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MEDITATION



THE EVERLASTING ARMS

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The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms—Deuteronomy 33:27a

At the time that I write this meditation, I have been sitting at the bedside of my godly mother as God prepares to take her to her heavenly home. After 89 years of traversing this earth, from childhood running around her dad's greenhouses and helping to care for her younger siblings, through 70 years of marriage, giving birth to three sons and providing the faithful nurture of a godly mother and grandmother, through many years

of faithful service as a godly woman in the church, the day that no one can escape has finally drawn near, the day when loved ones and friends gather to mark the frailty of life and the certainty of death. By the time this is published she will be in her heavenly home. "We spend our years as a tale that is told," Moses said in Psalm 90.

But thanks be to God, we who are one with Christ by a living faith—as was our mother—have been given a living hope and the assurance of a most wonderful truth. Because Christ has conquered death for all those for whom He died, we who are His understand that

death is but a servant leading us to glories that abide. Hallelujah! Mother now tastes the joys of her heavenly home! But not only is death such a servant; *all* things serve us on that pathway to heaven. God guides us by His counsel, afterward to receive us to glory (Ps. 73:24). That is the life of a sweet mother in Christ's church. That is the life of every believer.

Scripture radiates with the goodness and glory of the God of our salvation. His sovereign work in our lives is marvelous. That comes to expression in the opening words of Deuteronomy 33:27, as well as any passage in the Bible: "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." How blessed we are!

That is true every step of our earthly sojourn. That is notably true in the face of many trials. That is astoundingly true as we stand before death's door. The Bible throughout unfolds the sovereignty of God in His faithful love and care for His people, because that is the gospel message of salvation in Christ Jesus by the sovereign, particular grace of God. Having been redeemed by Christ's precious blood, we know that all things work together for our good (Rom. 8:28). Not just some things. *All* things. The eternal God sees to it. He sees to it for Jesus' sake. In Him is our refuge. And therefore we may know that underneath us are the everlasting arms of that unchangeably faithful Jehovah, the God of our salvation. The blessedness of this Word of God is the heritage of the true seed of Abraham, of all who are in Christ Jesus. If you belong to the Lord of glory by a true and living faith, you may take these precious words to yourself and rest upon them and find comfort in them.

The text points us to those everlasting arms of God in relation to the place where you and I are standing, and says, "*underneath* are the everlasting arms." God is above us in a way that no one else is—exalted in the heavens. The verse that immediately precedes this one tells us, "There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky." Think of His glory! You cannot escape it! He created us and gave us everything we have. Every breath comes from Him, as well as every good gift. He gave you your place in your family, for better, for worse. Our God is the One who shows us in ways innumerable that He rules over all. The psalmist confesses it in Psalm 115:3, "But our God is in the heavens: he hath done whatsoever he hath pleased." And because He is exalted as the one

only true God and is the Creator, His is also the right to tell us how we shall live. He demands of us that we serve Him. He requires our faithful worship, our praise, our obedience, our love. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

He is above us in such a way that there is an infinite chasm between us. For not only is He the perfectly Holy One, but we are fallen, sinful creatures, unable to perform the least of God's demands. And because His demands *stand*, we continue to pile up debt—debt that cries out for our everlasting damnation.

When the text says, therefore, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms," you must understand it is conveying a wonderful truth to a people whom God has set apart for Himself and redeemed.

This word is addressed to Israel, God's chosen people, the Old Testament manifestation of His church. It is addressed to a particular people whom God has saved. He has saved them by promise in the precious blood of His own dear Son, typified by the lamb whose blood was spread upon the doorposts of the believing children of Israel before the angel of death passed through Egypt. Therefore, they might be identified by the name *Jeshurun*, the upright ones. The words of this text, then, are words spoken to all—not who are without sin—but who are in Christ Jesus by a true and living faith. That is why these words are so precious to us.

"Underneath are the everlasting arms." Underneath refers to that region that we cannot see, and that is often difficult for us to face. The Bible often speaks of the pit, a place of desolation and destruction. The psalmist often prays that God spare him from falling into the pit. Sometimes that pit refers to the trap and devastating consequences of our own sins. Sometimes it refers to the place of death—death, after all, that is the wages of sin. Sometimes that pit refers to the darkness and desolation that we may experience in our own souls and that would threaten to carry us away to that point of "no return." Sometimes the pit refers to the grave.

I have often spoken of the Christian life as a life walked on a balance beam far above a deep pit. I use the figure of a balance beam because Jesus talked about the Christian life being a walk on a very narrow

pathway. There are dangers on every side, dangers that we lose our balance and fall off one way or the other. The Christian faith, and particularly the Reformed faith, is very balanced. The Scriptures would hold us to a balanced view of the Christian life. The danger is that we tend to become imbalanced, to lose the proper biblical perspective. When we do that, the pit yawns before us, and waits for us to fall. Besides that, Satan entices us and strikes at us, attempting to bring us down into the pit. He does not give up. He does not give up even when a child of God is on his or her death bed. That is why we may be so thankful to belong to our faithful Savior Jesus Christ, and to hear the words of our Savior: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

I am reminded of the closing doxology of that brief epistle of Jude, the second to the last book of the Bible, verses 24 and 25: “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” This knowledge must be yours, this confession your own conviction and hope.

When the Spirit speaks of God’s arms, it is His way of revealing to us that God is at work accomplishing His own sovereign and unchangeable purpose. God has a purpose marked out for us with perfect love, because He always looks upon His people and sees them in His beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever changes we face as we age, whatever trials we face, even this journey we all must make through death’s dark vale, there is never a change in the infinite resolve of God to bless His people and to preserve them to the end. The way of the LORD is perfect. Even though that way is often higher than our ways, and its perfection beyond our earthly comprehension, He has proven it to us His people. Job said it this way: “But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.... For he performeth the thing that is appointed for me: and many such things are with him” (Job 23:10, 14).

Besides God’s immutable and perfectly wise purpose and the infinite power by which He works all things for us, also reflected in that expression of “*the everlasting arms*,” is the inexhaustible patience with which the Lord bears us up. If only we examine ourselves and

see ourselves as we stand before the living God, what a burden we are! What a demanding people! What an inconsiderate people! We give plenty of thought to our own cares, our own needs, our own trials and sorrows. We readily look after our own pleasures, our own earthly situation, our own desires. And how heavily our sins weigh us down! Whether we live 15 years or 45 or 85-plus, our sinful natures plague us every day. But God has taken all the weight of our sins upon Himself in the Person of His only begotten Son. Rather than letting us go, His everlasting arms bear us up—even if it means pulling some of us out of the fire. He is longsuffering toward us, making sure that not one of His promises fail.

That is true because those everlasting arms are the arms of love. He said to us (Jer. 31:3), “I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.” His love has arms and hands that draw us unto Him. That is the only explanation for our salvation. Our safety comes from a love that never changes, the flame of which not even the flood waters can drown out. It is the love revealed to us in Christ Jesus, the love that is also shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. That is our salvation. It is all of God. And where God’s everlasting arms are, there is His power to preserve us and to carry us to that place that He has prepared for us.

How critically important it is that we see that in the face of death. Death is frightening, except we know those everlasting arms. In John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, he described Christian and Hopeful as they had to cross that river in order to get into the celestial city. Christian had a moment of fear as he entered that river, not knowing the depths. He cried out to Hopeful with a cry we find in Psalm 69, prophetic of the sufferings of Christ, “The waters are come in unto my soul! I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing; I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me!” And Hopeful responded, “Be of good cheer, my Brother! I feel the bottom, and it is good.”¹

“Underneath are the everlasting arms.” How beautiful! Yes, “Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.” But to make that confession, and to live and to die in that confidence, your confession must

1 John Bunyan, revised and updated by L. Edward Hazelburger, *The Pilgrim’s Progress in Modern English* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 204.

also embrace this: “The eternal God is *thy* refuge.” Do you believe that? What a tremendous blessing. To know that is to know that “*underneath are the everlasting*

arms.” That was my mother’s confession. It was a joy to witness. May God grant that this confession is yours even today.



A REACTIONARY BODY (1)

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INTRODUCTION

A few years ago, I went to the doctor to inform him of an ailment. The good doctor prescribed for me the necessary medication, one that I had taken before without experiencing any side effects. But this time it was different. I took the medication and shortly thereafter experienced a reaction that was worse than the initial ailment. I went back to the doctor and, after hearing my plight, he prescribed a different medication. The same thing happened. After a third attempt yielded no better result, he exclaimed, “Your body is very reactionary right now!” After asking a few more questions I learned that the human body can be more or less reactionary at different periods. Medication that before had not caused a reaction can do so when the body is in a *reactionary state*.

I wonder how often Christ looks down upon His church, or a portion of His church, and says something similar to what that doctor said, “My body is very reactionary right now!” And I wonder if he says this *now* about portions of His body that make up the Protestant Reformed Churches.

If He does, His statement would be different from any observation He might make of a *specific reaction* by a member of His body (or members), which reaction could be right or wrong. The point would be that the *body itself*, organically considered, is in a *state* that is *reactionary*, *prone* to reaction, and even *overreaction*.

