

THE STANDARD BEARER

OCTOBER
2024

VOLUME 101, NUMBER 1

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A MONTHLY REFORMED MAGAZINE

EDITOR'S NOTES

With heartfelt thanks and praise to God for His preserving grace we begin volume 101 of the *Standard Bearer* (SB)! For 100 years now, since October 1, 1924, the Lord has given generations of Protestant Reformed writers the privilege of using the SB to showcase the doctrinal riches of the Reformed faith with an application of that glorious truth to every facet of the believer's life. Focus has always been given to the sovereignty of God in His everlasting covenant of grace with His elect people in Jesus Christ. May God continue to favor us with His blessings so that we can use the pages of this magazine to declare His praises for years to come.

With this new volume year there are some changes to note.

As to editorship, Professor Gritters has retired as one of the three editors of the magazine. For his many years of instructive and insightful editorials we heartily thank him. His fellow editors are especially grateful for his wise counsel and leadership as editor-in-chief the last few years. Prof. Gritters will continue writing in a new rubric that appears in this issue: "For the Church." As has already been announced, Professor Griess will be

stepping into the role of editor, and we look forward to his editorials beginning in the upcoming issue. With the position of "editor-in-chief" rotating among the editors every three years, it now transfers to the undersigned.

As to changes in our staff of writers, we say goodbye to Mr. Dan Kuiper and thank him for his edifying contributions in the rubric, "All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee." I recall his final article was on the cicada and the remarkable attributes with which its Creator, our heavenly Father, endowed it. We are delighted that Rev. James Laning agreed to contribute to this rubric in addition to his other writing responsibilities. Finally, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma will take a temporary break from writing in the mission rubric, "Go Ye Into all the World" and in the rubric "When Thou Sittest."

As to publishing, remember that the SB is moving from a twice-monthly to a once-monthly publication, though each issue will expand by eight pages. In addition, we will continue our practice of publishing two special issues each year, one in the spring and one in the fall. We often hear remarks of special appreciation for these issues. If you have suggestions for important topics that could fill



The *Standard Bearer* (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a monthly periodical with two special issues (Fall and Spring) published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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

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Annual subscription price

Print: \$32 USA / \$52 international
Digital: \$22 / free to print subscribers

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

Editorial office

Prof. Brian Huizinga
4949 Ivanrest Ave SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
b.huizinga@prca.org

Business office

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

out an entire issue (the fall issue usually has a Reformation theme), please let us know. Look for a dandy special issue next month on the 100-year anniversary of the *SB*!

As to cost, the RFPA recently announced that the cost for a domestic subscription has *decreased* from \$37 to \$32 per year! The international subscription price remains \$52 US and the esubscription \$22 US.

As to the magazine's attractive look, we thank Erika Kiel for the fresh design that made its debut this past June. Do take note of the stamp on the front cover. While we have recently been using a centennial stamp to commemorate 100 years, the stamp has been altered slightly to include the last phrase of Isaiah 62:10, "Lift up a standard for the people." We writers do well to remember these words in preparing our articles: "For the people!" In these last and evil days, God's people need good guidance regarding doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Let's write with them in mind and remember that our readership extends outside of the USA.

Thanks to all the men and women who make up the *SB* staff and do the hard work of writing. Your commitment to the cause of this magazine is valued. The wide variety of articles touching so many important topics continues to make the magazine a great read. A special word of thanks goes to Mr. Charles Terpstra, our managing editor, and Mrs. Judi Doezema, our typesetter. Only a few people know how many hours they invest in every single issue of the magazine, week after week, month after month, year after year. Their dedication is commendable! In all these things we are indebted to our Lord Jesus Christ who purchased us with His blood and strengthens by His Spirit.

We covet your prayers for the magazine. May God give us the humility and firm conviction of our predecessors to keep the light of the Reformed faith burning as a standard for the people.

If you benefit from the magazine, tell others, and tell them why.

B. Huizinga

MEDITATION



THE FEAR OF GOD'S WORD REWARDED

REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA

minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches and member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Whoso despiseth the word shall be destroyed: but he that feareth the commandment shall be rewarded—Proverbs 13:13.

What is your attitude toward the Word of God?

This proverb speaks of those who fear God's Word and those who despise it. These two are opposite of each other. These are also mutually exclusive. There is no third possibility.

This proverb was given to the church of the Old Testament. This indicates that you will find both attitudes in the church as she comes to visible manifestation on the earth—those who fear God's Word and those who despise it.

And so the question is very much to the point, Which are you? One who fears God's commandment? Or one who despises it?

Finally, this proverb speaks of the result of fearing and despising the Word. Those who despise the Word of God shall be destroyed. Those who fear the Word of God shall be rewarded.

The obvious implication is that we must fear the Word of God and not despise it.

This is the wisdom of God!

THE WORD AND COMMANDMENT OF GOD

The Word of God mentioned in this proverb was a word first spoken by God through His prophets. We must also

be clear about the content of God's Word. Whenever God speaks, He speaks of Himself as the God of salvation in Jesus Christ to all and everyone who believes. He also speaks of His judgment upon all His enemies who turn not to Him in Jesus Christ. God has preserved His spoken Word by leading holy men, often the same men who spoke His Word, to commit His Word to writing by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

This proverb also makes mention of God's commandment. This identifies an important part of God's Word. It calls our attention especially to the laws that God gave to Israel at Mt. Sinai and that regulated Israel's life in the Old Testament.

Let's take a closer look at these laws or commandments.

First, there were the Ten Commandments (moral laws) written on tables of stone. These reveal God's will for man's life—how God would have man to live with Him and each other in His covenant. The heart of this law is to love God and love the neighbor. Each commandment shows how we are to manifest that love. The fact that these commandments were written on tables of stone indicate that they are valid for all time.

But in addition to the Ten Commandments were the civil and ceremonial laws. The ceremonial laws were the religious laws that taught Israel how to worship God at the tabernacle; the civil laws were the laws of the state that organized Israel into a nation. These laws were of great importance. They proclaimed the salvation of God to Israel. Through the ceremonial laws Israel received a picture of the coming Christ and His great works of salvation. Through the civil laws Israel received a picture of the kingdom of heaven to come. Only by clinging to the salvation proclaimed in the civil and ceremonial laws could the church of the Old Testament serve God according to the moral laws of the Ten Commandments.

This is important to know to understand the Bible we have today.

Initially the Word and commandments of God comprised only the first five books of the Bible written by Moses—the Pentateuch. During the remainder of the Old Dispensation the civil and ceremonial laws were in effect proclaiming salvation and God's will to Israel in shadow form. But in addition, God also spoke through the prophets, making the promises of salvation contained in the law ever clearer. God also confirmed

these promises through many mighty miracles. This greater revelation God faithfully recorded in the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures by infallible inspiration.

In the fullness of time God fulfilled the promises of the Old Testament through His Son, Jesus Christ. He did this through Jesus' birth, death, resurrection, ascension, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. These great works of salvation, which fully reveal the purpose of God for His people, are infallibly recorded in the New Testament Scriptures. With the coming of Christ, the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws fall away. Yet the Ten Commandments remain, as do also the principles of the civil and ceremonial laws.

This is the Word and commandment of God.

FEAR AND DESPISING!

This proverb speaks of fearing God's Word.

To fear the Word of God is to stand in awe and reverence of it. The Word of God is awe-inspiring. This is because the Word of God reveals God Himself as the God of salvation in Jesus Christ. Nothing is as awe-inspiring as that. Those who fear God's Word do so because they revere the God who is revealed in it.

This godly fear is a fruit of God's grace received when we are born again. By nature, we do not stand in awe of God but despise Him. It requires a new birth and a changed heart to stand in awe of God as He has revealed Himself in the Word as the God of our salvation.

This fear manifests itself in several wonderful ways.

It manifests itself, first, in a faithful and diligent use of God's Word. Obviously, those who stand in awe of God's Word will not neglect it but use it. They regularly attend the preaching of God's Word, study God's Word, teach it to their children, and discuss it with their fellow saints.

This fear manifests itself, second, in an embracing of the salvation revealed in the Word. God has revealed Himself in His Word especially as the Savior of His people in Jesus Christ. Those who stand in awe of that revelation embrace the God who has revealed Himself. They embrace Him as their Savior and they embrace Jesus Christ in whom that salvation is accomplished. They seek that salvation with all their heart. And that salvation they find, as do all who seek it earnestly. They find the forgiveness of their sins. They find a new

life with God in Jesus Christ. They live in the hope of eternal life with God in glory.

Finally, fearing God's Word manifests itself in a loving obedience to God's commandments. Remember, this proverb speaks of fearing God's commandment, of holding the commandments of God and the life they require in high esteem. Those who fear God's commandment obviously will keep His commandments joyfully. They do so in the power of the salvation they have found in Jesus Christ.

Is this you?

Over against this the proverb speaks of those who despise the Word of God, which is the exact opposite of fearing it.

To despise the Word of God is to consider it to be of no value and even to hate and loathe it. Those who despise the Word of God do so because they despise God and the great salvation revealed in God's Word. It is the plight of natural, fallen man that they despise God's Word.

Despising God and His Word is manifest in several horrible ways.

First, there is a sad neglect of the Word of God. Those who despise God's Word have time for their careers, for entertainment, for sports, for friends...but they never really have time for the Word of God. The Word of God is not in their thoughts or life.

Despising God's Word manifests itself, second, in a rejection of God's salvation and Jesus Christ in whom that salvation is found. God's Word reminds them of their sin. It calls them to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. They turn their back on all of it. They do not seek forgiveness for their sins. Nor do they seek to live with God in Jesus Christ according to His commandments. They despise it all and trample it underfoot.

As we indicated earlier, those who despise God's Word are not limited to those outside the church visible. They also are found within. They are often irregular in their attendance on the Sabbath day. When they are present, their attention is elsewhere. They tend to move to a church that has severely compromised the gospel message giving glory to man instead of God. They gravitate to churches that provide them with entertainment on the Sabbath day. They may make a confession of faith in Jesus Christ, but it is false. They may make a show of serving God before others, but

in their home and private life they trample under foot God's commandments.

Which are you? Do you fear God's Word? Or despise it?

REWARD AND DESTRUCTION!

Those who despise the Word will be destroyed. Literally, they shall bring ruin upon themselves.

This ruin will come upon them both in this life and in eternity.

The ruin they bring upon themselves in this life will be the direct consequences of their sinful way. At best they will find a life of emptiness (vanity) that Solomon found in his years of departure from God's Word and reported in the book of Ecclesiastes. More often there is the sorrow of sin's consequences in failed marriages, broken homes, and ruined lives. Perhaps worse, God visits the iniquity of their sins upon their children. Their children will run in the sins in which their parents only walk.

And without repentance there will be the destruction of God's eternal wrath in hell.

Let us be warned!

But those who fear the Word will be rewarded.

They will be rewarded both in time and eternity.

In this life they will be rewarded with the joy of God's friendship and fellowship. This will be found in and enjoyed especially in a covenant home as set forth in Psalm 128:

Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.

For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee. Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

And in eternity they will be rewarded with heavenly glory.

This reward is a reward not of merit but of pure grace, received by faith.

It is a reward set before us to encourage us to fear God's Word and commandment, especially when that fear requires us to deny ourselves and take up our cross as we follow Jesus.

Take heed to the wisdom of this parable.

Fear God's Word and commandment with your eye on His gracious reward.



