cloud of many witnesses who have gone before us, is the triune God of glory. Glory!

God is great in *mercy* (v. 4, "For thy mercy is great

above the heavens"). When God looks down from heaven and sees that there is none that does good and all are gone astray, He does not consume the whole human race in wrath. Rather, according to His discriminating mercy, which reaches all the way back into eternity, He comes compassionately to sinners and delivers them into glory with Him by sending His own dear Son into the humility of our humanity. Mercy!

God is great in *faithfulness* (v. 4, "and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds," where "truth" means "truthfulness" or "faithfulness"). Many, like David or officebearers today, have made promises and broken them. No one has made as many promises as God, and to us and our children He fulfills all of them in Jesus Christ. Faithfulness!

God is great in *victory* so that David confidently concludes, "Through God we shall do valiantly, for he it is that shall tread down our enemies" (v. 13). Victory!

When David exclaims, "O God," he means, "God of glory, and mercy, and faithfulness, and victory in the promised Messiah." This great God is the object toward which David is oriented.

It is most remarkable that David says, "O God, my heart is fixed." The heart is the center of a human's entire existence and determines the spiritual, moral character of his whole life. The deepest core of David's being, out of which flows his entire life of actions, words, thoughts, desires, intentions, and affections, is his heart, and it is directed toward, settled upon, and focused on God.

David does not mean, "O God, my heart is fixed on my kingship, my hundreds of thousands of fighting men, and tens of thousands of slain enemies." He does not mean, "My heart is fixed on women, wealth, and pleasure." He does not even mean, "My heart is fixed on Michal my wife, Joab my captain, Jonathan my friend, Amnon my first born, Ahithophel my counselor, Nathan my prophet, or Zadok my priest." Nor does he mean, "My heart is fixed on the tabernacle or the ark." The whole psalm has an upward orientation to the clouds and heavens because David means, "O God, my heart is fixed on *Thee*, my God and Savior!"

There are at least four *characteristics* of a heart fixed on God, whether David's or the minister's heart. First, it is full of *praise* for God (both vv. 1 and 3 speak of "praise"). In the ministry, if our hearts are fixed

on God, we will detest flattery, whereby men come to shower us with praise because for the moment (and flattery is always momentary) they really like what we do, or say, or the position we have taken. We will groan if any in Israel tries to take the credit for any victories we enjoy, as if *we* have done so valiantly, and *we* have trod Christ's and our enemies underfoot, and *we* have attained salvation by our own strength. How could the humble child of God tolerate anything that requires God to share His glory with the sinner, if his heart is fixed on God? When our heart is fixed, it is full of praise for God: "Be *Thou* exalted and Christ at thy right hand!"

Second, the heart fixed on God is full of *love* for God. In Scripture the heart is always connected to love, thus the great command requires us to love God with all our heart. When your heart is fixed and beating hard after God in sweet communion and fervent exercises of piety, it is almost as if you see nothing else, like that camera focused on the solar eclipse has no other object in view. God! Nothing is more precious to me than my *God*! This fixed heart is the explanation for David's hatred in Psalm 139, and how he can say, "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate thee? I hate them with perfect hatred." "How can I *not* hate those who blaspheme Thy name, trod underfoot Thy Son, and damn Thy church, for my heart is fixed on Thee in love."

Third, the heart fixed on God is full of *confidence* in God. Who is Moab, and Edom, and Philistia (v. 9)? Who are mighty men with loud voices of hatred for and opposition to God's church and who aim their spears at you personally? What is sin and evil, mighty though they seem...condemnation, shame, corruption, and the gates of hell? When your heart is fixed on the God of redeeming blood who has promised a Seed to bruise the serpent's head, and who always does valiantly, then you do not tremble in fear but are confident in faith.

Fourth, the heart fixed on God is full of *sincerity* before God so that a man means what he says (for example, v. 1, "I will sing and give praise..."). If the minister's heart is fixed on God, how can he be a lying hypocrite who speaks from the pulpit, saying, "Congregation, this is God's way of holiness for us; zealously walk in it with gratitude," and then in his personal life he walks impenitently in sin all week long?

How can he preach “To God be the glory forever,” but then secretly be peeved when his colleague is recognized, and he is not? How can he counsel others saying, “Let not your heart be troubled,” while he himself is terrified of men and what they think of him. A fixed heart is sincere.

Obviously, David’s heart was not always fixed on God. For a time, it was fixed on the bathing neighbor, or fixed on his own glory when he required Joab to count his men of war. Many other days his heart was down in the mire of fleshly lusts. But what a remarkable exclamation from David here, at this time, “O God, my heart is fixed!”

THE PERSONAL RESOLVE OF IT

Because David’s heart was fixed on God, he had a two-fold personal resolve. First, he was resolved to praise God with singing (v. 1, “...I will sing and give praise...”). “I will,” indicates personal resolve, and “I will sing and give praise” means, “I will give praise by singing.” How striking that the first resolution of the fixed heart is a commitment to *singing*, and to sing songs that praise God for His excellent greatness. If there are times in David’s life when he is not singing melodiously, then it is fair to ask, “What is wrong?” It is impossible that the heart fixed on God does not erupt in praise.

Let that be the minister’s resolve, “I will sing and give praise!” Not merely this: “The congregation will sing,” or “the catechumens and conventioners will sing,” or “the school choir will sing.” But, “I, the minister, will sing! I will sing with you, and I will sing in my house, in my car, and on the way to my study. How can I keep silent when I spend all week mining exegetical gold out of the Scripture, phrase after phrase packed with gospel splendor redounding to the glory of God!”

The second resolve is unique and striking, for David was resolved to praise God with *his glory* (v. 1, “I will sing and give praise, even with my glory”). “Glory” refers to the unique position and talents that God gave to David, as God gives to each of His children a unique place in His kingdom and various gifts. David calls his position and talents “glory,” first, because they are glorious to the beholder, drawing recognition and honor. Secondly, they must be pressed into the service of the glory of God the Giver. When God sanctifies

David, He begins to glorify David in such a way that David consciously presses what God has given to him into the service of God’s name. When David speaks of “my glory,” he is not arrogantly boasting in himself but is resolved to take the honor with which God has crowned him and use it for God’s glory.