REACTION

An individual reaction itself can be good and right

and even helpful. Even a *strong* reaction. A good reaction is an immediate, almost instinctual, fervent, yet appropriate, response. God made the physical body capable of reaction, and behold it is very good. If there are bacteria in your body that are killing you, you would not decry the body’s strong, immediate, fervent reaction against it. So too in the body of Christ’s church. God spare us if His body does not react appropriately to obvious, blatant evil in the body, whether it is evil in doctrine or in life. The Scriptures honor Phinehas in Numbers 25 for his zealous standing in the gap when obvious, blatant evil manifested itself.

Yet, Phinehas was “zealous *for my sake*,” in his reaction. Not every reaction is right simply because it is a reaction. Walking close with God, knowing God’s Word and way, one will be able to react to blatant evil appropriately, in a way that pleases Him and does not mistake one’s own will for God’s will. May God ever give us Phinehases who have such godly reaction. Some who have reacted to obvious, blatant doctrinal and moral evil in our own context as a denomination are to be thanked for doing so.

REACTIONARY

But this is all different from a *body* being *reactionary*. If the human body, or the body of a congregation or denomination is *reactionary*, that body is in a state in which it is prone to *react* or even *overreact*, when *response* would be better. Response is different from reaction. Response is not immediate or instinctual. It is thoughtful, deliberate, considered, careful, and

often involves a more complex evaluation and answer. Sometimes reaction is appropriate; more often response is appropriate. Being *reactionary* indicates a proneness to *react* when a body should *respond*.

THE OCCASION

As I alluded to earlier, there are circumstances in which the human body enters a reactionary state. Intense and enduring stress can be one such circumstance. Similarly, when there is intense and enduring stress on the body of Christ, it too can become reactionary. When there has been trouble for years, which trouble has stressed her heavily; when there have been doctrinal disagreements or confusion; when there have been shocking moral failures among leadership; even when there have been occasions for a right zealous (but spiritually stressful!) reaction; when there have been troublemakers who by all appearances seek their own agenda at the expense of the health of the body; when the church realizes the correcting hand of God upon her in this stress; then like the human body, the stressed church can enter a state where she is *reactionary*. Given what she has been through and still faces, it might be *expected* that the PRC would be in such a state.

If she is, it does not mean that every member is in such a state. Nor does it necessarily mean that every congregation is in such a state, or even part of every congregation. Rather, it would mean that there is enough observable evidence of a reactionary state in various parts of the denomination that it becomes the concern of the whole denomination.

SIGNS OF A REACTIONARY STATE

There are some particular signs that may confirm a body of Christ (and now *this* body of Christ organically conceived) is in a reactionary state.

The first sign is that overreactions become more frequent. What is deemed an overreaction as opposed to a proper reaction is up for debate, of course. But when there are frequent overreactions on a scale that goes beyond a few individuals, it is a sign. In Luke 9:51-56, Jesus sent messengers ahead of Himself to a village of the Samaritans to tell them He was coming. However, the Samaritan people would not receive Him because He intended to pass through to another place: “because his face was as though he would go to Jerusalem.”

The immediate reaction of the disciples was to say to Jesus, “Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them?” Jesus “turned and rebuked them,” specifically for the *reactionary spirit* that was evidenced in the disciples organically conceived. Speaking of the group, He said, “Ye know not what *manner of spirit* ye are of. For the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.” Matthew Henry interprets this as the Lord saying, “You are not aware what an evil spirit and disposition you are of; how much there is of pride, and passion, and personal revenge, covered under this pretense of zeal for your Master.” And then he gives this application: “Note, there may be much corruption lurking, nay, and stirring too, in the hearts of good people, and they themselves not be sensible of it.” In other words, good people may together be in such a state that they are prone to overreaction.

When reactions should be responses; when neither the reaction nor the response fit with the matter at hand; if there is a proneness to become “soon angry” (Prov. 14:15); if the reaction and or response starts out good and then turns into overreaction or overreach; if there is an unwillingness to take in all the information that pertains to the matter; these are signs the body of Christ is reactionary. I believe I have seen an increasing amount of this over the last number of years. I point no finger at any individual, church, or group of people. I believe I have seen it on both sides of various debates and issues. And the temptation, if not the action, I have seen in myself.

A second sign may be the broader assemblies going back and forth on matters in their decisions. This may, of course, simply be part of the process of working through a difficult issue, and thus may even be a sign of health. Too much of it, though, may indicate that the body is reactionary. Perhaps strong opinions or personalities sway the body one way and then another. Perhaps due to fear of what people might think, or for some other reason, there is not willingness to take the time carefully to consider and discuss all sides of a matter thoroughly on the floor of the assemblies. Fairly quick consideration and then voting before the matter is really debated and discussed thoroughly can lead to considerations being overlooked. A protest or appeal later points out what was overlooked, and the decision

is different. Such a reality *may be* a sign of a reactionary body—the assemblies are prone to react.

A third sign is if the body is in a state in which it is easy for rumors to be spread and believed without confirmation or consideration. This sin is always a problem for every church. But an increasing amount of it can indicate a reactionary state. Stress on the body of Christ due to failures in leadership can lead to such a state. But the state is not good. When Proverbs 14:15 says “the simple believe every word,” the Hebrew word for “simple” has as its root idea, “to be open,” as in, “to be open to suggestion.” And while a certain kind of open-mindedness can be good, of course, the reference here is to someone who is wrongly open to almost anything. He is ready, even *bent on* believing almost any rumor he hears. He *wants* to believe evil. And so, it is easy for rumors to spread, false though they may be.

A fourth possible indication that a particular body of Christ is in a reactionary state is regular departures from the membership rolls. To be sure, this could be indication of the failures of the body coming home to that body in such consequences. Or it could be an indication of weakness on the part of the departing. In the end it could be a combination of things. One contributing factor could be a reactionary state. The body is prone to reaction and overreaction, and so within that body there are more departures, to where it appears the grass is greener elsewhere without really taking into consideration all factors. I am not here

making any judgment of any particular individual who has left our body but, looking at the big picture, I am stating why regular departures can be a sign of a reactionary body.

There are other signs I am sure, but these are a few that may indicate the body is in a reactionary state. And especially when they are seen together over a period of time, the diagnosis can be made more confidently. I have seen enough signs to believe this is the state we are in, and am concerned about it enough that I write this editorial and another one next month.

The next article, Lord willing, will give some of the harmful long-term effects on the body of Christ if she continues to live in such a state. Just as there are negative long-term effects on a physical body that continues to live in a reactionary state, so there are the same for a church body. I do not intend simply to point out the negative, however. I also intend in the next article to give a positive biblical prescription for healing, should the Lord allow it. The body of Christ has hope because indwelling her is not only the inflammation of internalized stress and sin, but the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. The faithful Spirit leads the church into all truth, comforts her, never leaves her or forsakes her, and brings the Lord Jesus to her in all His healing strength.

For now, discuss together what I propose here. Do you observe a reactionary state in the PRC body? If so, increase your prayers in number and fervency for her. And if so, what could God use to help?

ALL AROUND US



- PUBLIC SCHOOLS A TRAINING GROUND FOR FAITH?
- THE YOUNG AND RESTLESS TURNING TO WESLEYAN ARMINIANISM
- MAiD

REV. DANIEL HOLSTEGE

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS A TRAINING GROUND FOR FAITH?

Earlier this fall, children across the land went back to school. Most of them go to a public school. But a rising number are going to private schools, or are being

homeschooled. The theology editor at *Christianity Today*, Stefani McDade, recently wrote that the debate about Christians using the public schools “has come back to the foreground of our public life in recent years.”

She cites a Gospel Coalition debate in which the

popular evangelical author and speaker Jen Wilkin used “faith-led arguments” to promote Christians sending their children to public schools. According to McDade, Wilkin believes our children receive the following benefits from a public education: “a more diverse socialization, a healthy exposure to different worldviews, and fulfilling the calling of being a Christian witness in the world.”

McDade agrees. She likens sending our children to a public school to “strength training: Your children need to build muscles of faith, and public schools can provide weight to lift while you’re around to spot them. Let them wrestle with worldly counternarratives to God’s truth while they’re still under your care. That may feel risky, but the alternative—keeping them sheltered, then letting them be exposed to everything all at once when they leave home for work or college—is risky too.”¹

Our “adversary the devil” (1 Pet. 5:8) is all too pleased with that kind of argument. Of course, all Christians agree that our children need to build “muscles of faith” when they are young. My wife and I have five young children of our own who are all in school as of this fall, from kindergarten to seventh grade. We send them to a Christian school in a neighboring town, even though there is a public school right here in Wingham. We drop them off at the bus stop every morning, and they spend quite a few hours on the bus each week. A few years ago, we were on a mission field in the Roman Catholic society of the Philippines. At that time, we sent our children to a Christian academy of missionary children from different nations. As parents, we are glad that our children have been able to experience “a more diverse socialization” in their short lives. Nor has it been all bad for them to be exposed to some views and practices of other Christians that differ from our own—it has led to some good conversations around the dinner table. Surely, too, we must teach our children about their calling to be “a Christian witness in the world.”