REFLECTIONS ON SYNOD 2024 AND THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION (4)

REV. JOSHUA ENGELSMA

pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

INTRODUCTION

Up to this point in my reflections on the doctrinal decisions of Synod 2024 of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRCA), I have related the experience of salvation to the doctrines of the saving work of Christ, God's forgiveness of our sins, and faith. In this concluding editorial, I want to address the relation between the experience of salvation and the believer's good works.

I note briefly that there are a number of sub-topics that could be addressed in a treatment of the relation between the experience of salvation and good works. There is the matter of the believer enjoying covenant fellowship with God in the way of obedience. I am not going to treat the matter of "in the way of obedience" here, since it is a subject that has been addressed at length elsewhere.¹ There is also the relation between good works and the reward of grace. I am not going to treat this topic either, but I direct the interested reader to the masterful treatment of this subject in the newly published book of one of my colleagues.² There is also the matter of a life of good works being the necessary pathway along which God leads His people to final salvation in glory (cf. Matt. 7:14; Heb. 12:14). I am not going to treat this subject either, as one of my fellow editors has intentions of touching on the subject in an upcoming editorial, God willing.

In treating the relation between the experience of salvation and good works in this editorial, I want to

focus on the relation between good works and assurance of salvation in general and, specifically, the issue of how good works relate to the assurance of justification.

I want to focus on this specific subject because this was one of the issues treated by Synod 2024. As a reminder, synod declared two statements to be erroneous, judging that they wrongly gave to good works a similar necessity, place, and function in salvation as faith:

- Statement #1: "Scripture teaches that something must be done that we may be saved" (where the something that must be done refers to good works).
- Statement #2: "We must accurately distinguish between a right to life and the possession of life. The former must be assigned to the obedience of Christ, that all the values of our holiness may be entirely excluded. But certainly, our works, or rather these, which the Spirit of Christ worketh in us, and by us, contribute something to the latter."

Synod also made a judgment regarding a third statement: "Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification." Synod's judgment was that Statement #3, although not a clear statement of orthodoxy, is not erroneous. I want to explain this judgment more fully.

THE RELATION OF GOOD WORKS TO ASSURANCE IN GENERAL

I want to begin by considering the relation between good works and the assurance of salvation in general.

The Reformed confessions, summarizing the teaching of God's Word, clearly teach a relation between good works and the assurance of various aspects of our salvation, including election, faith, and preservation.

1 See, for example, Brian L. Huizinga, "Synod 2018 of the Protestant Reformed Churches and Holy Scripture: Enjoying Fellowship in the Way of Obedience," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 56.2 (2023): 3-29; and Joshua Engelsma, "In the Way of Obedience," *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* 55.1 (2021): 31-43.

2 Brian L. Huizinga, *Crowning His Gifts: Gracious Rewards in the Reformed Tradition* (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2024).

Canons 1.12 indicates that good works are the evidence of one's election:

The elect in due time, though in various degrees and in different measures, attain the assurance of this their eternal and unchangeable election, not by inquisitively prying into the secret and deep things of God, but by observing in themselves...the infallible fruits of election pointed out in the Word of God—such as a true faith in Christ, filial fear, a godly sorrow for sin, a hungering and thirsting after righteousness, etc.

Lord's Day 32 of the Heidelberg Catechism affirms that good works are evidence to the believer of a true faith: "...also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof..."

Canons 5.10 teaches that good works are the evidence of one's preservation:

This assurance...springs from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word for our comfort; from the testimony of the Holy Spirit, witnessing with our spirit, that we are children and heirs of God (Rom. 8:16); and lastly, from a serious and holy desire to preserve a good conscience and to perform good works.

Good works are the fruit of faith; therefore, they serve as evidence that one's faith is genuine and not counterfeit. By first pointing back to faith, only then do good works serve as evidence of election and preservation.

While the confessions do make this connection between good works and assurance, it is important to note as well the subordinate role that the confessions give to this connection.

This subordinate place of works in relation to assurance is especially evident from the precise wording used by the fathers of Dordt in Canons 5.10. First, a desire to perform good works is listed third, after faith in God's promises and the witness of the Holy Spirit. Second, in our English translation the three ideas of faith in God's promises, the witness of the Holy Spirit, and a desire to perform good works are listed in the same sentence; however, in the original the first two are combined in one sentence and the third is found in a new sentence, separate from the first. This indicates a distinction between faith in God's promises and the witness of the Holy Spirit on the one hand and a desire to perform good works on the other. Third, the mention

of a holy desire for good works is preceded by the words "and lastly" (Latin: *denique*). This wording is intended to convey the subordinate role of good works in relation to assurance. One author explains the force of this Latin word in Canons 5.10 this way:

The focus is on the promises of God in his word.... Moreover, while sanctification and good works have a place they are last in order, certainly not dominant. Here the force of the *denique* should be realized. Sanctification supports assurance only when assurance is already grounded elsewhere, on the promise of God and the work of the Spirit.³

The place of works in relation to assurance is in a secondary, supportive role as confirmatory evidences. The child of God does not ground his assurance in his working. Assurance is grounded in the promises of God and the work of Christ, and is received and enjoyed by faith in Christ. Works serve in a secondary, supportive role to show especially that our faith is genuine.

Reformed theologians of the past have affirmed the connection between good works and assurance, while also warning against giving too prominent a place to works.

John Calvin wrote in his *Institutes* (3.14.18),

Therefore, when we rule out reliance upon works, we mean only this: that the Christian mind may not be turned back to the merit of works as to a help toward salvation but should rely wholly on the free promise of righteousness. But we do not forbid him from undergirding and strengthening this faith by signs of the divine benevolence toward him. For if, when all the gifts God has bestowed upon us are called to mind, they are like rays of the divine countenance by which we are illumined to contemplate that supreme light of goodness; much more is this true of the grace of good works, which shows that the Spirit of adoption has been given to us (cf. Rom. 8:15).

Calvin made a similar point in his commentary on 1 John 4:17: "Nor do we deny that newness of life, as it is the effect of divine adoption, serves to confirm confidence, as a prop, so to speak, of the second order; but in the meantime we ought to have our foundation on grace alone."

Herman Bavinck wrote similarly,

Hence we can speak of these good works, as joining

3 Robert Letham, "Dort and Its Controversies," *Mid-America Journal of Theology* 30 (2019):18. For the original Latin of Canons 5.10, cf. Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* (New York: Harper, 1877), 3:573.

the faith in God's promises and the testimony of the Holy Spirit, and as deserving attention, in the third place, as a means by which God assures the believers of their adoption as children in Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Question 86; Canons of Dort, V, 10). But we must carefully note that in seeking for assurance we cannot begin with these good works, that the faith can never firmly lean or rest upon them, and that still less can they be performed by us with a view to our achieving the assurance of salvation by means of them. For all works are imperfect, and they are more or less perfect in proportion to the extent that they issue from a stronger or weaker faith. But to the extent that they do issue from a true faith, they can serve as aids to our assurance. Just as faith proves and illustrates itself in good works, so the faith is also confirmed and strengthened by them.⁴

THE RELATION OF GOOD WORKS TO THE ASSURANCE OF JUSTIFICATION SPECIFICALLY

The specific point debated at Synod 2024 was not so much the relation between good works and assurance generally as it was the relation between good works and the assurance of one's justification specifically. The statement in question was: "Hence, I conclude, that sanctification and its effects, are by no means to be slighted, when we treat of assuring the soul as to its justification." Synod's judgment was: "This statement, although not a clear statement of orthodoxy, is not erroneous."

On the one hand, synod's judgment was that this statement was not erroneous. Synod's explanation made plain what it meant: this statement was not erroneous, *if what is meant by it* is merely that good works serve indirectly as a confirmatory evidence of justification.

Synod maintained that one has the assurance of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, apart from works. At most, good works serve as a confirmatory evidence of one's justification, since justification is the basis for sanctification and sanctification necessarily follows justification (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 24).

In addition, good works serve at most as a confirmatory evidence of justification *in an indirect way*. Good works serve as confirmatory evidences specifically of faith and that faith is a genuine faith; since we are justified by faith, our works serve indirectly as evidence that we are justified by this genuine faith.

After proving from the confessions that good works serve as confirmatory evidences of election, faith, and preservation, synod reasoned that if our works have this relation to these other blessings of salvation, then "it would not be erroneous to understand that works also serve indirectly as confirmatory evidences of justification, for we are justified by a true faith, the elect are justified, and the justified are preserved."

While synod did not do so, it could have appealed to the many respected theologians of the Reformed tradition who spoke of good works as evidences, proofs, signs, testimonies, or witnesses of justification. In a recently published collection of works by Reformed theologians on justification, this language is used frequently. For example, Theodore Beza (1519-1605) wrote of sanctification that "we rest on no part of it at all as a cause of our reconciliation and salvation. But we nevertheless hold it as a sure sign of our faith and of the perfect justification imputed to us." Later he wrote that good works "are truly testimonies through Christ seized by faith, of absolution already obtained and of free acceptance to eternal life, both before God and in their consciences." He also wrote, "[W]e call faith the instrumental cause of seizing Christ. But we acknowledge good works as witnesses of faith and of justification obtained." And again he wrote, "Yet it by no means must be denied that the peace of our consciences and expectation of salvation are supported by that sanctification and its fruits as sure proofs of our free sonship and justification obtained in Christ."⁵ The Scottish Presbyterian James Buchanan (1804-1870) spoke of justification being "manifested or declared" by good works, and wrote that good works "are the effects of faith, and, as such, the evidences both of faith and of justification," citing as proof Jesus' words to the sinful woman who washed his feet (Luke 7:36-50) and the apostle's instruction in James 2.⁶ In his treatment of justification, Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949) wrote, "That without doubt there is a testimony of good works and conduct from which believers themselves and others can

4 Herman Bavinck, *The Wonderful Works of God: Instruction in the Christian Religion according to the Reformed Confession* (Glenside, PA: Westminster Seminary Press, 2019), 494.

5 *Justification by Faith Alone: Selected Writings from Theodore Beza, Amandus Polanus, Francis Turretin* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2023), 13, 43, 66, 114.

6 James Buchanan, *The Doctrine of Justification: An Outline of its History in the Church and of its Exposition from Scripture* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2017), 328, 331-332.

draw strengthened assurance that they truly are children of God, that Christ's power is working in them, and that they are increasing in living righteously."⁷ More recently, David Engelsma wrote, "James describes the believer's demonstration and proof of his free justification by faith alone. One who has been justified by faith alone will show this justification. He will show it to other humans. He will confirm his justification to himself."⁸

While on the one hand synod judged that Statement #3 was not erroneous, on the other hand synod judged that the statement was "not a clear statement of orthodoxy" and that "while this statement is not necessarily in error, we ought to be cautious about how we use it." Synod was aware that the wording of Statement #3 all by itself could lead some to think that good works are essential to having the assurance of one's justification, which is not true.

Synod was determined to guard the truth that justification is by faith alone, without works. Synod explained its caution this way:

With respect to the assurance of justification specifically, the confessions emphasize that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, never mentioning any positive role of good works but rather

repudiating them. This emphasis ought to caution us against bringing in the matter of good works even as a confirmatory evidence of our justification. We have the assurance of being justified by faith in Christ. At most, our works serve as confirmatory evidences of our justification in an indirect way. Our works serve as evidences specifically of faith and that our faith is a genuine faith (cf. James 2); since we are justified by faith, our works serve indirectly as evidence that we are justified by this genuine faith.