Many elements were included in David’s glory, already in his youth and later as king, but surely what stands out is his position as the sweet psalmist of Israel (II Sam. 23:1) and his Spirit-worked gift of poetry. We can become so accustomed to the expression, “the Psalms of David,” that we lose a sense of the wonder that David not only wrote a portion of Scripture as others did, and he not only wrote *songs* or psalms, as others did, but he wrote most of the psalms, including this one (Ps. 108). It takes a peculiar talent to *write songs* (poetry put to music for singing), and it was an uncommon glory in the history of the covenant for someone to write a psalm.

The Holy Spirit is the *author* of all the Psalms, and by the miracle of inspiration, He worked in David so that what David wrote was word for word the Word of God. And yet, according to our view of organic inspiration, David was not a robot programmed by God to spit out data. God gave David tremendous gifts and the Spirit of inspiration worked through that God-given “glory” of David.

Possessing “glory,” David had opportunity to boast! Some of the wealthiest and most popular people on the planet today are award-winning artists who can write music, play an instrument, and sing to adoring fans in sold-out concert venues. The song-writing, harp-playing king of Israel could have made a name for himself in the ancient world, but listen to him: “O God my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, *even with my glory*.”

God gives to ministers an uncommon glory—a *position* in the church as minister of the word, and *gifts* to be able to discharge the duties of our office. There is something healthy about that perspective (“glory”), lest we and our sons spurn the ministry as something dishonorable and undesirable, and turn our hearts to any number of careers, perhaps because they promise a more lucrative future. But there is also something very dangerous about this reality (“glory”). A minister may have a steel trap of a mind for memorization or

debate, or a golden tongue of oratory for teaching, or a winsome personality for interacting with people, and he may be tempted to use his glory to draw hearts to himself, desiring to be the sun at which every heart-camera is pointed. That is what Absalom did with his glory, stealing many hearts in Israel (II Sam. 15:6).

Can you imagine anything more wicked for David or the minister? Do we really want others to take their hearts and fix them on us as sinful clay pots of dirt rather than fixing them on the God who is exalted above the heavens? What hellish pride! What a sinister attempt at robbery! God did not give us “glory” for ourselves but for Him!

Let every minister say with David, “O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise to Thee and Jesus Christ, even with my glory.” And that must be a daily resolve—today in the pulpit, today in my study, today in catechism class, today in the consistory meeting, today visiting the sick, today at the Young People’s Convention, today at the church picnic I will praise God with my glory.

THE ONLY EXPLANATION FOR IT

There is only one explanation for the minister’s fixed heart—the Person, and then the Spirit and Word of the true David. We need to fix our heart now, on Christ, of whom David was a faint picture.

As we all sit here thinking about a fixed heart and our own hearts, we shudder, and feel a deep sense of guilt and shame. Perhaps we exclaim, “I find this statement of David almost unbelievable!” My heart is so often like a camera fixed to a tripod positioned on the deck of a ship at sea. Rarely fixed and laser-focused on God in heaven, but constantly moving about from God to self, from God to idols, from God to pleasure. Not praise but pride, not love but indifference, not confidence but fear, not sincerity but insincerity is in my heart.

Look at Christ, the Son of God incarnate! He lived on this earth with a heart perfectly fixed upon God. Nothing in the whole vast creation of God is so amazing as the perfect heart of Jesus, through which the whole church is consecrated to God.

Christ! The mighty king of Israel through whom we do valiantly is *Christ!* The content of all the psalms is *Christ!* The high mercy and lofty faithfulness of God

are revealed in *Christ!* Sin and evil mighty though they seem, especially within as your heart fluctuates day and night, are overcome by the cross and resurrection of *Christ!* The one heart that is full of perfect praise, love, confidence, and sincerity is the heart of *Christ!* The One who has a position like no other, gifts that no tongue can fully tell, and therefore a “glory” that is higher than the heavens is *Christ.* All His life He said, “I will sing and give praise to Thee, O God, even with My glory!” And that was His resolve and song even while the torrents of God’s wrath were poured out upon Him on the cross for all our heart sins.

Now the only explanation for David or the minister possessing a fixed heart is that we are united to this Christ by the *Spirit*, and the Holy Spirit conforms our hearts to Christ’s, and works Christ’s resolve in us. And the Spirit does that through our lives by means of the *Word*.

The preached word is primary for everyone, including the minister who must be first partaker. I do not believe it is hyperbole to say that if the word that the minister preaches is not consistently, positively affecting his heart, it is time to cry, “Code-blue!” Hospital staff calls “code-blue” when a patient goes into cardiac arrest, and then there is a rapid, hospital-wide response to the emergency. If the minister notices that week after week his heart is no longer in the work and on the Lord, then he needs to cry “code-blue” to his elders that they may come running and pray over him, so that the prayer of faith may save the minister with his failing heart and further help can be provided. Christ uses the very word we preach, the pure doctrine of the gospel of God, to turn our hearts to God.

We also need that word sung (the text is a song). There is a twofold relation between a fixed heart and good music. Good music is what flows from the fixed heart as fruit. But good music is also a powerful means through which the Spirit works to cause our hearts to be fixed. Do you not experience both? When your heart is fixed, you cannot help but make a joyful noise unto the Lord, and when you make a joyful noise to the Lord, you cannot help but fix your heart on Him!

We need that word in personal devotions every morning. Just like the instruments of the orchestra are tuned and tightened before every performance, so the minister’s heart needs to be tuned every morning

according to the Word. And what a wonderful life is the minister's because everything we do is with the Word, and that pure Word of sound doctrine is the means the Spirit of Christ uses to cause us to fix our hearts on God. And because we have only a small beginning of this fixing and we constantly fail, that Spirit keeps fixing our hearts on God's *mercy*, which is great above the heavens.

Arend, in the near future, God willing, you will

have many things to fix, arrange, organize, position, and reposition. Fix your parsonage and study. Fix your schedule and study habits. Fix your sermon manuscript so that everything is balanced and clear (do not get lazy homiletically, but better). Fix the hairs of your head and the folds of your suit. But what matters most for a profitable ministry for God's people is that you, the minister, have a heart that is fixed on God. May the Spirit of Christ work it.