But are we not playing right into the hands of the spiritual powers of the darkness of this present world if we encourage Christian parents to send their children to the public school as a training ground for faith? Rather,

we must train our children within truly Christian, and as much as possible within soundly Reformed, circles. Our primary calling toward our young children is to fill their minds and hearts with the truth of God’s Word in the home, school, and church. Something is not right in our minds if we think the best option is to send our children to schools where the teachers may not mention God but must teach as facts miserable theories that are antagonistic to God’s truth. As Warren Cole Smith puts it in a response to McDade’s article, the idea “that Christian children will get ‘healthy exposure’ to different worldviews and will fulfill ‘the call of being a Christian witness in the world’ is an assertion without an argument.... For young children, there are no safe levels of exposure to influences they will encounter in public schools. ‘Healthy exposure’ arguments fail to take seriously enough the biblical commands to parents to protect and nurture their children.”²

The biblical commands to which he refers are that we diligently teach, train, and nurture our children in the words and ways of God (Deut. 6:7; Prov. 22:6; Eph. 6:4). We *ought* to shelter our young and tender children from worldly counternarratives, as much as we can, until we have thoroughly taught them the one true narrative that God has revealed in His Word. Then we prepare them well to face those wicked counternarratives when they come to years of discretion and to give an answer to anyone who asks about the hope that is in them. Not the public school, but the good Christian school is a training ground for the faith of our children. May God use good Christian schools to sharpen the little arrows in our quivers, so that when they grow up, they will “speak with the enemies in the gate” (Ps. 127:4-5) and “shine as lights in the world” (Phil. 2:15).

THE YOUNG AND RESTLESS TURNING TO WESLEYAN ARMINIANISM

In February of 2023, I wrote an article entitled “Young, Restless, and Reformed today” about the current resurgence of interest in Reformed theology that began in the early 2000s. In April of 2023, I wrote about what was called a revival at Asbury University, a school founded by Wesleyan/Methodist men in the 1800s. In August of the

1 Stefani McDade, “Public School Can Be a Training Ground for Faith,” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 6, 2024 (<https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/public-school-can-be-a-training-ground-for-faith>).

2 Warren Cole Smith, “Should Christians Send Their Children to Public Schools?,” *Ministry Watch*, Sept. 13, 2024 (<https://ministrywatch.com/should-christians-send-their-children-to-public-schools>).

same year, I wrote about a split in the United Methodist Church and the formation of the new Global Methodist Church. Continuing in that lane, I direct your attention to a recent article claiming that “two decades after New Calvinism, some young Christians are turning to Methodist history for theological sustenance.”

The author claims that “there appears to be a growing number of young people drawn to Wesleyanism and Wesleyan-Arminian theology. Nearly 20 years after the rise of New Calvinism—when ‘Young, Restless, Reformed’ Christians embraced the doctrinal system taught by French theologian John Calvin—there’s a new and renewed interest in another theological tradition, which has a bit of a different flavor. Where Calvin taught predestination, Wesley believed that, through prevenient grace, God freed the human will sufficiently to accept or reject the offer of salvation. God predestined a plan of salvation, but not individual people.”³ Sound familiar? See the Canons of Dordt, Head I, Article 7 and Rejection of Errors #3.

The author cites evidence of a growing interest in Wesleyan-Arminian theology. He writes that “some of the institutions promoting revitalized Wesleyanism have been explicitly modeled on the New Calvinist movement.... ‘What do the Reformed got going?’ said Fred Sanders, author of *Wesley and the Christian Life* and professor at Biola University. ‘They’ve got an infrastructure of generating a lot of online articles and a steady content stream.’” It would seem that the fresh interest in Reformed theology a couple decades ago has provoked a reaction from the Arminian side: “Some Wesleyans, watching the influence of Calvinists over the years, have felt compelled to offer an alternative.”

What about us? How much do we love the God who unconditionally predestined us, as specific individuals, unto everlasting life? (Eph. 1:5). How great is our love for Him who first loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins on the cross (1 John 4:10)? How joyful are we that God in His sovereign grace liberated our bound will from the slavery of sin and drew us to Jesus (John 6:44)? Are we pastors on fire

to preach the glorious truth of God in order to feed the hungry and thirsty souls of believers? Do we as laymen and laywomen know why we are Reformed, and do we joyfully teach those reasons to our children and youth? God grant that young people may not be restless in faithful Reformed churches, but that they may find Christ to be their true meat and drink unto life eternal.

MAiD

Canada is further along in secularization than the United States. I recently read and discussed with a group of Reformed pastors a book by Ewan Goligher, a Christian professor of medicine at the University of Toronto, entitled *How Should We Then Die? A Christian Response to Physician-Assisted Death*. Without endorsing everything he writes, I recommend this book if you are interested in understanding more about the topic. This is a hot topic in Canada right now. Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD), as they call it, has been legal here for a number of years. People who want to die because they feel they have no reason to live can ask a doctor to help them commit suicide. They do not want to call it suicide, though. So they call it physician-assisted death or medical assistance in dying.

Many Canadians have already ended their lives this way. Mark Penninga notes that MAiD “has quickly become one of the leading causes of death in Canada, according to a new study by the Canadian think tank Cardus. The report noted that MAiD deaths have increased thirteen-fold in the short time since it was legalized in 2016 (growing from 1,018 deaths then to 13,241 now). That makes it the fifth leading cause of death in the country, and the “world’s fastest-growing assisted-dying program.”⁴

Though Christians in Canada should know better, Canadian pastor Tim Challies points out that “it is also increasingly common for pastors to have to counsel their elderly parishioners away from [MAiD] and for children to have to plead with their elderly parents not to opt for it. It is widespread and becoming more common, it is accepted and becoming more acceptable.

3 Clayton Sidenbender, “‘Wesley is Fire Now,’ and Evangelicals Are Being Strangely Warmed,” *Christianity Today*, Sept. 17, 2024 <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2024/09/wesley-is-fire-now-methodist-turn>.

4 Mark Penninga, “State-Sanctioned Murder Now the 5th Leading Cause of Death in Canada,” *Reformed Perspective* 43, Iss. No. 5 (Sept-Oct, 2024), 7.

As Christians, we need to be prepared and we need to be able to offer a response.”⁵

How important at such a time as this that we preach to a world of people who are in despair the only comfort

5 <https://www.challies.com/book-reviews/how-should-we-then-die>.

in life and death of belonging to the faithful Savior Jesus Christ. Our lives have meaning and purpose in Christ, all the way up to the moment when He, not we, decides that our earthly pilgrimage is over and takes us home to our Father’s house of many mansions.

BELIEVING AND CONFESSING



OF THE LAW OF GOD SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION (12A)

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The Will of God Is Explained for Us in the Law of God.

We teach that the will of God is explained for us in the law of God, what He wills or does not will us to do, what is good and just, or what is evil and unjust. Therefore, we confess that the law is good and holy.

The twelfth chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) deals with the Reformed view of the place of the law in the life of the Christian. This has often been a controversial issue in Reformed and Presbyterian churches. Throughout history, the Reformed faith has occupied the middle way between equally treacherous ditches. On the one hand, it rejects the Roman Catholic position that the keeping of the commandments of the law is meritorious. On the other hand, it repudiates the radical antinomian view, which denies the place of the law in the life of the New Testament believer.

To begin with, the SHC in chapter 12 insists that “the will of God is explained for us in the law of God.” The law is the expression of the will of God. Since the law is not merely a list of dos and don’ts, but is the expression of the will of God, it follows that the law is of abiding value. God never changes. What was His will for Old Testament Israel in the wilderness is also His will for New Testament saints in the twenty-first century. The law is “good and holy” in every age

because God is good and holy. The law is grounded in the very being of God.

The abiding character of the law is brought out in numerous ways in this chapter. The title of the chapter concerns “the Law of God.” Twice in the first paragraph, and several times thereafter, the law is referred to, not as “the law of Moses,” nor as “the Ten Commandments,” but as “the law of God.” The law is called the law of God not only because the law has its source in God—true as that is. God is the sovereign Lawgiver. But the law is the law of God also because the law reveals God to us. In the law, we behold the perfection and purity of God’s holy being. Because the law is the law of God, its commandments are enduring.

That the law regulates the life of the New Testament Christian is also evident from the language of chapter 12, specifically the pronoun that is used repeatedly throughout. The pronoun is “us.” Even though Christ has fulfilled the law, the law of God was not only for the Old Testament Israelites. It is not the case that the law no longer has binding authority over us, living as we do in the New Testament age. Article 12 repudiates the insidious error of antinomianism. “The will of God is explained for *us* in the law of God.” Moreover, the law sets forth what God “wills or does not will *us* to do.” The law of God is binding on us.

The law is antithetical, approving of one behavior and condemning the opposite behavior. The law sets

forth not only what God wills positively, but also what God “does not will us to do.” The law does not only tell us “what is good and just,” but also tells us “what is evil and unjust.” The antithetical nature of the law reflects the antithetical nature of God. God condemns the evil and unjust, and God blesses the good and holy.

The Law of Nature.

And this law was at one time written in the hearts of men by the finger of God (Rom. 2:15), and is called the law of nature (the law of Moses is in two Tables), and at another it was inscribed by His finger on the two Tables of Moses, and eloquently expounded in the books of Moses (Ex. 20:1 ff.; Deut. 5:6 ff.). For the sake of clarity we distinguish the moral law which is contained in the Decalogue or two Tables and expounded in the books of Moses, the ceremonial law which determines the ceremonies and worship of God, and the judicial law which is concerned with political and domestic matters.

In this second paragraph of chapter 12, Heinrich Bullinger makes some important distinctions regarding the law. First, he distinguishes between the law of nature and the written law of God. By the law of nature, Bullinger refers to the instruction of the apostle Paul in Romans 1 and 2. He cites Romans 2:15, which refers to “the work of the law written in [men’s] hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another.” In Romans 1:19, the apostle expresses himself in a similar way: “Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath showed it unto them.”