Synod 2024 also reaffirmed the warning given by a previous synod: the believer does not *find* the assurance of his justification in his works nor do his works *maintain* his assurance of justification. At most (and this is a very limited role), good works "may serve as a confirmatory evidence to one who already has the assurance of his justification that he is in the faith, and thus that he is justified by faith."

In no way ought synod's decision to be understood as throwing the guilt-stricken sinner back upon his works for the assurance of his justification. The guilt-stricken sinner must not look to his works, but rather repudiate them, and rest by faith in the saving works of Jesus Christ. Then he has peace and assurance and the experience of his salvation. Good works serve in a secondary way to show that the faith by which we are justified is a genuine rather than counterfeit faith, and thus serve at most in an indirect way as evidence of that which we are already assured by faith: that we are right with God for Christ's sake alone.

7 Geerhardus Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2015), 4:166.

8 David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed* (Jenison: RFPA, 2017), 423.

LETTERS

Greetings *Standard Bearer*,

I would like to encourage Rev. Josh Engelsma in his writings in the August 2024 issue of the *Standard Bearer* and his reference to the passive and active obedience of Christ. Christ's *one* complete work. Especially, as it relates to our recent and historical doctrinal denominational disputes.

I also want to pass along to other readers who may be interested in some of the references that have helped me better understand and appreciate the significance of Christ's obedience as it relates to our daily walk and resulting peace of heart and mind.

- "The Obedience of Christ," Rev. R. Harbach (*Standard Bearer*, May 1, 1968).

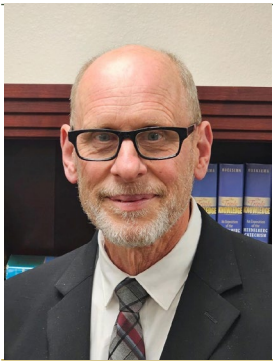
- *Gospel Truth of Justification*, Prof. David Engelsma (RFPA, 2017).

- "To Obey is Better Than Sacrifice: A Defense of the Active Obedience of Christ in the Light of Recent Criticism" [*criticism* referred to is New Perspective on Paul and Federal Vision], Dr. David VanDrunen, chapter 6 in *By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges of the Doctrine of Justification* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006).

The following is a fitting quote from theologian Dr. J. Gresham Machen, written to one of his friends as he was dying: "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it."

I look forward to Rev. Josh Engelsma's future articles.

Wes Koops, Holland, MI



NAHUM (6)

GOOD TIDINGS OF PEACE (1)

REV. RONALD HANKO

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

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2024, p. 514.

Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off—Nahum 1:15.

Surprisingly, the first chapter of the unfamiliar prophecy of Nahum ends with a verse that is familiar from its quotation in the New Testament (Rom. 10:15), and which seems at first glance to have nothing to do with the subject of the chapter or of the book. Nahum 1:15 reads: “Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace!” It is not only quoted in the New Testament but is quoted with some changes taken from Nahum’s contemporary, Isaiah, “How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, thy God reigneth!” (Is. 52:7)

In the Hebrew Bible Nahum 1:15 is the first verse of chapter 2. But since the chapter and verse divisions are not inspired, its placement makes little difference. Either as the last verse of chapter 1 or the first verse of chapter 2, it serves as a transition to the vivid description of Nineveh’s destruction that follows.

The good tidings are the news reports of Nineveh’s downfall and of the peace that would come to Judah with Nineveh’s end. The verse describes the bringing of the good news by a messenger who arrives at the mountains of Jerusalem—Zion, Moriah, Akra and Bezetha—with his message. The word “behold,” not found in Isaiah 52:7, describes both the delighted surprise his message brings to a city long oppressed by the Assyrians and also the city’s shock at Assyria’s sudden end. The focus on the feet of the messenger has to do with his haste in

bringing these good tidings. One cannot read the verse and its reference to the feet of the messenger without thinking of someone running with this amazing news. Isaiah and Nahum are among the messengers, though they did not have to run to Jerusalem; but there must also have been actual messengers when Nahum’s prophecy reached its fulfillment and the tidings of Assyria’s end came quickly to the gates of Jerusalem.

Nahum does not describe the feet of the messenger as beautiful, though Isaiah does. It seems that Nahum’s focus is on the message, while Isaiah’s is on the arrival of the messenger, whose very feet, dusty and bruised, would have been beautiful indeed on account of his message.

The messenger, then, is described as bringing the news that God’s Word in Nahum 1 has been fulfilled, a fitting end to that chapter, but a fitting start to the next chapter as well. Chapter 2 vividly, though prophetically, describes the actual downfall of Nineveh, and one can imagine the messenger, having caught his breath, giving the description of chapter 2. Isaiah was the first messenger and Nahum followed, both of them messengers who arrived before the actual event, announcing the Word of God ahead of time, so sure was God’s Word concerning the downfall of Nineveh.

Judah is, then, exhorted to enjoy the peace brought by Assyria’s destruction: “O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.” Under Assyria’s domination, Judah’s keeping of the feasts and bringing of the sacrifices would have been interrupted and often impossible. The people would have been scattered and led captive. Those who were left would have been driven from their farms and cities. The animals they needed to keep their vows would have been carried off

by the raiding bands of Assyrians. There would have been little bread for the feast of unleavened bread, few boughs of trees for the feast of tabernacles, no possibility of bringing the scapegoat out into the wilderness or burning the remains of the other goat outside the camp. The trumpets would have been used to warn the people of another Assyrian incursion and not to summon them to the Feast of Trumpets.

The exhortation with which verse 12 ends is also a reminder of Judah's past sins, of their not keeping vows and feasts and of their sacrificing to strange gods. Having been delivered from Assyria, Judah had to show her gratitude to God by returning to the way of obedience. God had chastened His people and they had to show that they had learned from those chastisements.

Nahum's (and Isaiah's) prophecy was first heard in the Old Testament, but its quotation in Romans 10:15 opens a new understanding of the prophecy. There the reference is to the preaching of the gospel as the means God uses to save His people, as the context reveals:

How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God (vv. 14-17).

In Romans 10:15, the emphasis is on the sending of the gospel messengers by God. Nahum 1:15 is quoted as proof of the statement: "And how shall they preach, except they be sent?" That the messengers who bring the glad tidings and preach the gospel must be sent by God is an important truth, seldom recognized today. The messengers of the gospel are not self-appointed, but God's appointees. They must be called and sent by God Himself, as Nahum and Isaiah and all the other prophets were. One of the New Testament words for preachers and preaching has to do with heralds and their work of bringing messages from the king. No one may take it upon himself to preach the gospel.

This is true because the gospel messengers are heralds. A herald is one who is sent with a specific message. In the case of gospel heralds that message is

found in the Word of God and one who is sent by the King of kings must bring that message in its entirety and nothing besides. He may not leave out any parts of the King's message that he dislikes, perhaps certain doctrines such as the doctrine of predestination or the doctrine of eternal punishment. But he may not add his own thoughts and opinions, political and social commentary, jokes and other such things to the message either. His message must always be, as Nahum's was, "Thus saith the Lord."

Only in so far as his message is the word of the King is anyone obligated to pay attention. What a gospel messenger thinks about the next elections, about the war in the Mideast or Ukraine and of other such matters is of no more weight than the opinions of the smiling, biased, lying, and unbelieving news commentators. For that reason, too, the message of the herald must always be checked against its written copy in the Word of God, for the King has given His message there also.

Those to whom the messenger, the preacher and herald, comes must hear His message, then, not because he can shout loudly or because he has a nice way of bringing the King's message but because he is sent. Sent by the King, he is the mouthpiece of the King and his message the word of the King, which must be received and obeyed. Those who hear it must be like the Bereans who checked even the words of the apostle Paul himself against the Word of God (Acts 17:11). Those who do not do so, who simply accept without question everything the preacher tells them, are not good citizens of the King and His kingdom. But heard and verified by Scripture, the word of the King is law.

I knew a man years ago who left his church and joined another because the minister, the preacher, spent too many "sermons" telling the people which political party and which presidential candidate they should vote for. That man was a good citizen of the kingdom who understood that no citizen has an obligation to listen to anything from preachers but the Word of the King Himself.

That these messengers of the gospel must be sent if their message is to have any authority can be illustrated from everyday life. I might get wind of some important political developments in a foreign country that concern the well-being and future of my own country.

I might then take it upon myself to bring the news of these developments, good or evil, to the attention of the political leaders of my own country. They, however, are under no obligation to listen or to act on my word, since I have no official status and have not been “sent.” But if the ambassador comes with the very same message I brought, my leaders must pay attention and act accordingly because he was “sent.”

Christ is the One who speaks through preachers and the One who gives them their authority, but the message they bring has authority only if they are sent and only if they bring His Word to His people, the citizens of His kingdom. Those citizens, therefore, must compare every word that is spoken in Christ’s name with the message He has given them in His written Word. But they must also be sure that the messenger has proper credentials, for if he is not sent they are under no obligation to listen, no matter whether his message be truth or lies. If the messenger is sent and the message is the same as they find in the Word, then they are obligated to hear and obey, whether they like the message or not.

Christ sends, commissions, and authorizes His messengers through the laying on of hands or ordination (Acts 1:22; 13:3; 1 Tim. 4:14; Tit. 1:5). Even Christ Himself had to have official sanction and authority for the work of redemption: “So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee.” The ordination and sending of preachers takes place through the church as the example of Saul and Barnabas in Acts 13:1-4 so clearly shows. Their ordination and sending by the church of Antioch is identified there with the sending of the Holy Ghost.

The church today is plagued by self-appointed “preachers” of the gospel who claim to speak in Christ’s name when they have not been authorized or sent by Him, but also by preachers, who, though properly appointed and sent, bring another message than Christ’s own. Members who are as careless about the message as are the messengers, who sit like lumps in the pews sucking in everything the preacher says to them, never opening the Word of God to see what that message ought to be, are also trouble in the church.

When a messenger or preacher is sent and brings the Word of God and nothing else, then Christ Himself

becomes the messenger, the One who speaks through the preacher. That is another biblical truth seldom recognized today.

That He is the messenger of whom Nahum speaks is clear from Romans 10:15. Romans 10:14 should be translated to read, “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him *whom*¹ they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?” It is His voice that is heard in the preaching of the gospel, and the power of His voice that makes the gospel the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16). That is the only reason why faith comes by hearing.

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.” When Paul speaks of the salvation of the Ephesian believers, he ascribes that to the fact that Christ came and preached peace to them (Eph. 2:14-17). Not Paul’s preaching but Christ’s was the power of God unto salvation to them.

Even when He sends others, Christ is the One who speaks and the message is also His. It is not the eloquence of the preacher, nor his skill in bringing the Word of God that saves. What mere man’s voice can change hearts and lives? It is always He who comes on the mountains of Zion with the message of salvation, salvation through the judgment and destruction of all enemies, accomplished not with the power of arms, but by humble submission to the will of God and by taking on Himself the anger of God against our sins.

1 For those who are interested in the grammar of the passage, the genitive used is the objective genitive and should be translated without the “of” that the KJV uses. Few of the versions seem to catch this, but the American Standard (ASV) and New American Standard (NASB) do: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”



MERCY

REV. JUSTIN SMIDSTRA

pastor of First PRC in Holland, Michigan

Is there anything more beautiful than mercy unmerited? For the Christian who knows the mercy of God, not merely with the mind but with the heart and lived experience, God's mercy sets the heart on high to sing "O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth forever" (Ps. 136:1).