LETTERS

Dear *Standard Bearer*,

The word *arsenokoitès* occurs twice in the New Testament, namely in I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10. It is a combination of two words, namely *arsen* and *koitè*. *Arsen* is a male, and *koitè* is a lying down to sleep, derived from the verb *koimao*, to lie down to sleep. These are the words that the Septuagint uses for the translation of the words *zakar*, *mishkab*, and *shakab* in Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Thus there is no denying that the word *arsenokoitès* is based on these two verses in Leviticus. And indeed, whether the word *arsenokoitès* is translated "abusers of themselves with mankind," meaning "abusers of themselves with males" or "who defile themselves with mankind," meaning "who defile themselves with males" or "homosexuals," these translations direct us straightly to these two verses in Leviticus. So it is a riddle how these can be alleged to be mistranslations.

Yours in Christ,
Jan Reckman
Aylmer, Ontario Canada

Thanks for your comments on my May 15 "All Around Us" article. It is indeed a riddle how the makers of the film "1946: The Mistranslation That Shifted Culture" can allege that the Revised Standard Version of 1946 made a mistake when it originally translated the Greek word *arsenokoitai* in I Corinthians 6:9 as "homosexuals." As you note, God made it crystal clear already in the law of Moses that His people must not commit the vile practice of men lying with men and women with women, which seems to have been

common among the heathen throughout history. The apostle Paul knew those laws well, as he testified when he called himself a man who was once "exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers" (Gal. 1:14). When, as you point out, he used the same word that the Greek Bible of his day used to translate the Hebrew text outlawing that practice, he was simply applying God's law to the Corinthians. The modern English word for men who lie with men or women with women is *homosexuals*. Therefore, it was no mistranslation to use that word. Perhaps the solution to the riddle you mention can be found by remembering who is behind every attempt to silence the truth of God and teach the opposite....

In Christ,
Rev. D. Holstege

About the time we start to wonder whether we and the church world in general have elevated the pursuit of leadership positions into a form of idolatry, along comes Sherry Koole's timely *Standard Bearer* article (May 15, 2024) wisely reminding us that godly leadership is grounded in the simple and oft-repeated command of Jesus to "*follow Me*."

As Christian educators, we applaud the article.

Jim and Brenda Regnerus
Doon, IA

Dear Rev. McGeown, my colleague,

I would express some concerns with your response to Tim Pipe, Jr. in the May 15, 2024 issue of the

Standard Bearer. When you say that we should reserve the language of faith for the activity of believing, you indicate in your response that your concern is “that faith is understood by some—erroneously—as a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond or connection to Christ that is divorced from the activity of believing.” I would caution, however, that the error of speaking of a passive faith divorced from the activity of believing does not require the rejection altogether of a passive aspect to a true faith. It is erroneous to restrict the definition of faith to the activity of believing. You yourself would seem to acknowledge the same in your reference to the Canons of Dordt, III/IV, Rejection of Error, 6: “Faith is, before it becomes an act of man, a quality or gift infused by God,” and “before it becomes an act of man, it is primarily a divine gift or a power infused into man.”

It stands to reason that the emphasis on faith in Scripture is indeed on the activity of a true faith. The gospel addresses us as the conscious partakers of salvation in Christ Jesus. By the gospel the Holy Spirit efficaciously calls us to repentance and faith, and works in us the activity of faith, believing in the Lord Jesus.

But, according to Lord’s Day 7 (Heidelberg Catechism), the establishment of the living graft uniting us to Christ is the establishment of that bond or power of faith through which alone we receive the life of Christ from the very moment of regeneration. That concept of faith as a graft or bond is affirmed in Scripture not only by the figure of the vine (John 15), but also by Ephesians 2:8, “For by grace are ye saved through faith,” which is the Greek word *dia*, through, and not the dative of means that is often used and translated “by faith.” That bond, established by God Himself without any contribution on our part, is not divorced from, but is brought to expression by the Holy Spirit in our believing as well as our bringing forth the fruits of faith that follow.

This distinction has important practical implications, to which Mr. Pipe alluded, when it comes to elect children who die in infancy as well as those who have a very limited mental capacity from birth, perhaps unable even to hear or observe, let alone know the things of this life. Their salvation as children of God is still by faith—not as the act of believing, but as the work of God grafting them into their living Vine,

our Savior Jesus Christ, and faith therefore by which they receive Christ and all His benefits even apart from the activity of believing. The graft or power of faith is a living graft, even prior to being brought to conscious activity by the Holy Spirit.

When it comes to the biblical distinctions of regeneration, faith, and so on, and what is known as the order of salvation, we always have to remind ourselves that salvation in all its aspects is one inseparable work of God. We make a mistake if we limit concepts such as faith to one particular idea, when Scripture gives a far richer and more meaningful development to the various aspects of the wonder work of God’s grace. That would be like looking at what appears to be a piece of glass and not realizing we are missing the glorious perspective of a multi-faceted diamond. God’s work is wonderful!

Rev. Steven Key, emeritus pastor
Loveland, CO

Dear Rev. Key,

I thank you for your cordial response. You write that faith has “a passive aspect” and that it is “the establishment of a living graft uniting us to Christ.” If you mean by a passive aspect that God gives us the gift of faith by working it in us (which is His sovereign work, not our activity in any sense), so that we believe, I agree wholeheartedly. If you mean that faith includes the faculty of faith (as I explained it in the *SB*, March 1, 2024), I concur. My concern is not where faith comes from (certainly, it is the gift of God), but what it *is*. Before faith becomes an act of man, it is “a quality or gift infused by God,” that is, it is the spiritual power to lay hold upon Christ (Canons III/IV, Rejection of Errors, 6); but we are not united *consciously* to Christ until we believe.

You appeal to John 15 where Christ describes a vine with its branches, but I ask you to consider that in this chapter there is no mention of faith as a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond. In fact, Christ emphasizes the believer’s *activities* and makes many exhortations: “abide in me;” “he that abideth in me...the same bringeth forth much fruit...continue ye in my love...ye shall abide in my love...”

If your argument is that in John 15 the grafting of branches into the vine is presupposed, and that the graft is the bond of faith, the chapter is silent on that, and

Christ does not call the graft or the engrafting “faith.” In my opinion it is better to say that we are engrafted into Christ by the Holy Spirit in regeneration and that we abide in Christ by faith (which is the activity of believing in, trusting in, embracing, appropriating, seeking Christ—see Belgic Confession, Art. 22).