Besides the testimony of God in the consciences of all men, there is also the objective testimony of the creation, bearing witness to God’s existence and summoning all men to acknowledge that He is God. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal Godhead; so that they are without excuse: because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God” (Rom. 1:20-21). Taken together, the testimony of God within men and the testimony of nature, or, the creation, leaves men without excuse. A person does not need the written law of God to know that stealing, adultery, murder, idol worship are condemned by God. God sees to it that every human being receives

the testimony of “the law of nature.” We usually reserve the expression “written by the finger of God” for the Ten Commandments. But Bullinger also uses the expression to apply to God’s testimony in nature.

In distinction from the law of nature is the written law of God. This was “inscribed by His finger on the two Tables of Moses, and eloquently expounded in the books of Moses.” The law inscribed by God’s own finger in the two tables of stone is often referred to as the Decalogue. The word “Decalogue” means, literally, “ten words.” The ten commandments are the ten words spoken by God to Israel out of the mount and then written down in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. The expressions “Decalogue” and “ten commandments” are interchangeable.

Although Bullinger references the two places in Scripture where the Decalogue is found, he says nothing about the different contexts in which God’s law was given. The first giving of the law was after God had delivered the children of Israel out of Egypt, as the introduction to the law both in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 indicates: “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.” It is significant that God gave the law to Israel *after* He delivered them from Egypt’s enslavement and not *before* as conditions that they must fulfill in order to be delivered. Rather, God’s people must keep the commandments out of gratitude for having been delivered.

The second giving of the law is found in Deuteronomy 5. The law was given a second time—which is what the word “Deuteronomy” means—after the generation that had come out of Egypt perished in the wilderness. They had not trusted in God and refused to enter the promised land. A new generation had arisen after the forty years of wandering in the wilderness. Before they cross the Jordan River and begin to possess the land, they must hear God’s holy law. Out of gratitude to God for their deliverance out of Egypt and His promise to give them the land of Canaan they must live in gratitude to God by keeping His commandments.

NECESSARY DISTINCTIONS REGARDING GOD’S LAW

Importantly, the SHC makes some further distinctions when it comes to God’s law. The ten commandments are God’s “moral law,” the law “inscribed by His finger on the two Tables” of stone, after He had thundered it from the mount while all Israel was gathered together.

The moral law applies in every age and exercises its authority over all men wherever and whenever they live. This is the Decalogue.

In distinction from the moral law, the SHC speaks of the “ceremonial law” and the “judicial law.” These include all the laws that arose out of the moral law that were specific applications to the life and times of Old Testament Israel. These are the laws that were abrogated on account of their fulfillment in Christ. The abrogation of these laws will be discussed in the last paragraph of this chapter. We will have more to say at that time about the meaning of “abrogated.” Sometimes all the laws of that Old Testament that had application to Israel are referred to as ceremonial laws. This is the case, for example, in the Belgic Confession, Article 25, which treats “The Abolishing of the Ceremonial Law.” Strictly speaking, however, distinguishing the ceremonial laws as ceremonial and judicial is more accurate.

The ceremonial law “determine[d] the ceremonies of the worship of God.” The ceremonial laws concerned the priesthood, the worship of the tabernacle and temple, the sacrifices, and the religious festivals of the Old Testament. The law concerning circumcision, the annual Passover celebration, redemption of the firstborn, and the morning and evening sacrifices are specific examples of ceremonial laws.

In distinction from the body of ceremonial laws were the judicial laws, sometimes called the civil laws. This body of laws was “concerned with political and domestic matters.” Examples today include the speed limit laws, the tax laws, legislated property easements, and terms of office for elected government officials. In

Old Testament Israel the judicial laws included such laws as the stoning of an ox that gored a person to death (Ex. 21:28); the stoning of the ox’s owner if he knew the beast was inclined to gore but did not restrain it (Ex. 21:29); the Israelites might not plow with an ox and an ass yoked together (Deut. 22:10); when the Israelites built a house they must put a battlement or railing around their rooftop, to prevent anyone from falling off what was usually the Israelites’ sun porch; Israelite farmers might not harvest the corners of their fields nor pick up what fell to the ground of their grapes or olives, leaving them instead for the poor (Lev. 19:9-10).

All these laws were specific applications of the moral law to the life of God’s people in the Old Testament. They revealed the fundamental principles of the moral law for Old Testament people. The principles endure, even if the Old Testament application falls away. In the New Testament, if a farmer wishes to plow with an ox and an ass yoked together he may; but he had better be living antithetically in the world (2 Cor. 6:14-18). A farmer today may pick up the “drops” of his apples or blueberries, but he must certainly have a care for the poor (Jam. 2:15-17).

In the Old Testament, God’s church needed the ceremonial and judicial laws, which were imposed by God in her immaturity, as Paul argues in Galatians 4:1-4. These laws belonged to God’s discipline of His church in her infancy. In addition, it must not be forgotten that every Israelite family did not own a full, written copy of the sacred Scriptures in their home, as we do today. Thus, these constant reminders of the will of God were necessary in her everyday life—constant reminders that pointed ahead to Christ.

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE



IS THE NEW MAN THE HOLY SPIRIT? (2)

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In our last article, we began our study of the old and new man by proving that the notion the new man *is* the

Holy Spirit contradicts the Scriptures and Reformed confessions. This proof is significant because this

notion is used to defend a novel—and equally false—doctrine about the unconditional covenant, namely, that in the covenant of grace the regenerated person does nothing—he does not believe in (or love) God; faith is wholly passive; faith is God’s act; God believes (and loves) Himself and the neighbor for you, that is, instead of you.

We also demonstrated that the truth of the old and new man is no minor, obscure doctrine in the Scripture and creeds. This fact further explains the many references to the old and new man in the theology of Herman Hoeksema, spiritual father, faithful prophet, and ardent defender of the unconditional covenant. We briefly surveyed references to the old and new man in his dogmatics in order to demonstrate this truth is a major, integral part of his soteriology. And the significance is that this shows the doctrine of the old and new man is a basic part of Hoeksema’s covenant theology because, according to him, salvation is the means by which God fulfills His eternal and unconditional covenant of grace with us through Christ.

We will now turn to Hoeksema’s definition of the old and new man. Waiting to do this until now is a deliberate nod to an unusual instructional method he employs with this specific doctrine. This method becomes evident from the location of this definition, which is at the end of his entire treatment of the old and new man. This is such a striking departure from his normal dogmatic method, that it demands some attention before actually presenting his definition.

Usually, in explaining theological truth, Hoeksema uses an *a priori*, deductive method of analysis. That is, he first defines a theological truth, then explains and proves the various parts of it. But with regard to the old and new man, he takes a more subjective, *a posteriori*, inductive approach. That is, he first refers to and explains the doctrine of the old and new man in his soteriology generally and in detail on sanctification, but waits until the second-to-last paragraph of it all to define the old and new man. This is highly unusual, and deliberate.

One explanation for this notable departure from his *modus operandi*, is found in what Hoeksema writes at the very beginning of this treatment: “It is indeed very difficult to form a somewhat clear conception of the life of the Christian from a spiritual, ethical viewpoint, of

the old and new man....”¹ Hoeksema recognizes the difficulty is mainly because the new man originates in regeneration, which the Canons of Dordt 3/4.12 call a “supernatural work” of the Holy Spirit that is “astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable.” In other words, it so transcends the operations of the human mind that even the regenerated person cannot fully comprehend it or express it with words. Yet its effect is a real subjective experience. Like someone raised from the dead or healed of blindness, the regenerated person knows without doubt what has happened—he was dead, but now lives; he was blind, but now sees—even though he cannot explain it exactly. And an inductive, *a posteriori* method appeals to that real experience of the new man.

We might be inclined to criticize Hoeksema for this experiential approach to the old and new man because he elsewhere criticizes “subjectivistic” methods of theology as looking “for the autonomous man,” and he asserts that “no knowledge of God can be derived from the mystical experience.”² However, we should remember a few things. First, Hoeksema does not deny the subjective experience, and even repeatedly says, “the Spirit of Christ Himself is the subjective principle of knowledge,” so that “only the spiritual man” who “has the Spirit of God” can know the “hidden mystery of God, the new speech.”³ The new man has that Spirit. Secondly, Hoeksema still derives his doctrine of the old and new man objectively from the Scripture and creeds. Lastly, such an experiential method comes well credentialed. It is the well loved pedagogical method of the Heidelberg Catechism for all its doctrines, and it is frequently employed by both Scripture and creeds when teaching specifically about regeneration and the new man.

One example is the Canons, when explaining why some “obey the gospel call and are converted...is not to be ascribed to the proper exercise of free will...but it must be wholly ascribed to God...who confers upon them faith and repentance” (3/4.10). The explanation for this is regeneration by the Holy Spirit, which the Canons then simply describe as to its subjective effect on the mind, heart, and will (3/4.11); then compare to familiar concepts

1 Herman Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1966), 535.

2 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 9-10.

3 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 20-22.

as “a new creation” and “resurrection from the dead;” and finally conclude with what every regenerated person knows from experience: “that all in whose heart God works in this marvelous manner...do actually believe.... Wherefore also, man *is himself rightly said* to believe and repent by virtue of that grace received” (3/4.12).