What is mercy? Put succinctly, mercy is tender-hearted compassion for the miserable, which moves you to endeavor to relieve the miserable of their misery. Described more fully, mercy is a deep feeling of compassion for another person who is suffering or needing help; compassion for the sufferer, regardless of whether their suffering was brought about by forces outside their control or by their own fault. But mercy is not only a feeling of compassion; it is acting on that compassion. The merciful lift a hand to help the needy. The merciful strive to do all that is in their power to relieve the sufferer's misery, or otherwise support and encourage the sufferer in the bearing of their burdens.

True mercy is such a wonderful thing because it bears the stamp of God's own character. Mercy is a perfection of His divine being, a glorious facet of His nature. God Himself said so, when He appeared to Moses atop Sinai: "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (Ex. 34:6). As God *is* love, so God *is* mercy. God is "rich in mercy" (Eph. 2:4); He is "the Father of mercies" (II Cor. 1:3); He is "plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 103:8). God's mercy is the mercy from which all mercy flows.

The Lord is sovereign in how and to whom He shows mercy: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15). God reveals "the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory" (Rom. 9:23). God's election, far

from a frigid truth, is one that lifts the believing heart to praise the merciful God. What a wonder that God is pleased to choose a people in Christ, and fashion them into vessels that He will eternally fill to the brim with His mercies! Toward His people, "all the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth" (Ps. 25:10), a mercy that is "great unto the heavens" (Ps. 57:10), and "from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him" (Ps. 103:17).

In His mercy, God has tender compassion for His people in their suffering and need: "the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:11), "a God full of compassion...and plenteous in mercy and truth" (Ps. 86:15). He has compassion on us in our afflictions. "I will be glad and rejoice in thy mercy: for thou hast considered my trouble; thou hast known my soul in adversities" (Ps. 33:18). He has compassion on us even when our misery is of our own making, when we in folly stray like sheep and walk in the paths of sin. God is "plenteous in mercy unto all them that call upon thee" (Ps. 86:5). "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in mercy" (Mic. 7:18). God's mercy is unmerited. He has mercy, not because we are worthy, but because He is good, and He is glorified in showing mercy to the unworthy.

God's mercy is more than His attitude of compassion, it is His power to save, to lift His people out of their misery and make them blessed. "Shew us thy mercy, O LORD, and grant us thy salvation" (Ps. 85:7). "For great is thy mercy toward me: and thou hast delivered my soul from the lowest hell" (Ps. 86:13). Jesus' miracles showcase the power of God's mercy. Hear blind Bartimaeus cry "Have mercy on us, O

Lord, thou son of David.” See the mercy of our Lord displayed! “So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight” (Matt. 20:30, 34). Our Savior has both a heart of compassion for His suffering people and the power to deliver them.

Jesus our Savior! In Jesus we find the supreme manifestation of God’s mercy, and the ground for our receiving mercy. Salvation is of the Lord. “It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy” (Rom. 9:16). Jesus came “through the tender mercy of our God” as the “the dayspring from on high” (Luke 1:78). “It behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17). Jesus went to the cross where He atoned for our sins and satisfied God’s justice in order to open up the flood of God’s mercy, which flows to us through Him and sweeps us

to glory. “Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (Ps. 23:6). Therefore, people of God, “let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

God is merciful! But now, you who have received God’s mercy, are you merciful as He is merciful? “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). If we have experienced the mercy of God, our thanksgiving to Him should take the shape of a merciful spirit toward the sinners and the sufferers in our lives. The privilege of the Christian, saved by grace, is to embody and reflect, more and more, the merciful character of God. Let us love mercy and practice mercy (Mic. 6:8). Let us prioritize this “weightier matter of the law” (Matt. 23:23). “Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy” (Matt. 5:7).

PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH



WHAT THE LAYMAN SHOULD KNOW ABOUT TEXTUAL CRITICISM: JOHN 7:53-8:11

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 article in this series: July 2024, p. 450.

The practical purpose of this introduction to textual criticism is to show that some Bible versions undermine the inspiration of certain passages of Scripture, and to buttress the conviction of Bible readers that these passages are, in fact, inspired. In the last article we defended the inclusion of Mark 16:9-20 in Scripture. This article will demonstrate that, according to sound methods of textual criticism, the reader may be confident that he or she is reading God’s Word in John 7:53-8:11, the story of the woman taken in adultery. When ministers preach on this text, the hearers must believe that the sound exposition and application of the passage is relevant.

ARGUMENTS AGAINST INCLUDING IT

As it did with Mark 16:9-20, the ESV includes John 7:53-8:11 with this notation before it: “[The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11.]” The 1978 NIV includes the passage with this notation before it: “[The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not have John 7:53-8:11].” The 1984 NIV revised the wording, but says essentially the same thing: “The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11.”

Admittedly, two significant fourth-century Greek manuscripts do not include this passage—the very two manuscripts that some textual critics consider

more weighty than about 90% of the other extant manuscripts combined! And admittedly, some papyrus manuscripts that date to the third century also do not contain this passage.

The Greek textual-critical edition that I am using (NA28) puts the passage in double brackets, indicating that the passage is “known not to be a part of the original text.”¹ Note that whereas the ESV and NIV editors stated facts (which facts must be analyzed and evaluated), the Greek textual-critical edition made an assertion: *not part of the original text!* In other words, *not inspired!*

For the following reasons, scholars argue that this passage is not actually part of God’s inspired Word. First, numerous manuscripts do not include it. The two favorite earliest manuscripts do not include it, nor do twenty other specific manuscripts. One curiosity is that special notes are added to five of the twenty-two. *Apparently* two of these five do not contain the reading; the editors think they do not, but cannot say it with 100% certainty. One of the five *does* contain the reading, but also contains an alternate reading. And two of the five do not include the reading, but a later scribe apparently “corrected” the manuscript by adding it. And yet, the editors include these five in the twenty-two.

Desiring *uncontroversial* evidence against including these verses requires us to reduce the twenty-two manuscripts to seventeen. Several of these seventeen date to the sixth or ninth century; some even later. This is no surprise; we would not expect a sixth-century or ninth-century scribe to include in his copy any verse that was not in the manuscript he was copying.

Second, two ancient church fathers omit it. Maybe many church fathers simply never faced the question of whether it belonged or not. But two church fathers did face the question, and apparently concluded it did not. One of the two is Jerome. NA28 includes a note that Jerome was aware of manuscripts that included the passage, and he is listed as evidence on both sides of the issue, to exclude *and include* it.

1 Nestle Aland Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th revised edition, sixth corrected printing (2020), 55. My further analysis of which manuscripts do and which do not support the inclusion of this passage will be based on page 322 of the same book.

Third, a good number of Bible translations in various locales do not include it.

Some textual critics are convinced that the evidence *not* to include it is overwhelming. Among them, the more conservative ones argue that this passage is not divinely inspired, did not come from John as its inspired author, and really is out of place between John 7:52 and 8:12. This passage, they say, is a reliable instance of oral tradition that scribes eventually added to the Bible.²

ARGUMENTS IN FAVOR OF INCLUDING IT

First, the overwhelming *number* of extant manuscripts support including the passage. This overwhelming number includes the entire tradition of texts that textual critics call the Byzantine family. An erroneous but commonly used method of textual criticism developed in the 1800s (introduced in an earlier article) considers the two ancient manuscripts to be more weighty than the great majority of manuscripts, especially those that belong to the Byzantine family. This method we reject. Most manuscripts—a *large* majority,³ not a small majority—include this passage.

Second, while the two ancient manuscripts that are considered most weighty date to the *fourth* century, one fifth-century manuscript clearly includes it. In addition, we noted that Jerome (c. 345-420) was aware of manuscripts that included this passage. Jerome finished translating the Vulgate by 405. So two manuscripts that date to the middle of the 300s did not contain the passage, but by 405 Jerome knew that some manuscripts did contain it. Do you remember that one foundational point in evaluating textual-critical questions is that the age of the reading is more important than the age of the manuscript? Both readings—including as well as excluding the passage—are old.

Third, while the absence of John 7:53-8:11 has wide geographic support, the inclusion of the passage

2 Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd edition (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 187-89; Philip W. Comfort, *New Testament Text and Translation Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2008), 285-88.

3 Writing in 1855, one writer found 347 that included it. See Samuel Thomas Bloomfield, *The Greek New Testament: With English Notes, Critical, Philological, and Exegetical* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1855), 1:590.

also does. It was known in western Europe, where Jerome translated the Vulgate, and it was known in the area around Egypt. Of note, though, is that Jerome's translation of the gospels was based on an older Latin version, in consultation with *Greek* versions; and that the Egyptian translations can be traced to *Greek* versions. In other words, the geographic witness to including the passage is broader than the witness not to include it, because the inclusion can be traced to *eastern* Europe.

This is strong evidence that the church of Jesus Christ from early times recognized that the passage belonged in the Scriptures, not because of oral tradition but because of divine inspiration.

INTERESTING OBSERVATIONS

To the objective evidence mentioned above, two interesting observations can be added.

First, in addition to the debate whether to include the passage at all, is the question *where* to include it. Several late manuscripts (tenth century or later) include it in Scripture, but in a different place in John, or even in Luke. Our concern is not where to include it. Those that include it elsewhere are still witnesses to its inclusion in the inspired Scripture.

Second, apart from the question of whether the passage is genuinely inspired, the passage is of great interest to Bible scholars.⁴ And understandably so: This

passage is a concrete example of the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus. It is a graphic account of Jesus exposing their hypocrisy: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her" (8:7). It contains instruction regarding our Savior's gracious mercy in forgiving sinners, and laying on us the calling of gratitude

and the power of sanctification: "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more" (8:11). It is a powerful and intriguing passage. What is striking, then, is that many scholars are determined to find relevant instruction in it, even if it is not genuine. They *want* it to be authoritative. But the child of God realizes that it can be authoritative only if it is genuinely God's Word.

CONCLUSION REGARDING JOHN 7:53-8:11

The debate whether the passage belongs in the Scriptures, and where, will no doubt continue until our Lord returns. But the evidence to *include* it is greater in number, and more persuasive, than the evidence to exclude it.

Those who say that John did not write it consider it to be a later addition. But one question must be faced with all seriousness: In

light of the fact that the reading is old, could it be that some manuscripts, among them the "earliest and most reliable," intentionally *omitted* it?

This is strong evidence that the church of Jesus Christ from early times recognized that the passage belonged in the Scriptures, not because of oral tradition but because of divine inspiration.

4 On May 23, 2024 I searched the ATLA journal article database and found two dozen articles in English that had "John 7:53-8:11" in the title. Half of them faced the textual questions that we are facing. Of these twelve, several defended it as authentically inspired either through John or Luke, while others argued that it was a later, uninspired addition. The

topics of the other twelve articles are intriguing; they focus on Jesus' interactions with suffering women; male violence against women; God's mercy in John's gospel; the intersection of law and religion; and the question of what Jesus actually wrote on the ground. Any conclusions that these writers reach have weight only if the passage is inspired.



RE-ENTRY: LEAVING THE MISSION FIELD AND GOING BACK (2)

REV. RICHARD SMIT

pastor of Randolph PRC in Randolph, Wisconsin

Previous article in this series: June 2024, p 427.

RETURN (CONTINUED)

The hearty farewells have faded, and the foreign missionary and family have begun their journey out of and away from the field of labor in which they lived for some time and from which the Lord has released them. They are returning, but to where?