To John 15 we may add Romans 11, the only place where the word “graft” appears in Scripture. It is noteworthy, I believe, that in verse 20 Paul writes, “Thou standest by faith,” which, as I understand it, does not mean, “Thou standest by a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond,” but, “Thou standest *by continuing to believe*.” That fits with Paul’s point, which is to warn against unbelief and exhort to faith. That does not mean that our standing depends on our believing because, as we know, faith and even its continuance are the gift of God; but one who does not believe does not stand, hence the exhortation.

The other text to which you appeal is Ephesians 2:8: “For by grace are ye saved through faith.” The word *through* indicates an instrument, but the text, as I interpret it, means that “by grace are ye saved *through believing*.” Faith is, of course, a gift, but, as to what the gift *is*, it is “the will to believe and the act of believing also” (Canons III/IV, 14; see also Philippians 1:29—“Unto you it is given...to believe,” not, “Unto you it is given to have a subconscious, unconscious, passive connection to Jesus Christ”).

You reference Heidelberg Catechism, LD 7, which teaches, “Only those [are saved] who are ingrafted into [Christ], and receive all His benefits, by a true faith,” but when the Catechism defines what faith *is*, it says, “True faith is...” and describes *activities*, not a bond. Nevertheless, generations of catechumens have been taught that faith *itself* is a graft and countless sermons have employed the illustration of a gardener engrafting a dead branch into the living vine. I, too, have earlier used that illustration, although I am stepping away from it because I believe that it confounds faith and the mystical union. In deference to the Heidelberg Catechism’s emphasis on the *experiential* aspect of salvation, I prefer to understand A. 20 as “(Only those are saved) who consciously receive (that is, take to one’s self consciously) all his benefits by a true faith and thus are consciously engrafted into Him.”

“Receive” in A. 20 is the German word *annehmen*,

which means accept (perhaps some dislike that word, but that is what *annehmen* means): we receive all His benefits by believing in Jesus Christ. That is how the creeds present it: “They who by a true faith *receive* this Savior” (A. 30); “What doth it profit thee now *that thou believest* all this?” (Q. 59); “inasmuch as I *embrace* such benefit with a believing heart” (A. 60); “I cannot *receive and apply* the same to myself any other way than by faith only” (A. 61); “it is to *embrace with a believing heart*” (A. 76); “whenever they *receive* the promise of the gospel by a true faith” (A. 84). The same language is used in the Canons: “Such as...*embrace* Jesus the Savior by a true and living faith” (Canons I, 4); “we by faith, inasmuch as it *accepts* the merits of Christ, are justified before God and saved” (Canons II, Rejection of Errors, 4).

I am intrigued to know from where the idea of faith as a subconscious, unconscious, passive bond came. I have not found it in theologians before Hoeksema. Commenting on LD 7, Zacharias Ursinus, the primary author of the Heidelberg Catechism, writes, “The reason why only those who believe are saved is because they alone lay hold of, and embrace the benefits of Christ... although the satisfaction of Christ, the mediator for our sins, is perfect, yet all do not obtain deliverance through it, but only those who believe the gospel, and apply to themselves the merits of Christ by a true faith” (*Commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism*, trans. G.W. Williard [Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, repr. 1985], 106).

Finally, God saves His people, such as elect infants and those of limited mental capacity, who are unable to exercise conscious faith, by regenerating them and applying to them the blood of Christ to wash away their sins, even if in this life they are never conscious of it and cannot articulate it. That, however, does not mean that in Scripture and in the creeds faith is anything other than the activity of believing in Christ for salvation.

God’s work is multifaceted and wonderful, and God uses specific words to explain it. One of those words is faith, which God defines in Scripture. I prefer to define terms as the Holy Spirit does, and I would suggest that we as Reformed believers should stick closely not only to the doctrine but also to the language of our creeds.

In our common faith,
Rev. M. McGeown



A SAMPLING OF WORTHWHILE READS

REV. DAVID NOORMAN

Pastor of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

If you have walked through a Costco, then you know the deal with free samples. They are aimed at enticing you to buy, but if you show up at the right time you will be offered so many little bites that you might not leave hungry.

This article is intended to be a sampling of Christian periodicals. It is possible that the little bites in this article will fill you up, but the ultimate aim is to encourage you to take up and read for yourself.

I regularly rely upon the information and analysis provided by others who write from a biblical, Christian, and Reformed perspective. I often profit personally from these publications, and I am thankful for them. I trust you will benefit from them as well.

CHRISTIAN RENEWAL: “GETTING TO KNOW JORDAN PETERSON”¹

In the May 4 issue of *Christian Renewal*, Hermina Dykxhoorn provides an introduction to Dr. Jordan Peterson, a popular clinical psychologist and university professor. Peterson’s popularity has exploded over the last few years, especially among young male Christians who watch him on YouTube, attend his lecture circuit, and view his content on other platforms. Dr. Peterson has a significant following. Some might be considered disciples or fan(atic)s, while others are genuinely intrigued by a brilliant thinker, a clear communicator, and a courageous spirit willing to oppose the dominant thinking of modern society.

The irony of his popularity among Christians is that Peterson himself is not a professing Christian, nor a member of any church. Dykxhoorn explains Peterson’s background, his rise in popularity and influence, and

carefully assesses his spirituality and religion (or lack thereof). Christians who take in Peterson’s books, lectures, podcasts, and other content would do well to get to know Dr. Peterson through Dykxhoorn’s article.

CHRISTIAN RENEWAL: A CLOSER LOOK AT MINISTER SHORTAGES, CALLS, AND MORE²

The same issue of *Christian Renewal* includes an article that examines some ministerial trends in Reformed denominations. Like the PRCA, denominations such as the United Reformed Churches and Canadian Reformed Churches do not have enough ministers for their churches. The great number of vacancies makes us more sensitive to the trends of ministers having longer pastorates, and churches having longer vacancies.

John Van Dyk examines these trends, considers different perspectives on them, and gives pros and cons for both longer and shorter pastorates. He also cites an interesting study by the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) that “one minister can effectively pastor no more than 200 people.” A thought-provoking article for myself as a minister, and one that will be of interest to elders and lay-members also.

Van Dyk’s last word is appropriate: “Ultimately, what is needed is more ministers to fill pulpits. The seminaries are doing their part. What’s needed is willing students. That need will be aided by prayer and discipling, along with home churches identifying young men with the necessary gifts and abilities to serve the Lord and His people.”