Another familiar example is Romans 7, one of the outstanding biblical texts about the old and new man. Here, the Holy Spirit Himself employs a subjective pedagogical method, when He moves the apostle Paul to speak entirely from the experience of the regenerated person, first, that of the members of the church (“we” and “ye,” vv. 1-7), then himself (“I” and “me,” vv. 7-25). And every child of God who reads along, says from their own experience, “Amen.”

There is another reason Hoeksema takes this unusual approach to the old and new man. It is because he defines the old and new man in terms of the human *subject*. The penultimate paragraph on sanctification, where he defines the old and new man, Hoeksema begins by first defining the *person* or “I.” And, significantly, he defines the person or “I” as the “one *subject* of all actions...thinking and willing” of the individual human (“him”). Only then does he define the old and new man, and defines them both according to this *subject*, the “I.”

Hoeksema’s definition of the old and new man then is this: “*The old man is his person* as it is *subject* of the old operations of sin in his nature. And the *new man is the same person*, but now as it is *subject* of the new operations of grace and righteousness in the same nature.”⁴ His definition in *The Triple Knowledge* is a bit more detailed but essentially the same: “*The new man is the regenerated Christian* as he lives in this present nature, with mind and will and all his desires and aspirations...from the principle of regeneration...according to the Word of God.... *The old man...is the same person of the Christian* as he still lives not from the principle of the regenerated heart, but from his old nature.”⁵

There you have it. According to Hoeksema, the new man is not the person of the Holy Spirit, but the new man is the person of the individual, regenerated

Christian. Also, the new man is called new, because the Holy Spirit must create him and he has new qualities, but the Holy Spirit does not create a new person, or “I.” The Holy Spirit creates *me* a new man renewed in knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness after the image of God (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10); but according to Hoeksema, the “I” of the old man and “I” of the new man are “the same person.”

The nature of the new man is also not the same nature as the Holy Spirit, but as Hoeksema points out, it is “the same nature” as the old man, that is, a human nature. Indeed, there is a vast difference between the nature of the old and new man, such that Luther (and others) will speak of the person having a “twofold nature.”⁶ But like the difference between the old and new future creation, or our old and new resurrection bodies, it is a difference of origin, power, and quality, not essence. Although this great difference in origin, power, and quality is entirely attributed to the presence and operations of the Holy Spirit, the nature and person of the new man is human, not divine.

Regarding the differences in origin, quality, power, and also legal status, the old man is “I” of physical, natural conception and birth of my parents; it is “I” born guilty of the sin of my first parents, Adam and Eve; it is “I” whose human nature is flesh, of natural body and soul, infected entirely with depravity from my parents, conceived and born dead in sin, born under the law, in bondage to sin, wholly incapable of doing any good, inclined to all wickedness, and legally responsible to God for my sinful thoughts and deeds (1 Cor. 15:44-45; Gal. 4:5; Heid.Cat., LD 2-4). The old man is “I” as the subject of sinful actions in my own human nature moved by idolatry and lust. The old man is “I” subject to the law of sin in my members, corrupt, serving sin, and performing that which is evil. The old man is “I” that must be mortified and die (Gen. 2:17; Col. 3:5).

The new man is “I” of spiritual, supernatural, heavenly conception and birth of the Holy Spirit; it is “I” born again, born from above, born justified and sanctified in Christ, born free from sin and death, born perfect in faith and love toward God. The new man is “I” as subject of holy actions in my human nature moved by grace and love. The new man is “I” as subject of the

4 Hoeksema, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 545. Italics added.

5 Herman Hoeksema, *The Triple Knowledge* (Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 3rd ed., 1990), Vol. 3, 87. Italics added.

6 Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty* (1520).

operations of the Holy Spirit, not under the law, holy, believing God, serving God, loving God, and performing

that which is good. The new man is “I” that is quickened with immortal holy life, and cannot die.

FOR THE CHURCH



IF MY BROTHER SIN... THE POTENT MEDICINE OF MATTHEW 18 (2)

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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

In the last issue, I explained the basic *ingredients* of Jesus’ prescription in Matthew 18, as well as the first two *principles* behind the text. The ingredients in this medicine for helping the sinning brother are: 1) Church members initiate discipline, not first of all elders. 2) Believers’ calling is to admonish. 3) Of concern are other believers, not unbelievers. 4) The problem is censurable sin, not annoyances. 5) The sin is private. 6) The sinner is impenitent. 7) They admonish privately.

The principles I find embedded in the text are five: 1) love, 2) protection, 3) maturity, 4) privacy, and 5) grace. Last time I treated love and protection. If we love the sinning brother, we will go to him to help him. If we love the church and all her members, paying special attention to “little ones,” we will seek their protection. There are three others.

MATURITY

The principle of maturity teaches that both parties involved—the one who administers the medicine

and the one to whom the medicine is given—must be mature members of the church. Spiritual, emotional, and intellectual maturity are required. “Keep out of the reach of children” belongs on the label of this medicine.

This maturity-principle comes out in Matthew 18 in two ways.

First, Jesus instructs us to “tell the sinner his fault.” The Greek original means to reprove, or convict by demonstration. Calvin explains: “to convince by arguments and to show by good reasons.” Required, then, is that you clearly demonstrate from Scripture the reality of the sin, the nature of the sin, how it is offensive to God, how it is a violation of His Word, what is required by way of repentance, and so on. A spiritually, emotionally, or intellectually immature person cannot do this.

Second, after we have “told him his fault,” Jesus requires us to make a judgment whether or not he has “heard” us. “Hearing” is not just listening politely. Probably most people will listen to your admonition, maybe even politely. They will open the door to let you in; they do not put their hands over their ears or shout you down. They listen. But the question is whether they *hear* you. That is, do they *hearken*, turn, respond in the godly way of true repentance? There are two kinds of sorrow, Scripture says, one of which is not godly sorrow. A judgment must be made. Is his repentance mere words, or is the repentance genuine?

That this is the sense of “hear” is plain because if the sinning brother “hears” you, you must be finished

with the matter: forgive him, forever bury the matter, and tell no one. And we are *not* permitted to be finished if we are convinced that he just listened but is not sorry with godly sorrow that led to repentance. To judge whether he “heard” takes maturity.

To apply this practically, we must not expect a child to administer the medicine of Matthew 18. Its requirements are beyond him. Of course, early in his life a child must learn at his own level how to obey Jesus’ instruction here. Parents will teach their son that if his classmate hits him on the playground in a fit of competitive anger, he must address it in a youthfully appropriate manner: make a judgment whether it requires saying something and, if so, make a judgment whether his friend is sorry. Then he may either drop the matter because his friend has been “gained,” or he pursues it with his teacher or parents if the sin repeats or escalates. The immature child must learn these basics.

However, we may never instruct our children that if an adult—a teacher or an uncle, for example—sins a serious sin against them, they must *in private* tell him his fault and then make a judgment whether or not he “heard” them. A child does not have the capacity to do that—either properly to rebuke or rightly to judge repentance. A child must not be expected to conclude impenitence and then take with him “one or two others” as witnesses. A child cannot carry the heavy responsibility of bringing the matter to the church. All these are the prescription of Matthew 18. Again, “Keep out of the reach of children.”

Nor may a child be the *object* of this action. In other words, the immature may not administer this medicine, but neither may it be given them.

Again, sinful children must be rebuked and called to repentance. But no child is treated with the full dose of Matthew 18, according to which witnesses are called and the Consistory acts and excommunication results. The object of Matthew 18 as well as the subject must be mature. Only when the impenitent child reaches maturity does he become the object of discipline and, in the end, is cut off from the church.

Related to this subject of maturity is that the object of discipline must be in his right mind. The church in generations past concluded that she may not apply Christian discipline to one who is mentally incompetent. Formerly, using the insensitive term “insane,” the

church contended that even if a person *became* insane in the process of discipline, discipline must cease. I have said before that if I develop Alzheimer’s disease and begin speaking and acting in ungodly or hurtful ways, I trust my family and church will not begin the process of discipline that eventually declares me outside the kingdom but rather will find appropriate ways to protect me and protect others from me. Empathy, encouragement, medication, perhaps a memory care facility. But not discipline.

In sum, before applying or recommending the medicine of Matthew 18, I want to ask myself: “Are both parties mature—intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually?” There may be questions hard to answer, in which parents can advise their children and with which consistories may wrestle. Is 16 too young and 18 old enough? Is confession of faith required? But all will agree that a certain level of maturity is implied in Jesus’ instruction.

PRIVACY

The privacy-principle is one of the most visible aspects of Matthew 18. Privacy is not the only rule here (a cursory study of the text may incline us to think so) but it is one of the clearest. By privacy is meant that the entire process of discipline must be kept hidden as long as it is both possible and permissible.

In three ways Jesus teaches privacy. First, if a brother sins against you, go to him *alone*: “...between thee and him alone.” That is, two and only two may be ‘in the know’ at the inception of discipline for a private sin: you and the sinner. Second, if that meeting (and more than one is not forbidden) does not succeed, “take with thee one or two more.” Our Lord enlarges the circle of those who know only a very little. Now, only three or four are aware—you, the sinner, and one or two others. And when Jesus says “tell the church,” we understand that not to mean the entire congregation immediately, but only the elders, who will keep the matter as ‘close’ as they can for as long as they can. Privacy is the rule.