Responding to the return of the missionary family, members of calling and supporting churches in the region or country to which the family is returning might normally think that their return is in a direction toward “home.” There might even be expressions of some joy that the missionary family is returning “home” permanently, or even for a lengthy furlough. While that joy of receiving the missionary family again into the fellowship of the sending churches is certainly commendable, yet, according to the perspective of the missionary with his family, are they actually returning “home”?

From certain perspectives, the departure of the missionary family from their field of labor and going back is a return home. The passports that the family shows to the immigration officers along their journey show that they are returning to their country of citizenship and birth. It is often common that the immigration officers politely smile and say heartily to the family upon return, “Welcome home!” The family returns to the passport country where the same language may have commonly been spoken in their overseas home. They are returning to the land of the common foods that they enjoyed periodically in their foreign location. They are returning to their relatives, including, for the younger missionary children, older siblings who may have moved away from the foreign missionary family and settled back into the ebb and flow of life in their passport country.

However, from the perspective of their life and

labor in the mission field, the missionary’s departure and return to life in their passport country is in some ways not a “coming home.” For example, for some of the missionary children, their passport may show their citizenship in the country to which the family has returned, but the country is not their birth country, nor is it the place where they may have grown up in their childhood or teenage years. For some missionary families, their common language at church, at home, and at school was not what is commonly spoken in their passport country. This reality may even be true to various degrees for missionary families who have labored in another country where English may also be spoken as one of the official languages. Upon return to their passport country, missionary children may be mystified as to why it might be a challenge to communicate with other English speakers in their passport country.

Then, the food that they may have commonly enjoyed overseas might not be found or be easily accessible in their new location. If a restaurant might be found where that foreign food is served, it often will not taste exactly the same as it did “back home.” Moreover, depending on where they have lived, missionary families may have become accustomed to eating all of their food with their hands, with a spoon mostly, or chopsticks. After moving, they must adjust to the new local foods and a different style of eating. After moving, the family must pass through a period of adjustment with a different diet of fruits, vegetables, meats, and much less rice, perhaps. Some missionary children, who may have become quite at home with walking mostly barefoot or with flip flops, may need to adjust to the wearing of socks and shoes again. Missionary families quickly discover that the

manner of communication and various cultural habits of their passport countries are different: for the older ones it may be familiar from earlier childhood and furloughs, but for younger ones it can be somewhat alien. Therefore, although foreign missionary families may return to their passport countries, appearing outwardly like they should easily belong and fit right in, actually for a while they are to various degrees unfamiliar with what will eventually become familiar.

On the one hand, the missionary family must embrace those alien and awkward feelings upon arrival as actually a good gift in the Lord's providence. This shows that, by the Lord's blessing, they have integrated well in their life and labors to which they had been sent. It is evidence of their development in contentment in their station and calling in the service of the church and kingdom of Jesus Christ on a foreign field or as that field developed into established churches. On the other hand, that feeling of being somewhat foreign in a familiar place among familiar friends and family is their new challenge to embrace and work through, with the Lord's guidance, upon their arrival and moving forward to a new temporary home in a new phase upon their lifelong journey Home.

REFRESHMENT

It might appear to the casual observer and to those who might find travel abroad attractive but have not been given the opportunity to do so, that overseas travel nowadays is easy and glamorous. It is true that long-distance travel to and from overseas mission fields no longer involves sea voyages or train travel of several months or weeks as it did not long ago. Missionary families normally do not endure what we wrote previously about some of the extraordinarily difficult travels for the apostle Paul: long journeys by foot, shipwreck, treading water for a night in the sea, highway robbery, and other perils (1 Cor. 11:25-27).

Nevertheless, modern travel has its own unique set of challenges. There are the unpredictable weather systems by which the Lord can quickly disrupt travel schedules. Travel nowadays includes many uncertainties and inconveniences: changing airline and train schedules, equipment unreliability, crowded terminal waiting areas, cramped and smelly cabins, piles of suitcases and boxes at check-in and then again among hordes of people at the baggage carousels upon arrival,

large crowds milling about upon arrival at airport, train, or ship terminals, time zone differences, jet lag, motion sickness during travel, post-travel sickness due to exhaustion, and shock of sudden changes in temperature and humidity upon arrival. It is common for most missionary families to endure the burden of long journeys and multiple modes of travel to a distant place of labor or to their passport country for furlough or move. Although more convenient and efficient in many ways in comparison to travel in past centuries, travel today is still mentally and physically demanding.

That observation is not meant to be a complaint. Rather, that comment expresses a reality that present-day foreign missionary families endure patiently as part of their call and place in their specific field of labor overseas. Being aware of this reality, one can appreciate the need that a missionary family has for a period of refreshment from the rigors of travel.

The apostle Paul and his fellow laborers needed and received refreshment during and after their long, wearying journeys. There are several examples of the apostle and his companions receiving such needed refreshment. First, after their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch "and there they abode long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:28). Second, after his second missionary journey and after the return to Antioch, it is noted that Paul did not resume his third missionary journey until "after he had spent some time there" in Antioch (Acts 18:23a). Finally, after his third missionary, the apostle Paul was lodged by the saints in Tyre for seven days, by the saints in Ptolemais for one day, by the saints, particularly Pastor Philip with wife and four daughters, in Caesarea for an unspecified number of many days, and by the saints with the aged Manson of Cyprus in Jerusalem until Paul was taken prisoner by the Roman guards (Acts 21:5-17).

In the examples above, there are several different inspired words used that describe Paul staying in those places: "abode," "spent some time," "tarried," "lodge," and "remain." In the original, with one exception, all the instances of "abode," "tarried," and "remain," come from the same root word which means "to stay." The exception is in Acts 14:28 where the word that is translated "abode" comes from the original Greek word which means "to rub away," as one might need the knots of a tight muscle rubbed away by a massage. Thus, these

words together convey the idea that the apostle Paul deliberately spent some valuable time with the saints in the lodging that they kindly and willingly provided, and he remained among them for the purpose of having the weariness of travel and the challenges and irritations of the mission work “rubbed away.” The chief means of that refreshment for the apostle Paul’s body, mind, soul, and heart was not a resort vacation along the Mediterranean coast, but the fellowship and hospitality of the saints in the churches in Antioch, Tyre, Ptolemais, Caesarea, and Jerusalem, who had supported him in his labors with their fervent prayers and gifts.

The Lord teaches that hospitality is a Christian virtue (Phile. 1:7, Heb. 13:2, 1 Pet. 4:9). It is one that foreign missionaries themselves regularly exercise to those among whom they labor in their particular place or to visitors and delegations from their calling and supporting churches. However, as the apostle Paul demonstrates, there come times when the foreign missionary and family need refreshment by means of the hospitality of their fellow saints. One of those times is upon being released from their field of labor and their return to their passport country and sending churches.

For foreign missionaries, this hospitality has taken many different, practical forms, such as temporary lodging, use of a vacation home, dinners, and various other opportunities for visits and discussions about mission and church matters. Although this hospitality takes different forms, it has its centrality and basis in the fellowship of divine worship on the Lord’s Day together in the Lord Jesus Christ and our like precious, Reformed faith. Standing together and encouraging one another in our like precious faith provides enduring encouragement for foreign missionaries and their families, as it was for the apostle upon return to the churches in Palestine.

This Christian hospitality is effective to massage away the rigors and hardships of the work that have been part of the daily burden of the missionary family in their place of mission labor. It refreshes their minds, bodies, and spirits for the next steps and for the challenges of the completion of their re-entry. Moreover, the refreshment of Christian hospitality in the calling and sending churches provides a natural forum for the next aspect of a missionary’s re-entry: rehearsal. This we plan to consider in the next article.

FOR THE CHURCH



IF MY BROTHER SIN... THE POTENT MEDICINE OF MATTHEW 18

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of Hudsonville PRC

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican—Matthew 18:15-17.

Like some medicines, Jesus’ prescription for healing in

the body of Christ comes with “warnings,” “directions,” “uses,” “interactions,” “side effects,” and maybe a “Keep out of the reach of children” highlighted with bold print. The medicine of Matthew 18 is so potent that if we administer it wrongly we may do more harm than good. Sound interpretation of this Scripture will show that.

It should get our attention that Matthew 18 is the passage that gives foundational instruction for Christian *discipline*, one of the three marks of the true church—and we need to get Christian discipline right

like we need to get preaching and the sacraments right. What also underlines the need for careful explanation of Matthew 18 are the too-common misunderstandings and misapplications of it. When someone is hurt by sin, “Go the way of Matthew 18” is sometimes thrown at the offended with the ease of tossing aspirin at a headache. Is that the remedy? Maybe. But maybe not.

I want to look carefully at Jesus’ teaching in this familiar passage, praying that this medicine’s “back label” will become very familiar to all of us, and that Jesus will use it for real healing when sin threatens the health of our church body.¹ But first, the basics.

MATTHEW 18’s MAIN INGREDIENTS

Briefly, Matthew 18 teaches that a church member must privately visit his brother who sins privately and is impenitent. Broken down, the elements are:

Jesus speaks to church members. The backbone of Christian discipline is when church members—not officebearers—address sin in other members. Although discipline *ends* with the elders, it *begins* with the members. And we know that Jesus is not addressing the elders because the one He does address must eventually *tell* the elders. Even in the Old Testament, responsibility to speak to others about their sin was everyone’s: “Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor, and not suffer sin upon him” (Lev. 19:17). “Open rebuke is better than secret love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend... (Prov. 27:5, 6). In the New Testament, Jesus said, “If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him...” (Luke 17:3). So Paul taught the Galatian Christians to restore a brother overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1) and James said, “Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins” (5:19, 20).

A brother. A church member addresses another church member—his *brother*. We do not address the sins of non-Christian neighbors, but of brothers in the church—your church or another church—just as Paul says to the Corinthian believers, in the matter of discipline, that their calling is not to judge those

“without” but those “within” (I Cor. 5:12, 13).

A sin. The problem is the brother’s sin. When a brother’s actions only irritate me, I ignore them: swallow hard, pray for grace to see and correct my own irritating conduct, and move on. Not a brother’s irritations but his sins—in faith or life—are at issue. He violates God’s law, either first or second table. The sin, though, must be such a sin that it may not be ignored. So we distinguish between sins that are “censurable” and others that are not, and it takes discretion to know the difference. Sometimes wisdom is to wink at a sin; other times winking would be wrong. But that is not surprising, as anyone who is married or has children knows. To confront every sin in a marriage would make a relationship miserable—brief sour moods, occasional unkind looks, and infrequent sins of omission are best graciously ignored. And if parents would address directly their child’s every sin, it would probably be an example of “provoking to wrath” (Eph. 6:4). Parents overlook an adolescent’s temporary sulking and address it only when it becomes chronic. So when a brother’s sin stands as a barrier between you and him, or you know that it stands between him and his God, it may not be ignored. The sin imperils his soul, and you must “gain” him from that peril. When he despises the Lord’s Day, or hides income from the government, or sits nightly in bars, or frequents the harlot’s house on the internet, the Lord’s way is clear: “Tell him his fault.” Such sins are worthy of “telling the church” and warrant excommunication, which will put him in the category of “heathen and publican.” Peccadilloes are not in view.