1 Hermina Dykxhoorn, “Getting to Know Jordan Peterson: Another Reluctant Convert Perhaps?” *Christian Renewal*, vol. 42, no. 10 (May 4, 2024), 26-28.

2 John Van Dyk, “Calling All Ministers: How the system functions, or changes,” *Christian Renewal*, vol. 42, no. 10 (May 4, 2024), 10-11.

REFORMED PERSPECTIVE: ADVICE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE ON MARRIAGE AND MORE

The May-June issue of *Reformed Perspective* includes several articles aimed at young people, with a healthy admonition to pursue marriage while young. In Alexandra Ellison's cover story, "How to Get Married Younger"³ she examines the trend of delaying marriage (or the pursuit of marriage), and gives some insight into the modern dating environment (hint: only our younger readers will recognize it). She concludes the article by passing along some quality pastoral advice in harmony with her title.

Single men in their teens, twenties (and older?) should read Jon Dykstra's editorial, "How I Married Your Grandmother: Dating advice for a young man."⁴ Parents of young men should read this one too, because you might recognize some of your sons' tendencies in Mr. Dykstra's story. Similarly, young women might learn something about their male counterparts (that is, the young men who are or are not asking them out). Dykstra tells a good story, gives an honest self-assessment, and provides some wise and helpful advice!

Young women and their parents will benefit from Jan Broersma's article "Advice for Young Women... from A to Z."⁵ Broersma collected a wide array of advice (not just on dating and marriage) from a variety of Reformed women and presents it alphabetically (from Aspirations, Beauty, and Courage...all the way to Zeal). There is a lot of biblical wisdom and good sense in this article, a fine manifestation of Titus 2:3-5.

Young men and young women are rarely conscious of their own faults in the pursuit of marriage, so they should be encouraged to read and discuss these articles with a trusted friend or family member—someone who will not be afraid to tell it like it is, even if it stings (Prov. 27:6). Parents, even if you cannot get your young people to read these articles, you yourself will gain a better understanding of the dangers and challenges facing your children as they seek a spouse and pursue marriage, and

3 Alexandra Ellison, "How to Get Married Younger," *Reformed Perspective*, vol. 43, no. 3 (May-June 2024), 20-26.

4 Jon Dykstra, "How I Married Your Grandmother: Dating advice for a young man," *Reformed Perspective*, vol. 43, no. 3 (May-June 2024), 4-6.

5 Jan Broersma, "Advice for Young Women... from A to Z," *Reformed Perspective*, vol. 43, no. 3 (May-June 2024), 14-19.

you will be equipped to provide them with better counsel and encouragement when the time is right.

ANSWERS IN GENESIS: FAITHFUL DEFENSE OF GOD'S WORD

The latest issue of *Answers* magazine includes a welcome article defending the truth and authority of Scripture in connection with a literal, historical Adam. Dr. Terry Mortenson provides a survey of those who deny a literal Adam, while also setting forth the plain teaching of Scripture in both the Old and New Testaments.

College and university students (secular and Christian) need to understand the different ways that proponents of evolution and theistic evolution twist and deny the truth of creation, and the serious implications of it. Mortenson helps in this regard. He succinctly identifies the significance of denying a literal Adam by drawing the biblical connections to the "last Adam." Mortenson's conclusion is to the point:

Rejecting a literal, historical Adam—or at least some of the details about him and Eve—undermines the authority of Scripture with enormous moral implications. Most importantly, Adam is critical to the gospel. The Last Adam came to solve the problem caused by the first Adam, as literally described in Genesis. Evolution with its millions of years is a destructive myth, but God's Word is true. The Last Adam has the last word on the first Adam.⁶

CHRISTIANITY TODAY: A CLOSER LOOK AT CHRISTIANS IN HAITI

Two American missionaries along with a Haitian missionary director were kidnapped and killed by gangs near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, in late May.⁷ A month earlier, *Christianity Today* (CT) published a in-depth report of the conditions in Haiti and its effect upon Christians in the middle of the unrest.⁸ Both of these

6 Dr. Terry Mortenson, "The Last Word on the First Adam," *Answers Magazine*, vol. 19, no. 2 (April-June 2024), 36-42.

7 Daniel Silliman, "American Missionaries Killed in Port-au-Prince," *ChristianityToday.com*, May 24, 2024 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2024/may/haiti-american-missionaries-killed-gang.html>).

8 Andy Olsen, "Haitians Are Ministering at the End of the World," *ChristianityToday.com*, April 16, 2024 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2024/april-web-only/haiti-ministry-end-of-world-gang-violence.html>).

stories provide much needed perspective to those of us familiar only with the peace, prosperity, and freedom we presently enjoy in the United States.

While *CT* certainly leans toward a mainline evangelical perspective, the magazine and website do a good job of providing insight into the life, experiences, and issues confronting Christians in other countries. These two articles regarding Haitian Christians are good examples of this.

WHAT ARE YOU READING?

I hope you enjoyed the samples, and I hope they made

you more hungry and thirsty for quality Christian literature, not less. These are the stories that caught my attention and matched my personal and pastoral interests, but there is plenty of variety out there if you are interested in other topics. So start reading, keep reading, subscribe and keep subscribing, and consider sharing your insights and interests with others (and with us too!). May God bless all the publishers, publications, writers, and readers of biblical, Christian, and Reformed publications that aim to inform and instruct God's people to God's glory!

PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH



WHAT THE LAYMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TEXTUAL CRITICISM: MARK 16

PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER

Rector and professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan

Previous articles introduced the practice of textual criticism of the New Testament Scriptures. New Testament textual criticism is the scholarly work of comparing the readings of currently available Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, observing the differences in their readings, and trying to explain those differences, in order to determine as best as possible which Greek words the Holy Spirit originally inspired. We examined the history of New Testament textual criticism, noted the principles that should guide the textual critic, and observed that some take a very different approach to textual criticism than that which is taught in the PRC seminary.

REMEMBER THE GOAL AND FOUNDATIONAL POINTS

In the first article on this topic,¹ I set forth my goal for the series. That goal is not to equip laymen to do the work of textual criticism; five or six articles

are woefully insufficient for that. The first goal is to introduce laymen to textual criticism. That goal I have accomplished.