The reason for privacy is in God’s law of charity that covers His people’s sin. According to that law, believers do not want their neighbor’s sin to be exposed any more than they want their own to be trumpeted in the neighborhood. Our sinful natures, though, motivated by hatred rather than love, always want the brother’s faults published. With his usual insights into sinful human

nature, Calvin says that Christ “seasonably meets this fault by enjoining us to cover the faults of brethren, as far as lies in our power; for those who take pleasure in the disgrace and infamy of brethren are unquestionably carried away by hatred and malice....” Jesus is applying the biblical rule that goes back deep into the Old Testament: love covers a multitude of sins (Prov. 10:12; 17:9, which Peter repeats in 1 Pet. 4:8). Yes, there comes a time when sin must be exposed, and some sins may not be hidden; but the rule with which the church starts is: “Keep private sin private.”

Behind Jesus’ requirement for us is God’s own treatment of us. God does not have an interest in exposing our sins to the world. By the blood of His Son He covers them, casts them to the depths of the sea, and forgets them. Someone may appeal, as proof to the contrary, to Revelation’s teaching that in the judgment day “the books will be opened” (Rev. 20:12).¹ That is, God *will* publicize our sins. We may be sure, however, that if the opening of the books is indeed a publicizing of our sins, God’s purpose will not be to shame us, but to magnify the glory of His grace in Jesus Christ. He covers all my sins! He covers such horrible sins—those no one else ever knew, even those we had not remembered and maybe never knew. How God is kind to His people; we must be also. Cover them!

Privacy is built into the Reformed Church Order, whose origin is at Dordt in 1618. After Article 71 establishes the need for Christian discipline, Article 72 says that “as long as the sin is of a private character” the “rule clearly prescribed in Matthew 18 shall be followed.” That is, keep it private. Article 73 requires that the sinner who repents of a private sin shall not be reported to the Consistory. And Article 74 allows publicity of a sin only when Matthew 18 has been followed (or if the sin is public, which is a different matter). Then, following the law of privacy, when the matter comes to the Consistory, the Church Order has elders begin with *silent* censure, followed later by an announcement of impenitence with *no name* mentioned, and then allows publicity of a name only when the other churches in the area agree that the matter must be publicized. So important is the principle of privacy.

¹ See the Belgic Confession, Article 37, where the “books” are identified as the “consciences.”

It is important to say here that it was a misapplication of the privacy principle that caused some Consistories and pastors to fall into a very hurtful and serious sin in the past generation or two. It was sin to consider private (keep hidden) some offenses that were in fact not “of a private character.” They were not *known* to more than one or two, but they should not have been judged “private.” I refer to the sin of sexual abuse, which is by its *character* public because it is a crime that must be punished by civil authorities. Some of this covering may have been in ignorance, but a sin of ignorance is still sin (see Lev. 4 and Num. 15, for example). It was sinful to cover what ought to have been exposed. Some ministers and Consistories have confessed this sin recently. May the Lord forgive these sins. May the people of God learn not to repeat these sins. It will no longer be a sin of ignorance. And may our merciful God heal those whose hurt was increased by covering the dark things that should have been brought into the light.

GRACE

This fifth principle is not so quickly seen in Matthew 18. But as soon as we think about Jesus’ calling here, grace is so obvious that it is almost shameful that we did not see it.

Grace is doing good to someone who does not deserve good, who has not earned it (Rom. 4:4; 11:6). Grace is a good attitude toward someone who deserves terrible things done to him. Anything that I am, I am undeservedly—by grace (1 Cor. 15:10). Why am I not condemned eternally, even though I deserve condemnation? Because God is gracious to me in His Son. One of Jesus’ first lessons to His disciples in Matthew 5 was grace. Turn the other cheek. Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Pray for sinners who hurt you. Living this way will show that you truly are sons of God, who is the God of all grace. Then, in words that at times are very embarrassing to us, Jesus says, “If you do good only to those who do good to you, how are you any different than the Pharisees and publicans?”

Now when you read Matthew 18, do you not see grace written all over it? The brother hurt you! You must go in love to win *him*. Very concretely, he dishonored the authority you have over him (5th commandment),

committed murderous acts against you or your children (6th), violated your marriage (7th), stole your property (8th), or damaged your reputation (9th). This is what Jesus is talking about. Your brother *sinned* against you! And your calling is not to “resist” this evil man (Matt. 5:39) but to love him. This is grace.

Such is the act of grace required of us that, like God’s to us, its cost is astronomical—high as the heaven is above the earth! So, as God’s grace gave His Son to death for us, in grace I must die to myself to bless the brother who hurt me. And if my sinful nature resists this call to endure this painful death (as it always does) because my sinful brother has made himself so unattractive and wholly undeserving, I need to refocus my eyes on my gracious God, and more honestly see myself, a wretched sinner saved

by grace. My thanks to God for His grace will be nothing less than being gracious to others. And the life that I now live by the faith of the Son of God enables me to do what otherwise is impossible: to love unlovely, undeserving, unattractive, mean, sinners. God is gracious to me.

These five principles—love, protection, maturity, privacy, and grace—will guide us to administer the medicine of Matthew 18 in a way that the sinner is helped and God is glorified. These principles will also help answer some hard questions we face in the interpretation of Matthew 18. Questions that otherwise are very difficult (“Who are the witnesses? Must I follow Matthew 18 to deal with sins that are not directly against me?” for example) become relatively easy in their light.

SPECIAL CONVOCATION NOTE

The annual convocation exercise for the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary was held at Byron Center PRC on Wednesday evening, September 4. Attendance was outstanding, especially since early September and the beginning of a new school year is a busy time of year for everyone, and when our exercises began at 7:00 p.m., it was still 79° F on a picture-perfect, late-summer evening!

Historically, convocation is not very well attended. Going back forty years to 1984, we find Prof. Homer Hoeksema commenting on convocation in the *Standard Bearer*, “I only wish sometimes that more of our people could and would join us on this occasion.” Similar expressions have been made since then.

How grateful we are at seminary for the work of the Theological School Committee (TSC) today in encouraging attendance through bulletin announcements and by reaching out to pastors, encouraging them to include petitions about convocation in their congregational prayers and to talk about convocation in their congregations. Last year there was a noticeable increase in attendance with

a capacity crowd in the sanctuary of Hope PRC. This year was even better as the crowd spilled out of Byron Center’s sanctuary and overflowed into several rows of chairs in the narthex! What an encouraging sight! Afterwards, there was a spirit of enthusiasm, gladness, refreshment, and hope in the air. Thanks to all who came to support the seminary and many others who would have liked to come—including those out of state or country—but were unable.

Rev. Nathan Decker, president of the TSC, led the opening devotions. Prof. Cory Griess delivered a stirring, Christ-exalting address on “The Spoiled Pastor.” It can be found in written form on the following pages. Prof. Doug Kuiper, the seminary rector, introduced the students, asking them to rise from their pew up front, turn, and face the audience. See the rector’s report in the October 1 issue of the *SB* for a picture of the students and professors, as well as a brief bio for each student. An additional highlight of the evening was joining our voices together in praise to God with four different selections from the Psalter. Convocation was a blessed event and a great start to a new year at seminary.

We covet your prayers for the seminary and for more men to come prepare for the ministry.

— Prof. B. Huizinga





THE SPOILED PASTOR

PROF. CORY GRIESS

professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and member of First PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him...”—Colossians 2:8-10a

The text is a warning to all God’s people. Yet, at the beginning of another academic year of the PRC Seminary it is a warning especially to the seminary students preparing for ministry. In the text, the apostle Paul warns the Colossians against a heresy that was a syncretism of various philosophies and religions, all bound together under the banner of Christianity. This “Colossian heresy” was a strange form of local Judaism that took into itself the worship of invisible spirit creatures. A person could connect with these creatures only if he lived a strict ascetic lifestyle. When Christianity came to the area, the Jews practicing this religion added Christ as one of the spirit creatures.¹ A syncretism indeed!

Syncretism is not a foreign temptation for God’s people. Whether intellectually or morally, whether in small ways or big, we all face the threat of uniting the way of the Scripture with the way of the world in our lives. An *intellectual* temptation to do this is further provoked by the fact that we live in an age of unprecedented access to an unprecedented amount of information. Some of that information is very good, biblical, and God-glorifying. Much of it is obviously unscriptural. Some of it is subtly syncretistic, pseudo-Christian information, surreptitiously unbiblical. Under the guise of Christianity, it presents unbiblical teachings. This subtle deception necessitates that

all God’s people exercise great discernment in the information age. Yet, the seminary student (or pastor) who is called regularly to read and interact with much of this dangerous material, produced in the past or present, faces a unique challenge.

Furthermore, from a *moral* point of view, syncretism presents a great temptation. In this anti-Christian age, there is the constant call God’s people hear to serve Christ in limited portions of their life, even as they bow to certain idols in other parts of their lives. This syncretistic beckoning of the world is especially alluring for seminary students and pastors. For their God-given calling includes intense pressure, and the illusion of a “release” from this pressure through the false promises of the idols around them. And while the seminary student’s conscience is pricked, his old man of sin cries out, “We can serve both God and the world!” A syncretism!

Paul’s warning applies, “Beware, lest any man spoil you!”

BEWARE!

The word “spoil” in the text is not a reference to the kind of spoiling that happens to milk after seven days in the refrigerator. Neither is it a reference to the kind of spoiling that happens to little Suzie when her parents always let her have her way. Rather, the word refers to “spoil” in the sense of *becoming* spoil. It is a war term. “Beware, lest any man take you captive and thus make you the spoil of war.”