Impenitent sin. All this implies that the brother is impenitent. Even the “censurable sin” for which my brother is quickly sorry I do not address. I do not need to “tell him his fault” because he is broken by it and is contrite with godly sorrow. He is not at risk of perishing. When my employer stops hiding income from the government, or when my brother asks me to oversee his phone and computer use so that he avoids pornography, or when my neighbor stops damaging my name, or when my cousin swears off barhopping and begins to go home instead—these have been “won.” The need to call to repentance has vanished. There is nothing to “tell.”

Private sin. Finally, as to the medicine’s basics, the

¹ In the 100-year history of the *Standard Bearer*, very few articles have been written to explain Matthew 18, and then very briefly. My search for other treatments of the passage came up almost empty.

sin to be addressed privately is a *private* sin—no one knows it but you. This is most elementary in Matthew 18. Sins that are *public* must be rebuked “before all” (I Tim 5:20) but sins that are private must be kept private. The Reformed Church Order establishes this quickly in Article 72: “...as long as the sin is of a private character...the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.” Then in 73: “Secret sins of which the sinner repents...shall not be laid before the consistory.” True: what is public may not be kept private (I hope to address this later); but what is private *must* not be made public. Love covers sin.

Such are Matthew 18’s basics.

MATTHEW 18’s PRINCIPLES

Let me press the figure that Matthew 18 is Jesus’ *medicine* for our church body. Sometimes I am annoyed when I cannot quickly find a prescription’s “Directions for Use” because it is hidden in long paragraphs of other information that I consider a bother to read. Thinking in this simplistic way may be dangerous for me since it might cause me to overlook a common but hazardous side effect (liver damage or ulcers for pain meds), or possibly miss a harmful interaction with another medicine. Likewise, Jesus’ potent medicine of Christian discipline can be considered and administered simplistically when we do not consider everything that is involved. At times, this may work to hurt instead of cure. “Do no harm” applies to the practice of spiritual medicine too.

So let’s look at some of the important principles embedded in Matthew 18, and elevate them from ‘fine print’ to ‘large font’ in our estimation, so that we understand well how Jesus’ spiritual medicine ought to be administered.

Love

Matthew 18’s first principle is the great commandment of love for the brother. Matthew 18 teaches this in two ways. First, the object of our concern is our *brother*, that is, a member of our family, and families (usually) are close. When Proverbs says that there is a friend that is *closer* than a brother, everyone takes notice because earthly brothers are very close. We love our earthly brothers. Jesus speaks of our spiritual family. Second, the principle of love comes out when Jesus teaches us that our aim in addressing the brother is to “gain” him.

I want to gain someone that I love. My love does not want to lose them!

I find, often, that we have a mushy or fuzzy perspective of love, as though love for a person is that I have good feelings when I am around him, or that she is a pleasant person to have as a friend, or that they make me happy. But my brother may well *not* be making me happy at all—he sinned against me, hurt me. Love properly understood—modeled after God’s love for us—is my settled and fervent desire to bless a person, and my doing good to them even if it costs me my life. God set His love upon me in eternity when He predestined me to the adoption of children, a plan that His heart yearns to accomplish, the carrying out of which cost Him dearly—His own Son. So my love for all the brothers and sisters in the church is a plan, deep in my heart, to do good to all of them, and doing it even if I have to die (to myself) in the process.

What a beautiful way to live in the church! All the sinful members know about all the other sinful members that they love one another and will help and bless them even when helping these fellow sinners is as painful as dying.

So when a Sunday morning finds me in the church pew before the worship hour begins, watching the other members of the church file in, I want to renew in my *mind* my high *calling*, and in my *heart* my steadfast *desire*, to do these fellow sinners the greatest good that I can do—lead them to see and know and embrace the Savior of sinners, Jesus Christ. I love them. They love me. Can there be anything better in this life?

Protection

Protection—of the body as a whole and of each member—is an underlying principle throughout the Bible. Discipline protects the body’s purity when it removes sin or sinners. A little leaven leavens the whole lump, Paul says. “Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump” (1 Cor. 5:7). Purging out the sinner (if he is impenitent), or the sin (if he puts it away) is protecting the church as a whole from the sin (infection) spreading, and the individual members from being infected by the sin.

This principle of protection is also found in Matthew 18—in the context of Jesus’ prescription for dealing with sinners. The flow of thought in Matthew 18 is not always seen. First, early in the chapter Jesus

rebukes His disciples' sinful ambition ("who will be the greatest?") by setting a little child among them and saying, as it were, "If you do not become like one of these little ones, you will not even have a place in the kingdom, much less be great in it." The subject of "little ones" is in view and continues throughout the chapter. He says to "receive" little ones (v. 5). In the sharpest way Jesus warns not to "offend" little ones (v. 6; or "despise" them, v. 10). He keeps in our view the church's "little ones." And what appears to be a diversion from the subject of little ones in verses 7-13 (offenses and the parable of the lost sheep) we see is not a diversion at all when Jesus concludes this section, "Even so it is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." Then, immediately follows, "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee...." Jesus does

not depart from the subject of "little ones" and their protection.

For the protection of all the members, with a special eye on "little ones," Jesus gives the prescription in Matthew 18. Remove sin from the congregation so that the little ones are not hurt by the sin. Go to your sinning brother in order that his own children are not damaged by his sin. Confront the impenitent member so that his sin does not spread and be contracted by others. Protect them!

In sum, these first two principles ask us to examine our hearts: Do we love the sinning member? Do we love the church and all her members? A hard look at these questions will help me when I study "the way of Matthew 18."

(Coming in November, principles 3-5: Maturity, Privacy, Grace.)

STRENGTH OF YOUTH



POLITICAL LEADERS AND THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING

REV. RYAN BARNHILL

pastor of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

It's that time again. Former President Donald Trump, flanked by his Secret Service agents, appears from behind the curtain: the music begins, the thousands roar, and he pumps his fist—another campaign rally. Vice-President Kamala Harris makes an appearance in an ad on your phone, making her personal plea for your donation. Fox News, CNN, and MSNBC give their viewers a steady diet of the latest political news and commentary. What time is it? An election year—2024. At the point of writing this article, it appears that voters will make a choice between former President Trump and Vice-President Harris. Whether or not you like politics or pay attention to political figures, you are confronted with it all especially in an election year.

But it's not just a looming election that shifts our attention toward political figures. This past summer,

much was made of President Biden's age and his competency for the duties of the office. Many loud voices called for him to reconsider his reelection efforts. Just as this news was peaking, more news came out of Butler, Pennsylvania: a bullet from a gunman grazed the right ear of former President Trump, leaving one of the most influential humans in the world only one or two inches from death.

Perhaps you are a young person who is interested in politics. But maybe you really could not care less, as I daresay is true of most young people. But regardless of which category you fall in, or somewhere in the middle, government is a real part of life and we Christians have a calling with regard to it. In our days of political chaos and immoral leaders, and especially in an election year, it is urgent that we young people understand the

Christian's calling in the realm of politics and political leaders. Let's summarize that calling using four words: submit, pray, watch, and trust.

SUBMIT

In Romans 13:1, the command comes, "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God." The higher powers are the government or the magistrate. In the apostle Paul's day, this was the Roman government, from the emperor down to the most local authorities. In our day, these higher powers include the president and vice-president, congressmen and congresswomen, the governor of your state, the police officer in his patrol car, the mayor of your town, and others. They are "powers": literally, authorities, which means they have from God the right to rule—the powers that be are ordained of God.

We must submit ourselves to these higher authorities who have been given from God a right to rule. Submission is an attitude of arranging oneself under the magistrate's rule. Submitting is the conscious decision to view one's place as *under* the authority of government. The opposite of submission is militancy and rebellion of heart—a war-like attitude that views oneself as *over* the God-ordained authority. Flowing from this inward attitude of submission is the outward activity of obedience. Obedience is hearing what one is told to do and then doing it. In obedience, we pay our taxes, pull over when the red and blue lights flash behind us, and abide by the laws of the land. While we must always *submit* to the government, we may not always *obey* it. When the higher authorities call on us to act contrary to God's Word, then we must obey God rather than men, the principle laid out in Acts 5:29.

Submissive and obedient, you will be careful not to slander the opposite political party or carelessly misrepresent their policies, but speak only the truth; you will not descend into the name-calling, mockery, and inappropriate jokes so common in our day, but will speak of them respectfully; and, although you will not approve of sin and corruption where it is found, you will not use that sin and corruption as an excuse to disregard the authorities entirely and militate against them in your heart and activity. The Belgic Confession in Article 36 summarizes the Scripture's teaching when it says, "...it is the bounden duty of every one...to

subject himself to the magistrates...to show due honor and respect to them, and to obey them in all things which are not repugnant to the Word of God...."

Submit, Spirit-indwelt young person! This submission is part of your life of thankfulness for gracious salvation in Jesus Christ and citizenship in His kingdom.

PRAY

Besides submitting to our political leaders, we should also be praying for them. The word to young pastor Timothy was, "I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; for kings, and for all that are in authority..." (1 Tim. 2:1-2a). We are not hesitant to do this, are we? Pray for your leaders!

First, we pray that those in authority would rule as God has designed for them to rule. That design is spelled out in Romans 13:3-4: "...rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? Do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil." The purpose for making this prayer is that we may "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:2b), during which peaceful times we may also preach the gospel without hindrance.

Second, we pray for the salvation of our leaders. When we hear of leaders' evil policies and of their immoral lives, that should not be the occasion for laughs and jokes. Rather, we should get on our knees and earnestly beseech God to work in them godly repentance and faith in Christ. Knowing our own salvation is full and free, we have a concern for the souls of those in power and have a desire for their salvation.

WATCH

It should be evident by now that when it comes to the higher powers, the Christian is not passive. He submits and prays. He also watches. Numerous times in God's Word, we are exhorted to watch. Jesus says in Matthew 24:42, "Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come."

Of course, watching does not mean *obsessive*

involvement with politics and political leaders, making an idol out of them. That is a danger, also in the church. Most Christians will not *admit* that they are making a god out of their politics; however, the amount of time they spend listening to and watching these things, the way the veins of their neck bulge when someone attacks their candidate, and the way they latch onto a certain man or woman for their future security—it all betrays them. Such is not careful watching but idolatrous gazing.

Let's avoid that ditch. But let's not fall into the other ditch, either, of paying *no* attention to our government and what is happening. Let us not avoid *all* the news and take a world-flight mentality when it comes to Washington, D.C. Jesus commands us to watch, to be observant of what is around us; surely this includes alertness to policies and positions, legislation, court decisions, the general direction of the country, and many other matters. We must be vigilant of these developments surrounding us. Not only is this an important part of discerning the signs of Christ's coming, but this will also help us pray more concretely (see previous point). Let us, by God's grace, watch!

TRUST

As you watch, you need not slip into anxiety and fear. True, the nation is divided, men and women in high

places are implementing their evil policies, and the national news reveals disheartening and even disturbing happenings on a regular basis. But you need not melt with terror. As you watch, trust in God. Jehovah is sovereign over the magistrate. Proverbs 21:1 teaches us this truth of Jehovah's sovereignty over kings: "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth is whithersoever he will."

Many in the media used the word "providence" to describe the attempted assassination of former President Trump in Pennsylvania on July 13; Trump was looking at a graphic to his right, which means his head was at an angle, resulting in the bullet only grazing his ear and not doing worse damage. Regardless of whether the news people who used the term "providence" actually believe the doctrine, and regardless of what they meant, we as God's people understand that the events of that day were, in fact, within the scope of God's providence. Nothing happens *to* political leaders, nor does anything happen *by* political leaders, apart from the all-governing hand of God, a hand that rules all things for the good of His chosen and redeemed church which He loves in Jesus Christ. God is sovereign. Let us pray that God would build our trust in Him during these dark days!