The second goal is to reassure Bible readers that certain passages are and always were part of the inspired Scriptures, even when some Bible versions cast doubt on their authenticity. The third goal is to demonstrate that the Greek textual basis underlying the New Testament of our King James Version is sound and reliable. In fact, the textual basis of the KJV/NKJV is a strength of these versions, and the textual basis of every other English translation is a weakness.

In this and the next (concluding) article in this series, I will further accomplish these last two goals. This article will examine the case of Mark 16:9-20, and the next article will examine John 7:53-8:11.

Before looking at specific texts, remember principles set forth earlier.² First, not only are the readings of relevant Greek manuscripts important, but

1 *Standard Bearer*, December 1, 2023, p. 132.

2 *Standard Bearer*, March 1, 2024, p. 281.

other witnesses are also. We have the witness of Bible translations in Latin (spoken in Europe), Syriac and its dialects (spoken in western Asia), and Coptic and its dialects (spoken in north Africa). We also have the witness of church fathers. Second, while the age of a *manuscript* should be considered, the age of a *reading* is more important. If evidence is found in church fathers that the *reading* existed prior to the writing of Greek manuscripts that do not include it, their witness to omitting a passage is considerably weakened. Third, the weight of a small number of early manuscripts does not outweigh that of the vast majority of manuscripts.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST INCLUDING MARK 16:9-20

In a bracketed notation after Mark 16:8, the ESV editors inform us: “[Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include 16:9-20.]” Similarly, the editors of the 1978 and 1980 NIV write: “[The two most reliable early manuscripts do not have Mark 16:9-20.]” The 1984 NIV adds to the notation: “The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20.”

The Greek textual-critical edition that I am using (NA28) puts the passage in double brackets, by which the editors assert that the passage is “known not to be a part of the original text.”³ The ESV and NIV editors stated facts: the two earliest manuscripts do not contain the passage. To those facts, the NIV editor added a questionable assertion: these earliest are “most reliable.” This assertion is an opinion, and can be argued not to be true. But the editors of NA28 make an even bolder assertion: *not part of the original text!* In other words, *not inspired!*

That a reading does not appear in certain manuscripts is one thing; that it is not inspired, and not meant to be part of God’s revelation to His church, is quite another.

Several arguments are used to assert that this passage should not be included in Scripture. One is that some manuscripts do not include it. NA28 indicates that *three* Greek manuscripts conclude Mark’s gospel at verse 8.

One of them dates to the twelfth century, while the other two date to the fourth century. *Three*, out of hundreds. But two of those three are supposedly “most reliable.”

A second argument is that some Bible versions, especially in parts of Syria and Egypt, do not contain these verses. Third, some church fathers (Eusebius and Jerome) indicate that perhaps they do not belong. Fourth, the passage seems out of place; to quote one scholar, verses 9-20 are “stylistically incongruous with 16:1-8. Any fair-minded reader can detect the non-Markan flavor of the style, tone, and vocabulary of 16:9-20.”⁴

FIVE POSSIBLE ENDINGS TO MARK’S GOSPEL!

Available manuscripts suggest *five* different ways to conclude the book of Mark:

- End the book at verse 8 (preferred by many modern textual critics).
- Include verses 9-20 (the most common ending; have you found an English Bible version that actually omits it?).
- Include a shorter ending after verse 8, which the ESV translates as, “But they reported briefly to Peter and those with him all that they had been told. And after this, Jesus himself sent out by means of them, from east to west, the sacred and imperishable proclamation of eternal salvation.”
- Include both the shorter ending and the most common ending.
- Insert some additional sentences after verse 14.

The matter actually is not complicated. Only one Latin manuscript includes the third option, the shorter reading. Seven manuscripts, the oldest of which dates to the 500s, contain both the shorter and most common ending. That means that only eight manuscripts in the whole world include the shorter ending in one form or another. And only one manuscript includes the additional verses after verse 14. Support for these three ways of ending the gospel account is weak; we can dismiss these options. The bigger question is whether God meant the gospel account to end at verse 8, or to include 9-20.

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF INCLUDING MARK 16:9-20

I am convinced that every believer may confidently

3 Nestle Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th revised edition, corrected 2020, 55. My further analysis of this text’s textual-critical issue is based on evidence provided on page 174 of this book.

4 Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 208), 159.

consider Mark 16:9-20 to be part of God's inspired Word. I have come to this conclusion based on my own study of the issues. Jeffrey Riddle provides a more detailed explanation of the position that I take; interested readers can consult his article.⁵

First, the *vast majority* of Greek manuscripts include verses 9-20. NA28 specifically mentions 29 Greek manuscripts that include it. These 29 are in addition to a *large* group of manuscripts known as the "Majority Text," consisting of what many textual critics call the Byzantine family, written in the area of Syria and Asia Minor (in which area the Greek New Testament itself was written). *Three* manuscripts suggest ending the gospel account at verse 8, while *hundreds* support including the traditional ending. Remember that some textual critics considered the weight of the two earliest manuscripts to be greater than the weight of the vast majority.

Second, the age of a *reading* matters more than the age of the *manuscript*. The two earliest manuscripts that omit it were written in the middle or latter part of the 300s. Do we have evidence that Christians before AD 350 knew of these verses and considered them part of Scripture? In fact, we do. The church fathers Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, and Hippolytus quote from the traditional ending. These church fathers were all dead before AD 240. Two philosophers, Celsus (died 180) and Porphyry (died 305), also quoted from these passages. Although not Christians, they knew the Christian writings. So the reading is older than the Greek witnesses to it, and even older than the two "earliest" manuscripts.

Third, from which geographic areas does one find support for either reading? Here it can be frankly admitted that Bible versions in a wide geographic area give evidence to either alternative. Bible versions in Egypt, Syria (eastern Europe) and western Asia can be found both that do contain, and that do not contain, these verses. This does not weaken evidence for including verses 9-20. It merely means that one could not decide the matter on the basis of this criterion only. But the western European (Latin) versions all witness to including the passage; no Latin versions are mentioned

in support of excluding the traditional ending.

I have presented facts. All textual critics recognize that most Greek manuscripts include verses 9-20, that some church fathers before AD 250 knew of these verses, and that some Bible translations in various geographical regions included them. The way to discredit the facts is to say that the two oldest Greek manuscripts are "more reliable" than all the evidence just mentioned, and that verses 9-20 are not Mark's style.

I say, on the basis of the facts, that believing children of God may confidently read Mark 16:9-20 as part of God's inspired Word.