The apostle acknowledges there is a war going on every day, and this planet is the theater of that war. The hearts and lives of men are the spoils of that war. Seminary students are training as instruments of God for a place at the front lines of this war. But how can these students be useful instruments if they are taken

¹ F.F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), 413.

captive themselves and made the spoil of the Evil one. Beware!

The apostle, by the Spirit, warns in the text of three possible avenues by which the Evil one might make spoil of us. The first is “philosophy and vain deceit.” Calvin says rightly that this ought to be translated, “the philosophy *that is* vain deceit.” Certainly, the apostle is thinking first of all, of the vain deceit of the Colossian heresy. Calvin further comments though that we should take “philosophy,” very broadly, as a reference to any way of thinking that is opposed to what is revealed in Scripture and that is therefore vain, empty, and devoid of value.

The first image then of the spoiled pastor—be-spoiled by the Evil one—is of one who has been taken captive by any false teaching or false view of life. The spoiled pastor holds the office, does his work, but also imbibes the theory of evolution, or the thought that Jesus was merely a good teacher but not God in human flesh, or denies that the resurrection ever occurred. He preaches and teaches, but his work is void of truth and power because it is void of conviction. He has been taken captive in his mind and he has been spoiled.

According to the text, the second avenue by which the Evil one might make spoil of the pastor is through “the traditions of men.” Especially the apostle is thinking here of the legalistic asceticism of the Colossian heresy. This heresy surely reminded Paul of the teaching of the Pharisees who bound the people to man-made laws, calling them to work their way to God.

Thus, the second image of the spoiled pastor is one who is held captive to legalism. He holds his office and



does his work, but he thinks that the Scriptures are not enough to redeem God’s people and empower them to live the godly life. Instead, this spoiled pastor strives to control the people more, binding them to his own laws because he believes God’s laws are not

enough. This spoiled pastor views his own thoughts on the same level as the commands of Scripture. In order to keep God’s people on (his own) “straight and narrow,” he tells himself it must be so. And when he works by words and warnings not approved by God, he tells himself, “In the end it will be better for the people.” He has fallen captive to the Evil one, having gone “after the traditions of men.”

The apostle warns of a third avenue by which the Evil one might take us captive and spoil us: by “the rudiments of the world.” This is likely a reference to the “spirit world” that had enthralled the syncretistic Jews. This heresy promised its followers an escape from flesh and blood reality into the world of the ethereal.

Thus, the third image of the spoiled pastor is one who holds his office, he preaches and teaches with urgency and conviction, and yet is himself given over to the appeal of escape into fantasy. He seeks the virtual to escape from the tangible in which he lives. He falls to pornography, some other fantasy on the internet, alcohol, an illicit affair, or any other illusion that temporarily allows him to “escape” from this world and the stresses and weights he bears.

Three avenues, and three images. But the danger inherent in all three is one. It is that these ways (and more) are *not after Christ*. “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, *and not after Christ*.” The great problem with the vain philosophy is that it takes one away from Christ! Whether the philosophy blatantly denies Christ, or pretends to work with Christ, it takes *away* from Christ, is not *after* Christ, and therefore is *devoid* of Christ! The traditions of men take one away from Christ. Instead of the love of Christ constraining, the wisdom of man falsely promises security. The rudiments of the world take one away from Christ. A temporary high found through a sinful escape from reality is nothing more than the siren call drawing a man away from Christ into the world of the unreal. All three dangers can take the pastor captive and farther and farther away from life with the true Christ. Instead, in the words of Herman Hoeksema, they place him “under a strange dominion.”² Beware!

2 *Chapel Talks on Colossians*, unpublished.

Beware of any syncretism of biblical truth and worldly ideas no matter its origin or its teacher. Beware lest *any man* spoil you in this way, the text says! *Any man*—whose books you read or blog posts you take in, to whose podcasts you listen, or whose video lectures you download.

Beware of the syncretism of Arminianism, a melting together of Pelagianism and Scripture. Beware of Christian feminism, a syncretism of rebellion and Scripture. Beware of abuse and manipulation, often a syncretism of biblical headship and murderous sin. All syncretisms!

Beware of Jordan Peterson who has the ear of more and more Evangelical and Reformed people, including Protestant Reformed people. Peterson is a man who says some good counter-cultural things but who expounds the Bible while believing it to be no more than a good piece of literature devoid of a Christ who is the Son of God. A syncretism!

Beware of the vain philosophy of the day that says freedom is not in the bounds of God's law but in actualizing all you feel and desire. A wicked "freedom" it says you may have even as you serve Christ! A syncretism!

The Reformed Form for Ordination calls the minister to "refute with the Holy Scriptures all schisms and heresies which are repugnant to the pure doctrine." But how can the seminary student do so if he himself becomes a spoiled pastor one day? The minister is called to deliver God's sheep out of the snare of the Evil one. But how can the seminary student do so one day, if he is himself made spoil of the Devil? Seminary students may be called one day to lead the sheep with the Word that is a light for their feet, but how can they if they are captive to darkness?

Beware!

BECOME!

What will keep us from being made the Devil's spoil? Ironically, in the text the means to this deliverance, is in fact, to *be spoiled*.

The idea of the text is, "Beware lest any man spoil you, through philosophy that is vain deceit, after the traditions of men, after the rudiments of the world, *and not spoil you after Christ!*" Beware, lest the influences in your life are not making you Christ's spoil! The

ultimate antidote to being spoiled by all these things (and more), is not to not be spoiled. Rather, it is to be spoiled by Another. It is to become Christ's own spoils of war!

If someone asked you, seminary students, what you ultimately hope to gain from this year of seminary training, how would you answer? "To better learn how to do exegesis"? "How to put together a sermon"? "How to teach catechism"? "To know the dogma of Christ's church"? But would you also say, "I hope to become more the spoil of the Lord Jesus Christ"? If not, the other gains of seminary training will be of little benefit—to you, or to God's people. Christ saves by uniting Himself to His people, taking them captive by conquering their minds and hearts and souls with His grace and truth. We then become useful to Him in this war when we are His spoil of war.

This Christ is the Christ "in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead bodily," one of the most powerful testimonies to the deity of Christ in Scripture. He is the fullness of God come to us in the second person of the Trinity made flesh. He is that fullness come to us "bodily." In other words, the fullness of the Godhead is not merely manifest to us in God's omni—but invisible—presence. Rather, in Him, a finite human body is filled with the infinite God, making this Jesus the true tabernacle and true temple. Only now, the presence of God, not filling a brick-and-mortar cubicle but our very own humanity, reveals the Godhead in human thoughts, human words, human actions, human expressions, and human touch. He is the only One who can redeem us from the curse and restore us to the favor of God. He is the only One who can connect us to God from whom we had once cut ourselves off. To be made His spoil is to be united to God Himself.

If in Christ God Himself has pierced the veil between heaven and earth; if in Him God Himself has become known to us and made Himself our salvation—then He must have us. Nothing must be allowed to take us away from Him. In Him we have light in the darkness and life in the midst of death. In Him we find the One who created us and breathed life into us. In Him we have freedom from the guilt and power of sin. In Him we have purpose, hope, and joy. In the great battle for the

minds and souls of men, we are used of Him to take others captive for Him! We must be captive to Him and no other.

The text warns not only concerning teachers that spoil the students after the Evil one, it also warns of teachers who will not labor to make students Christ's spoil. Why will the seminary students come to the classes? Why will they take notes, study, and take tests? There are many good and important answers to these questions. But if someone asked the professors what they hope to accomplish with their students in this year of seminary training, may they say this, "Oh, that Christ might make them His spoil! That He would take them in their minds with truth, take them in their hearts with His gospel, take them in their lives with His wise law!"

BE FILLED!

Becoming the spoil of the Lord Jesus Christ comes with this marvelous, mysterious result: one is made full. "And ye are complete in Him." An astounding sentence. No matter how full and complete we think we are made by anything else in this life, without Him one is incomplete. The wonderful mystery of the truth is that the only thing that can complete man is God.

The idea is really even more beautiful in the Greek. The word "complete" holds a rich meaning: "filled up to full and thus complete." Satisfied. No empty space left. The apostle makes a connection to the truth of the previous verse. In Christ is the fullness of the Godhead, and out of His fullness He is able to fill us up so that nothing lacks. He is the ocean; we are so many empty jars. There is plenty in Him to fill all of us to overflowing. Though He does not make us the Godhead bodily, He connects us to God, thus making us partakers of His divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). In this way, man is complete.

Who can fully describe this? And yet the child of God knows it. Most readers know Augustine's line concerning God, "Thou hast formed us for Thyself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee."³ But do not forget how Augustine continues, "But Oh! how shall I find rest in Thee? Who will send

Thee into my heart to inebriate it, that I may forget my woes, and embrace Thee my only good?"⁴ Here is the answer: The One who is the fullness of the Godhead bodily will send God into our hearts. In union with Him, we are filled to the top.

Made spoil by Christ and filled by Him, a man is not available to be taken captive by anyone or anything else. That is the ultimate answer to the problem of being taken captive by the enemy—being filled to the top by God in Christ. If a minister drifts into heresy, in the end this is why: he is not being filled to the top with the Christ of Scripture and is looking for something else to fill his mind and heart. If a minister drifts into legalism and controlling narcissism, capturing people in a world of his own making, in the end this is why: he is not filled to the top with the Christ of Scripture, and thus has been taken captive by traditions of men. If a minister loses himself in addictions and escapes until he is taken captive by them, this is always ultimately why: he is not being made the spoil of Christ, filled to the top with the Christ of Scripture.