Do not fear, reader, but fix the eye of faith upon your heavenly Father who does all things well.

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES IN COMMON—PR THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



NEWS FROM SEMINARY HILL

PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER

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

The summer vacation is past; the heat and humidity of West Michigan summers are over and gone; and the time of teaching our students has come again.

STUDENTS AND FULLTIME STAFF

God has blessed us with four students studying for ministry in the PRCA. Our senior is Mr. Aaron VanDyke (Faith PRC); Mr. Bruce Feenstra (Hope PRC, Grand

Rapids) is our junior; and Mr. Isaac VanBaren (Hope PRC, GR) is our sophomore. Mr. Joe Ophoff (Byron Center PRC) is, for all practical purposes, our freshman. Perhaps to call Mr. Ophoff our freshman is not exactly correct. He is the first to enter the Special Student Entrance Program (SSEP), approved by Synod 2023. The program is designed for older students who lack some pre-seminary requirements. The goal is to prepare these



L-to-r: Prof. B. Gritters, Prof. C. Griess, Isaac VanBaren, Prof. B. Huizinga, Joseph Dick, Joseph Ophoff, Prof. D. Kuiper, Bruce Feenstra

men more quickly than we would others, by tailoring a program to fit their situation. Mr. Ophoff already took some seminary classes last year as part of his SSEP; but he has four years of seminary ahead of him, and the classes he is now taking are the regular freshman classes.

In addition to these students, Joseph Dick, a member of Sovereign Grace URC in Grand Rapids, is enrolled as a freshman. He is a son of Rev. Mitchell and GraceKay Dick who intends to complete his seminary education at our seminary and seek candidacy in the URC. Joseph is not new to the seminary; we also taught him Greek grammar and reading while he did his undergraduate degree work at Calvin University.

We encourage those who intend to study in our seminary to take NT Greek grammar and NT Greek reading with us. These are college-level courses, but fewer and fewer colleges teach NT Greek. Those that do would probably teach classical Greek, which is not entirely identical to “koine Greek,” the Greek used in the New Testament. This year Prof. Griess is teaching college-level Greek grammar to several men.

Standard Bearer readers are acquainted with the four professors—Profs. Cory Griess (First PRC, Grand Rapids), Barry Gritters (Hudsonville PRC), Brian Huizinga (Grandville PRC), and Doug Kuiper (Trinity PRC). With the retirement of Prof. Ronald Cammenga, Prof. Huizinga is alone in the department of Dogmatics and Old Testament. Prof. Huizinga will still be developing new dogmatics lectures for the next two years. Prof. Griess begins his second year of teaching after getting his Master of Theology degree, and will

stay busy for several years developing new courses. Enabling Prof. Griess to focus on course development, the TSC has hired Prof. Cammenga to teach one course this fall, and the January 2025 interim course.

The most noticeable change to our staff recently is the hiring of Mrs. Bethany Engelsma (Hudsonville PRC) as our secretary. Hers is the first face and smile that one ordinarily sees when entering the building. Miss Valerie Kleyn informed us last March that she would be moving to Loveland, CO in May. After a transition period during which Miss Kleyn taught Mrs. Engelsma the ropes, Mrs. Engelsma took up her work full-time just when the seminary year ended. The transition has gone smoothly, and she is fitting in well.

Mr. Charles Terpstra (Faith PRC) continues to serve us well as our chief operating officer. He serves the seminary as our registrar, librarian, archivist, and building manager. In addition, he is the managing editor of the *Standard Bearer* and of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. Don’t forget to thank him for the many and invaluable ways in which he serves our denomination.

SUMMER

It was a busy but profitable summer. In June Mr. Aaron VanDyke, with his wife, Sarah, and two children, moved to Wingham, ON, to serve his six-month internship under the supervision of Rev. Daniel Holstege. Mr. VanDyke will make and preach about a dozen new sermons, read and review as many books, teach two catechism classes, lead two Bible studies, and get as much experience in the pastoral work of the ministry as possible. In his own words:

My family has been enjoying a nice blend of quiet rural life on the one hand, and the active, close-knit congregational life of Wingham on the other hand. To this point, I’ve been keeping busy writing sermons and book reviews, giving words of edification from the pulpit (six times already in the first two months), and getting ready for the catechism and Bible-study seasons that will begin in the fall. The internship has impressed



on me the joy and blessedness of serving God's people with His Word.

In May, the faculty licensed Mr. Bruce Feenstra to speak a word of edification. This summer he led worship services in several congregations in West Michigan, as well as in Redlands and Doon. He has also occupied himself, probably for the last summer in his life, in some form of manual labor. He summarized his summer this way:

This past summer has been full of opportunities to continue preparing for the ministry. Having been licensed in May, I have spent nearly every Sunday speaking a word of edification in the churches. A couple other highlights include being a chaperone at the young peoples' convention, as well as two trips to visit fellow Reformed Christians in Mexico. After years of study, it has been a great joy to begin applying God's Word to His people through discussion groups at convention, through speeches in Mexico, and above all, from the pulpit.

Mr. Isaac VanBaren had no official assignments for the summer related to his preparation for the ministry. He engaged in some professional work for income (he is a mechanical engineer), but has also busied himself this summer with reading, studying, and working on some commitments for upcoming speeches. His wife, Libby, and two children also enjoyed more of his time and attention.

Until last year, Mr. Joe Ophoff had not gone to college. As part of the SSEP, he is not required to get a degree. But he desires one, and is working to get at least an Associate of Arts degree. In addition, he must take some required college courses. With that in mind, he took three courses this summer. Profs. Gritters and Kuiper team-taught him a semester of Greek reading, and he took college-level courses regarding apologetics and evangelism/missions. Hopefully his wife, Audra, and five children also enjoyed more of his company in a more relaxed manner.

The professors also were busy. This year's meeting of synod, at which the professors were advisors, took most of two full weeks. Each had some time for family vacation. Prof. Gritters was in Mexico for a conference in May, and Prof. Griess in June. Prof. Huizinga spoke at the British Reformed Fellowship Conference in England in August. And Prof. Kuiper audited two courses for continuing education—one regarding the French Reformation, and another about the uses of the

Old Testament in the New Testament. In addition, all devoted time to course preparation and development, as well as other denominational commitments.

The janitors, Matt and Kim Kuiper (Southwest PRC) were far less busy during most of the summer months, as the building received less use. But they made up for it in mid-August when they did the annual start-of-school deep cleaning.

Our seminary building and grounds remain in good repair. The parking lot was sealed and re-stripped this summer. Prof. Huizinga's classroom received technical upgrades: we now have in the building a digital projector with interactive markers for the whiteboard. And the basement bathroom was enlarged so that it can contain a shower. Professors and students who bike to school or who relieve tensions by exercising after lunch will benefit from this new feature.

FALL

On Monday, August 26, Mr. Dick had the customary incoming student orientation. Prof. Kuiper gave him an overview of seminary life and expectations, discussed with him his sense of call to the ministry, and gave him pointers for good study habits at seminary.

The following day classes began. By the time you read this, five weeks of the semester—a full third—will be finished. Several of these classes are open to auditors; the brothers and sisters in Christ who audit are an encouragement for the seminary.

Other than the routine classes, what does the fall hold?

The students will work hard for five or six days every week. Classes are held Tuesday through Friday. But Monday is no day off; it is a day to work on larger projects. At least some hours will be put to the same use on most Saturdays. Also, on Mondays the professors and Mr. Feenstra prepare for and teach catechism classes at local congregations.

Practice preaching is also conducted on Mondays—not *every* Monday, but as many as necessary. Every student in the upper three grades is to preach two sermons a semester. A professor assigns the student the text, the student makes the sermon, and then the professors critique the sermon. The professor who assigned the text then works with the student to revise the sermon in light of that critique. Because Mr. Van Dyke is on

his internship, he will not have practice preaching this fall. That means Mr. Feenstra and Mr. VanBaren must each preach twice. A Monday morning can hold two practice preaching sermons, so one Monday is devoted to it this month and one in November.

The students will be given two days off in late October for an extended study break (reading recess), as well as the extended Thanksgiving Day weekend.

Both professors and students will find plenty of work to do. Above all, in our work we desire to serve our Redeemer and Lord, Jesus Christ, in gratitude for all He has given us, both materially, but even more, intellectually and spiritually. We seek your prayers on our behalf, that this school year may proceed, and eventually end, with God's blessing on us and our work.

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE



REDEEMING THE TIME AS PARENTS

MR. TOM CAMMENGA

member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan

I recall conducting family visitation as an elder with a young family several years ago, and in our discussion, I asked a question to the young mother who, together with her husband, was in the midst of raising several younger children. The question was whether she was able to rejoice in the Lord and in His ways for her. Her response began with tears that slowly ran down her cheeks and then the confession that she often felt so inadequate as a wife and as a mother. Although I immediately wished I could take that question back, God had a purpose in my asking it, as it gave us as elders the opportunity to minister to this young mother and to her husband and family of God's abundant grace and of His deep and abiding love for her and them.

This is a confession that I have heard more than once from other mothers, including my own wife from time to time. Over the years I have also seen my own inadequacies and failures as a husband and as a father, and I have heard this same confession from other men in the church. In our previous article, we discussed the truth that a husband and wife are sinners married to sinners. This is also the case when we look at the relationship between parents and children; we are sinners raising sinners. This is a truth that manifests itself very early on in the family relationship and continues throughout life. Indeed, the high calling to raise our children in the fear of the Lord is an impossible one, if we are to go

about it in our own strength. Much grace is required, and thanks be to our faithful God, much grace is given.

Often the work of a godly marriage is compared to the care and work required in the tending of a garden. I believe that this picture can also be applied, although in more detail, to godly parents in the raising of the children that God has given them. As applied to marriage, the care and concern are directed at the garden as a whole: maintaining it and keeping the weeds from overtaking it; whereas in applying this picture to the raising of our children, the focus moves beyond the care of the plants in general to that of caring for each individual plant. Just as a garden has various types of plants that require varying types and levels of care, so a godly family, if blessed with children, is made up of children who are all different, and who themselves require different levels of care. In a garden, for example, a potato plant requires very little direct attention from the gardener, other than at various intervals during its growth, mounding the surrounding dirt around the plant to keep the growing potatoes covered and occasional watering and spraying for insects. However, a tomato plant requires much more attention. The gardener who desires a strong tomato plant that will produce much fruit removes any flowers that may form on the plant before it is planted in the garden. At

the time of planting, the lower branches of the plant should be removed, and it should be buried in a hole deep enough to cover the stem where the branches have been removed, encouraging a stronger root system that results in a healthier plant and better fruit. The plant also must be supported in some way so that it does not fall over, and any “suckers” or branches that begin to form by the stem in the crook of other branches must be removed. Watering the plant must also be done carefully to keep the plant from succumbing to mold.

Likewise, each one of our children is a precious gift that God has entrusted to us, and we are to raise them and nurture them with the particular care that is required by each, as though they were God’s children, which indeed they are. This certainly requires much wisdom; the wisdom of God as we find that wisdom in His revealed Word.