MARK 16:9-20: MANUSCRIPT ANALYSIS

That a manuscript or Bible version omits entire sentences and verses is significant, but what that significance specifically is must be determined. *Why* does the manuscript not include it? What follows is not something that a textual critical edition such as NA28 would indicate; Jeffrey Riddle was especially helpful here.

Some manuscripts are fragments. Perhaps the page was ripped near the bottom; or perhaps a page was torn out of a larger book, and either the torn-out page, or the book without it, but not both, remain available to us. In such cases, the absence of a verse or section is not evidence *against* including those verses.

In other words, one can count the number of manuscripts that include these verses, and then count the number of those that do not. *Then* one must ask of those that do *not* include it, *Why not?*

Although both of the two "earliest" and "most reliable" manuscripts do not include Mark 16:9-20, they both end the gospel account in an unusual way. Neither is a fragment. One of them includes a decorative design after Mark 16:8, as if the scribe was intentionally saying, "I stopped here on purpose, and no one else should try to add more verses." The other manuscript has three columns of text on a page; but Mark 16:8 is found about 2/3 of the way down the second column. The rest of that column, and the entire third column, is blank.

Today that might not seem so odd. Many books begin a new chapter on a new page, even if the last sentences of the previous chapter took up only a few lines on the page. But writing media (paper, vellum,

⁵ Jeffrey T. Riddle, "The Ending of Mark as a Canonical Crisis," in *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 1 (2018): 31-54.

and more) was more expensive in the early church. One used it to its fullest potential. Blank sections were not the norm. In contrast to the chapters of a book, compare it to the articles in this issue of the *Standard Bearer*. When one article is finished, another begins on the same page, if possible. Space must be maximized.

The sum of it is this: the two manuscripts themselves indicate that scribes consciously and intentionally ended Mark's gospel account early and abruptly.

Why did they do that? We do not know for certain. But the deliberateness of it strengthens our conviction that verses 9-20 were not a later addition but were the inspired Word of God from the start, and some scribes did not want them in the manuscripts they were copying. In the "*most reliable*" manuscripts!

We will conclude by examining passages from John's gospel account next time.

BELIEVING AND CONFESSING



OF JESUS CHRIST, TRUE GOD AND MAN, THE ONLY SAVIOR OF THE WORLD (SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER 11H)

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

Emeritus professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Southwest PRC in Wyoming, Michigan

Jesus Christ is the only Savior of the world, and the true awaited Messiah.

For we teach and believe that this Jesus Christ our Lord is the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world, in whom by faith all who before the law, under the law, and under the Gospel were saved, and however many will be saved at the end of the world. For the Lord Himself says in the Gospel: "He who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and robber... I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:1 and 7). And also in another place in the same Gospel He says: "Abraham saw my day and was glad" (ch. 8:56). The apostle Peter also says: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." We therefore believe that we will be saved through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, as our fathers were (Acts 4:12; 10:43; 15:11). For Paul also says: "All our fathers ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock which followed them, and the Rock was Christ" (I Cor. 10:3f.). And

thus we read that John says: "Christ was the Lamb of God which was slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8), and John the Baptist testified that Christ is that "Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world" (John 1:29). Wherefore, we quite openly profess and preach that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and awaited Messiah, that holy and blessed One whom all the types of the law and predictions of the prophets prefigured and promised; and that God appointed Him beforehand and sent Him to us, so that we are not now to look for any other. Now there only remains for all of us to give all glory to Christ, believe in Him, rest in Him alone, despising and rejecting all other aids in life. For however many seek salvation in any other than in Christ alone, have fallen from the grace of God and have rendered Christ null and void of themselves (Gal. 5:4).

In this last section of Article 11 of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC), Heinrich Bullinger devotes himself to an extended defense of the truth that Jesus Christ

is the “unique and eternal Savior.” This is a fitting conclusion to Chapter 11, “Of Jesus Christ, True God and Man, the Only Savior of the World.” Everything that Bullinger has said in this lengthy chapter has deliberately laid the groundwork for this capstone, that as both God and man Jesus is equipped to be the only and eternal Savior of lost sinners.

Because Jesus is the “unique and eternal Savior,” there is no possibility of salvation apart from Him. It has always been the hallmark of apostate Christianity, the cults and sects, and the false religions to deny this truth of the gospel. Each of these groups place another savior alongside of the only true Savior, Jesus Christ. In apostate Christianity, the other savior is generally man himself. By their own free wills and meritorious works human beings save themselves, or, at the very least, contribute to their salvation. This was teaching of the Roman Catholic Church at the time that Bullinger wrote the SHC. In the case of the cults and sects, the founder of the radical and separatist group is ordinarily the “other savior” in whom the members are encouraged to seek their salvation. They speak of the prophets of God and what they say is not to be challenged. The adherents of the false religions are instructed to put their trust in another god or a panoply of gods. These are promoted as the saviors of their adherents in this life and in the afterlife.

Rejecting the counterfeit soteriology of false Christians, the cults, and the pagan religions, the SHC insists the Jesus Christ is the only Savior of lost sinners: “the unique and eternal Savior of the human race, and thus of the whole world.” There is no other Savior of sinners—none alongside of nor in the place of Jesus Christ.

BIBLICAL PROOF THAT JESUS IS THE ONLY SAVIOR

What saith the Scriptures? In demonstration of the truth that Jesus is the only Savior, Bullinger quotes an array of biblical passages. The truth is not established on the basis of the philosophy of men or the pretension of pagans, but on God’s revelation in holy Scripture. These include Jesus’ own teaching, as for example in John 10, that He is door of the sheep and the great Shepherd of the sheep. No one enters the sheepfold, except through Him. Apart from Him, all others who claim to be shepherds are thieves and robbers,

intent not on the salvation of the sheep but on their destruction.

This was also the heart of apostolic preaching, as found in the book of Acts. First, Bullinger refers to Peter’s statement in his sermon before leaders of the Jews, after he and John were arrested in the aftermath of the miracle of healing the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. Peter begins by insisting that the disabled man was not cured by their “power or holiness” (Acts 3:12). Rather, it was Jesus, the Prince of Life whom the Jews had killed but whom God raised from the dead who made the lame man to walk” (Acts 3:15-16). Peter’s conclusion: “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

Bullinger next refers to Peter’s sermon before Cornelius and his household. Peter refers to Jesus’ own preaching, as well as that of John the Baptist and the apostles, all of whom gave “witness, that through [Jesus’] name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). Besides observing that remission of sins (forgiveness) follows “believing in Jesus,” remission of sins—apart from which there is no salvation—is in Jesus Christ alone.