As with the care of a garden, however, this time of care is limited and fleeting. If one fails initially to care for the plants that they have planted, likely those plants will become overgrown with weeds, die, or grow in such a way that they fail to bring forth fruit. If they succeed in bearing any fruit, it is typically small and diseased. Verse 1 of Ecclesiastes 3 reminds us that, “To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven.” Certainly, this is true when it comes to raising our children, and that in the fear of the Lord. The time we have with them is so very short—the time in which we can influence them and their decisions, the time in which we are able to instruct them and impart God’s ways to them, the time in which they are teachable and will receive these things and take them to heart. Add to this what we noticed in our last article that the times in which we live are evil. So evil, in fact, that one wonders how much more evil this world can become. Therefore, redeeming this time with the children of the covenant is of utmost importance.

As we seek to redeem the time in the raising of our children, however, we must first determine what is the goal that we are striving for. We recognize, do we not, that goals are important for us as we seek to live our life as a child of God? There is one main goal that must guide the believer in setting and achieving all the other goals of life; the goal of following after Christ and living a life of thankfulness to God for the great salvation He

has given us. This, after all, is why we were created. What, then, is and must be our goal in the raising of our children? Most important to the believer is that their children love God and follow Him. Therefore, as Christian parents, we seek, more than anything in life, to direct them to Jesus. But simply directing them to Jesus is not enough. As we are instructed in Matthew 19:14, in Luke 18:16, and in Mark 10:14, we are not to forbid our children from following Jesus but rather permit them. We must take them to Jesus, even as the godly parents in these parallel passages were seeking to do. They were not content that their children, toddlers and infants, simply hear Jesus speak or to see Him, but it was their heart’s desire, driven by their faith, that He touch them and that He bless them. This, believer, is your calling and mine. We must bring them to Jesus.

We take as our guide for this high calling of redeeming the time in bringing our children to Jesus, the inspired words of Moses, who, having just given the children of Israel the commandments, statutes, and judgments of God (Deuteronomy 6:1) goes on to instruct them in how they are to go about teaching these to their children and applying them to their own lives in Deuteronomy 6:7-9:

And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.

First, it is necessary that those things that we desire to teach our children be in our own hearts. These commandments, statutes, and judgments of God we must hold dear in our heart and soul. They must not simply be our inclination or a knowledge that we have in our minds, but they must find their place in our very inner being. So important are these to us that they direct and impact every aspect of our life as a child of God. We saw the importance of this in the marriage relationship in our previous article, and now we see that this is no less important in the relationship of parents and children. Without an intimate knowledge of God’s ways and a deep love for them, what hope have we to pass on to our children those precious ways of God?

And if these ways of God are precious to us, they will also surely be manifest in our lives.

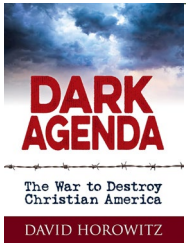
Second, it is important to note that the word “diligently” in verse 7 does not simply mean to do something with persistence and great care, but there is a deeper meaning. The idea of the original word is to sharpen or to whet, and the picture that comes to mind is a bladesmith or armorer who very carefully and purposefully sharpens or whets his knife or sword. The idea, then, is that there is not simply an act that takes place, but there is also a reason for that act and an expected result of that initial act. Not only, then, are we to teach these things to our children in a very careful and conscientious manner, but we must do so in order to achieve a result, that result being that our children come to know God and His great love for them and the manifestation of that love in the giving of His only begotten Son for them. In addition, those to whom we give this instruction are also addressed in the meaning. Just as the knife or sword in the hands of a knowledgeable bladesmith is honed to a razor sharp edge, so are our children, by the grace of God, through our instruction, sharpened in such a way that they not only take hold of the knowledge that we pass on to them with their minds, but also that they too, by the grace of God, take it to heart and seek to live according to it.

Third, we must notice that this is an ongoing and constant process and something that we must do, as the text makes clear, when we are in the home and when we are outside the home, when we lie down to sleep at night and when we wake up in the morning. The idea, you see, is that this training is and must be a part of every aspect, not only of the raising of our children but also of all our life. And it must be purposeful and done with great care, with a view not only to impart that knowledge to them but also to show them practically how that knowledge applies to them, how they must use it, and what a life governed by those commands will look like. Never is there a time—and this ought to be humbling to us as parents—that we are not in some way teaching our children. We must always remember, and when we do not we must pray that God will remind us, that whether we are actively teaching our children or not, they are always learning. In fact, much of what they learn they do so by observing us. Do we embrace the laws of God, and do we keep those

laws with grateful hearts for all that He has done for us in Jesus Christ, or do we simply give them lip service? If not, then when it comes to our life, we are really no different from the world around us. Our children will see, and they will follow what they see. Indeed, our children are able to see very clearly whether we love God and whether we carry His commandments in our hearts. We must, as the saying goes, consciously and purposefully, practice what we preach.

Encompassing and governing all of this is the aspect of time, as that is referred to in Ephesians 5:16 and as it is alluded to in Deuteronomy 6:7-9. Time, that unique creature that God has created, and which God has put in place to govern all the created world. We see this clearly from Ecclesiastes 3:1 as that is quoted above in that there is a time for everything. We must be willing and intentional about spending time, and ourselves for that matter, in this endeavor. We must view it as one of the most important things we can ever do in our life, whether we have children of our own or whether we care for the children of others. This calling we must view as a high calling and a great privilege; one that we can accomplish only by the amazing grace of God. Amazing grace indeed that God would enable weak and sinful parents and fellow believers to raise and to instruct His beloved covenant seed.

The result of this faithful instruction is that our children will, by the grace of God, not forget Him. Deuteronomy 6:12 gives this as the negative reason for the instruction that God commands be given to the children of the covenant. It must be given so that they will not forget! Fathers and mothers, teachers, and all those in the family of God who seek to impart God’s wisdom and ways to the children of the covenant, cling to the hope that we find in verse 25 of Deuteronomy 6: “And it shall be our righteousness, if we observe to do all these commandments before the Lord our God, as he hath commanded us.” How important is this calling to instruct our children in God’s ways? Only in the true knowledge of the ways and commands of God can we and our children see ourselves for what we truly are: unworthy sinners and, by nature, enemies of God, who are in great need of a Mediator and a Savior. Praise be to our covenant God that He has given us, and our children, that Savior in His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ!

**MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA**

member of Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and *SB* book review editor

The following book is reviewed by Mr. Tim Block, member of Byron Center PRC in Byron Center, Michigan.

Dark Agenda: The War to Destroy Christian America, by David Horowitz, Humanix Books, 2018. Pp. 191. Hard Cover, \$26.99.

Dark Agenda is a book covering sixty years of policy change in America intended to undermine the Christian principles on which this country was founded. Ironically, the book was written by David Horowitz, a self-defined agnostic, formerly of the leftist camp of politics. Therefore, his perspective is unique and offers a detached (from Christianity) glimpse into the agenda of the anti-Christian world.

The policy changes discussed were conceived by an anti-Christian minority who desired a world where all truth is based on science and rationality, with no religion whatsoever. A sort of new enlightenment. This minority consisted of leaders prominent in science, journalism, and culture. The author describes the movement as “New Atheism,” noting its leaders are “... blind to all the positive influences religion has had on human behavior, and they ignore all the atheist-inspired genocides of the last 250 years.” (5)

The chapter entitled “Radical Faith” is one of the more frightening chapters for a Christian parent to read. The days of instructing our children in our own schools, teaching them what we believe and bringing them to church are more precious than we can imagine. Already now, the forces of evil are working to take away parents’ rights to teach their children the literal truth of the Bible. While this is not a new concept (see any communist state), it is new thinking in the “land of the free.”

In recounting some history of religion in America, Horowitz reminds us that the Bill of Rights guarantees our religious freedoms. Yet, for how long? The anti-Christian powers are working hard. We can begin to see persecution developing from tolerance, or more accurately, the lack of tolerance. Such persecution focuses on Christians over against other religions, because, as the author explains, “Leftists don’t object to religion being taught in schools, apparently, so long as the religion is opposed to Western

values in general, and American values in particular.”(58) Those values are/were Christian values.

Much of the change we are seeing in policy finds its inception in the *Roe vs. Wade* decision in 1971. In the chapter entitled “Battle Lines,” the author explains the creation of the Religious Right, which, though active, has failed to “slow down radical assaults on Christian values” (104). Religion was further marginalized, Horowitz claims, with the birth of the LGBT rights movement and their agenda, which sought to change the social order. This movement is ripe with lies and disinformation and is used to advance the anti-Christian agenda.

Most compelling to me was the chapter on the Obama presidency. This chapter alone is worth the price of the book, in my opinion. It stands as a stark reminder that the world in which we live hates Christians. The seed of the serpent wants only to destroy Christians, their homes, and their schools. Horowitz (accurately) paints Obama as a most anti-Christian world leader. In the following chapter on Religious Liberty, the author points out nineteen acts of hostility toward people of biblical faith (148). Yet Obama is, of course, a hero to the left.

Horowitz concludes his book with “Civil War,” in which the author discusses the Trump presidency and the evangelical support he has versus the anti-Christian movement on the left. This, too, is interesting as the author explains the radical left’s shock and surprise over the evangelical support for Donald Trump.

This book is an interesting read, and I recommend it to adult readers. It is good for dinner table discussion with our families. It reminds us that, in recent history, the subtle liar, the Devil, continues to work hard. Thankfully, we need not panic and fear. God, who is absolutely sovereign, sits on His throne and directs all history for the sake of His beloved church! “For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end” (Jer. 29:11).

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**CRC SYNOD KALAMAZOO 1924:
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October 31, 7:30 pm | Prof. Douglas Kuiper

GOD GIVING GOOD THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE: GRACE?
November 1, 7 pm | Prof. Brian Huizinga

THE GENERAL OFFER OF THE GOSPEL: GRACE?
November 1, 8:15 pm | Prof. Ronald Cammenga

GOD'S RESTRAINT OF SIN IN THE UNBELIEVER: GRACE?
November 2, 9 am | Prof. Barrett Gritters

THE GOOD THAT THE UNREGENERATE DO: GRACE?
November 2, 10:30 am | Prof. Cory Griess

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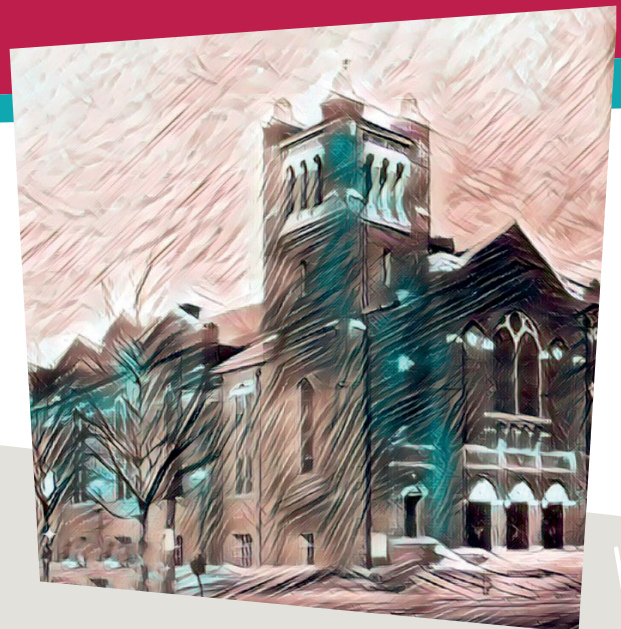
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10/27 The Man of Sin Revealed, II Thess. 2:3, 4