Bullinger further quotes from Acts 15, the chapter on the deliberations and decisions of the first broader assembly of the church, the Jerusalem council. Early in the discussion, the apostle Peter, likely reflecting on the salvation of Cornelius and his household, declared: “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:11).

Many more passages could be cited from the book of Acts. In all their public preaching, as well as in their discussion with individuals or small groups, the apostles insisted that Jesus Christ is the only Savior and that there is no possibility of salvation apart from faith in Jesus Christ. Throughout the books of Acts it is the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles who stir up persecution against the apostles. They reject the message of the gospel that Jesus is the only Savior and they reject the call of the gospel to believe in Jesus. Time and again they are responsible for raising up persecution against the apostles and early Christians.

In addition to the passages in Acts, Bullinger cites three passages from the New Testament epistles:

I Corinthians 10:3 and following, Galatians 5:4, and Revelation 13:8. The force of these passages is the same as those that are referred to in Acts, that Jesus Christ is *the* Lamb of God, who alone takes away the sin of the world. In Him there is salvation for time and for eternity. Apart from Him there is only the wrath of God and everlasting destruction.

An important part of the instruction of this paragraph is its defense of the truth that Christ was the Savior also of all the Old Testament saints. Those who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ include “all who before the law, [and] under the law” believed in Christ. Those “who before the law” believed in Christ are especially the patriarchs and those who preceded them from the seed of the woman. They lived before the formal giving of the law from Mt. Sinai during the time of Moses. Those who were saved under the law is a reference especially to the nation of Israel who were led by Moses out of Egypt, through Joshua were brought into the promised land, continued as the kingdom of the ten northern tribes and the two southern tribes, were carried off into captivity, and eventually were assimilated into the Roman Empire prior to the dawn of the New Testament and the birth of Christ. Contrary to the heresy of the Dispensationalists, faith in Jesus Christ has *always* been the means unto salvation. Sinners in the Old Testament were saved by a faith in Jesus Christ that was forward looking, and sinners in the New Testament are saved by a faith that looks back upon Christ’s finished work.

THE ONLY SAVIOR BECAUSE HE IS AN EFFICACIOUS SAVIOR

The truth that Jesus is the only Savior rests on the truth that He is an efficacious Savior, that is, that He has actually saved us. His doing and dying are sufficient to atone for all our sins. We do not need any other savior because Christ has done everything that is necessary to be done for our salvation. “Wherefore, we quite openly profess and preach that Jesus Christ is the sole Redeemer and Savior of the world, the King and High Priest, the true and awaited Messiah, that holy and blessed One whom all the types of the law and predictions of the prophets prefigured and promised; and that God appointed Him beforehand and sent Him to us, so that we are not now to look for any other.” We are not to look for any other savior, first, because God appointed Jesus Christ in His eternal counsel. That which God appoints in His eternal counsel comes to pass and is realized. God appointed one Savior of sinners, the Lord Jesus Christ. And then, secondly, when He came into the world, He fully accomplished the salvation of elect sinners as God had appointed. Twice in the article, Bullinger refers to Jesus as the “true Messiah.” He is the true Messiah because He is not the Messiah in name only but in reality. Thus, “we are not now to look for any other” Savior than Christ alone.

Our calling, then, is clear. We are “to give all glory to Christ, believe in Him, rest in Him alone, despising and rejecting all other aids in life” and for eternity. What a beautiful description of true faith! Those who truly believe in Jesus give Him all the glory for their salvation, rest in Him alone for their salvation, and despise and reject all others who put themselves forward as saviors. These are both the activity and evidence of true faith, in distinction from every form of false faith.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC (Walker, MI) expresses our sincere sympathies to fellow officebearer Joel Vink, his son Ethan and fiancé Megan Karsemeyer, in the death of their beloved wife and mother, **Barbara Vink**. We also express sympathy to Barb’s parents, Jim and Barb Huizinga, her siblings: Michael and Shari Bosveld, Brad and Julie Schwartz, Vance and Sue Grasman, Tom and Kristin Huizinga, Brad and Sara Schipper, Laura Huizinga, and many beloved nieces and nephews. Praying God will bring comfort with the words of Psalm 48:14, “For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death.”

Rev. J. Mahtani, Pres.

Jon Rutgers, Clerk

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WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With gratitude to our heavenly Father, we rejoice with our parents, **Prof. Ron and Rhonda Cammenga**, as they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on July 19, 2024, the Lord willing. We are thankful for their godly instruction and example to us of what a loving, Christian marriage looks like. “For the LORD is good; his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endured to all generations” (Psalm 100:5).

Marc and Rebekah Kuiper
Kerwen and Catherine Kooiker
Ben and Liz Cammenga
Chuck and Catherine Cammenga
Lee and Laura Kooienga
Derek and Leanne Cnossen
Bryan and Amy Knott
Daniel Cammenga (in glory)
Josh and Tracy Meinzer
Rev. Erik and Cherith Guichelaar
Jared and Taylor Cammenga
45 grandchildren
2 great grandchildren

Grandville, Michigan

NOTIFICATION OF CANDIDACY

All Protestant Reformed congregations are hereby informed that the 2024 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America has declared Mr. Arend Haveman a candidate for the gospel ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Candidate Haveman will be eligible for a call on or after July 13, 2024.

Mr. Haveman's address is:

11447 104th Ave.

West Olive, MI 49460

Phone #: 616-283-9950

Email: arend.haveman01@gmail.com

Douglas Mingerink, Stated Clerk

CLASSIS EAST

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 18, 2024, at 8:00 A.M., in the Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 19, 2024.

Rev. C. Spronk, Stated Clerk

CLASSIS WEST

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Hull, Iowa, on Wednesday, September 25, 2024, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 26, 2024. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Hull's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk



REV. WILBUR BRUINSMA

- 7/7 Jedidah and the Elect Remnant, II Kings 22:1, 2
7/14 Mary Foresees Christ's Death, John 12:1-8
7/21 Tabitha Raised from the Dead, Acts 9:36-42
7/28 God Opens Lydia's Heart, Acts 16:13-15
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