In the words of the French Reformed preacher Jean Daille:

He is the true tree of life, loaded with fruit, that we might gather...He has received in order to give to us. He is rich to enrich us. He is full to replenish us. His abundance is our bliss, and his treasures are the relief of our necessity. Neither suppose that he will impart only some of his benefits—as he has superabundance of them in himself, so he communicates them all to us. He leaves no part of our nature empty. He fills up all with his graces. We derive from him all that is necessary to complete us.⁵

May the Protestant Reformed Seminary be used of God to make seminary students and, in turn, congregation members, more and more the spoil of Christ.

3 Augustine of Hippo. *The Confessions of St. Augustine*, The Literary Guild of America (1932), 1.

4 Augustine, *Confessions*, 3.

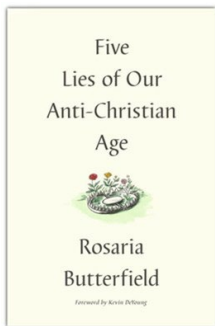
5 John Daille, *An Exposition of the Epistle to the Colossians* (Marshalltown, DE: National Foundation of Christian Education, 1972), 310.



FIVE LIES OF OUR ANTI-CHRISTIAN AGE: A REVIEW

MRS. SARAH MOWERY

wife and mother in Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado



It's been over a decade since Rosaria Butterfield's book *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* shook things up in Reformed and Evangelical circles. Since that time she has authored *Openness Unhindered*, *The Gospel Comes with a House Key*, and her latest book, published last year, *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age*. Like the books that preceded it, *Five Lies* is full of anecdotes from her life; it is intelligent and thoughtfully written; and it pulls no punches.

The book's title clearly denotes its content: in it Butterfield confronts with the truth of God's Word five lies of the age in which we live. The lies she addresses are not the only lies against which Christians must stand—after all, Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, propagates lies at a breathtaking rate—but they are not selected arbitrarily either. They are five lies from the front lines. As Kevin DeYoung notes in the foreword, “The front lines today are battles over sex, gender, and identity.”¹

But before she considers those lies, Butterfield repents, publicly and in writing. She confesses that she was complicit with certain lies of our age not only before her conversion but also after becoming a Christian. Does she make too big a deal out of things that others might deem areas of Christian liberty? Regarding “pronoun hospitality,” she explains, “I have come to see my use of ‘preferred’ pronouns today as sin, pure and simple. Not only is it lying to people who are already being lied to by the world, but it also falsifies the gospel imperative of the creation ordinance, with its eternal binary of being

created in the image of God as male or female...” (18).² And, she points out, when Christians see their sin, they repent. When they have sinned publicly and in writing, they repent in the same manner. And repentance is more than saying you are sorry. What distinguishes true repentance from counterfeit repentance? Butterfield references Puritan Thomas Watson's book *The Doctrine of Repentance* and lists six ingredients. In a day in which many individuals and churches are willing to accommodate sin, she maintains that the Bible calls Christians to die to sin and live to Christ.

The first lie that Butterfield treats is the lie that “homosexuality is normal.” She recaps her former life as a lesbian professor and her conversion to Christianity and explains how the Lord transformed her from one who chafed at the teaching of male headship into a Christian wife, mother, and homemaker. This material will be familiar to one who has read her other books. In this context she defines and deconstructs the theory of intersectionality, explaining that intersectionality fails to distinguish between morally neutral categories like race and morally charged ones like sexual behavior. She argues that the theory also confuses a biblical understanding of justice and mercy with an unbiblical one. “We sin because we are sinners, not because we are victims,” she writes, “and people who are sinned against need a savior to save them from their sins as well” (62).

She goes on to demonstrate that defining one's personhood based on his sexual orientation is not only demeaning but also flies in the face of the Bible's teaching that each person is created either a male or female image bearer. She contends that those who

1 Kevin De Young, xv.

2 <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/why-i-no-longer-use-transgender-pronouns-and-why-you-shouldnt-either>.

claim a “gay Christianity” deny the authority and trustworthiness of Scripture and the necessity of true repentance. She answers the question, “Why is homosexuality a sin when it feels normal to some people?” in her characteristically pointed style: “True Christians believe God’s word over their feelings” (99).

In this section Butterfield distinguishes between empathy and sympathy. *Empathy* is “standing in someone else’s shoes” (99). It is a relatively new and popular English word. *Sympathy*, an older word, “recognizes a problem that someone else has” and “seeks an objective solution” (100). Sympathy is superior to empathy. “Empathy is dangerous because if the highest form of love is standing in someone else’s shoes, no one is left standing in a place of objective truth” (101).

The second lie she confronts is this: “Being a spiritual person is kinder than being a biblical Christian.” Are these two versions of the same thing? No, “Christians are filled with the Holy Spirit, not the spirit of the age” (122). Whether or not one falls for this lie depends on what he believes the Bible is. Is it the infallible and authoritative word of God? “All the other debates are downstream from this one” (144).

The third lie: “Feminism is good for the world and the church.” Butterfield writes, “Feminism in the world is passé—it has been displaced by transgenderism,” but “when the church sets itself up to follow the world and not lead it, it necessarily lingers long with discarded trends and affections” (14-15). She identifies feminism as her former religion and opposes this lie by celebrating the unique callings for which God created men and women.

The fourth lie is the one that has displaced feminism in the world: “Transgenderism is normal.” Butterfield exposes the sin at the root of transgenderism—envy—and asserts that, “Reframing sinful deeds and desires of the flesh in worldly or therapeutic terms is sinful” (204). She observes that sin infantilizes a person, and she states,

We live in a culture that ascribes truth to feelings and perceptions, and it fears hurting people’s feelings more than encouraging them to permanently mutilate their bodies. Christians must stand in a discerning place. Our culture says things like not being believed is more traumatic than abuse. But believing things that aren’t true is a sin and leads people into further sin (217).

She also unpacks this “quandary”: “homosexual orientation is now considered immutable and fixed while gender identity is a matter of psychological choice” (229). If envy is the vice, what is the virtue? Contentment. The answer to this lie ends with a several-page summary of another Puritan classic, Jeremiah Burrough’s excellent book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*.

At first glance, the fifth and final lie Butterfield addresses seems trivial when compared to the other four: “Modesty is an outdated burden that serves male dominance and holds women back.” She describes her first exposure to Christian women: “They didn’t sell themselves. They didn’t talk about themselves. They possessed a virtue that I had not ever seen before: modesty” (264). This lie is as old as the Devil himself, but nowadays, “In both dress and social media use, modesty has been replaced by exhibitionism” (268). Modesty has always been about more than clothing: it is also about conduct. And, whether in-person or online, privacy and modesty tend to disappear at the same time. Butterfield points out that modesty is an active not a passive grace. In other words, modesty is something Christians are called to put on. When directed toward women in particular, that statement is likely to ruffle feathers. After all, a woman is not responsible for a man’s problem with lust, right? Butterfield shrewdly suggests that a woman’s lack of modesty reveals more about her own temptation patterns than anyone else’s. In this context she mentions two valuable books by a third Puritan, John Owen: *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* and *Temptation: Resisted and Repulsed*.

In her consideration of exhibitionism and temptation, Butterfield describes our world as one “that eschews modesty and believes that everyone needs to know all of our struggles,” and she notes, “Satan is listening” (276). Satan is not omniscient: only God is. What a comforting thought! But the Devil has been a diligent student of human speech and behavior for thousands of years. Perhaps, then, there are times when instead of divulging every temptation, we are better off bringing them to God, the One who searches our hearts and knows our thoughts.

Five Lies includes an afterword, in which Butterfield distinguishes between acceptance and approval. She posits what this might look like in specific situations,

especially regarding prodigal sons and daughters. I did not find her examples particularly helpful, because given the nuances of such difficult situations, I believe our course of action is best decided in the context of the local church with the counsel of one's elders and fellow saints. I do not think Butterfield would disagree. Then follows an appendix of guiding principles on reading the Bible.

As I turned the final page of this book, I found myself in agreement with Kevin DeYoung's remark, "You won't agree with every sentence" (xv-xvi). I did not. For example, I believe that Scripture teaches that sinful man does not bear the image of God unless he is regenerated. Nor do I believe the Bible teaches common grace. And I disagree with her understanding of Adam's

union with Christ prior to the Fall. But, like DeYoung, I find it hard "to imagine anyone who shouldn't listen to what Rosaria has to say" (xvi). Reading this book is like sitting at the feet of a wise, older Christian sister who honors the Word of God as the objective rule for all of faith and life. She begins the book this way: "This book is for Christians, especially Christian women, who aren't ashamed of the Bible and its teachings" (xix). Sisters, in an age in which women are lurching left and leaving the church at an unprecedented rate, may we be numbered among that tribe.³

3 <https://www.breakpoint.org/why-are-educated-women-leaving-church>.

STRENGTH OF YOUTH



GOING TO THE GYM

REV. JONATHAN MAHTANI

pastor of the Pittsburgh PRC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

...Exercise thyself rather unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come—(1 Timothy 4:7b-8)

This article has been a long time in the making. From my high school days until today, I have made bodily exercise an important part of my life. In my younger years, "working out" was an idol to battle. Presently, I struggle to discipline myself to stay in shape as a good steward of my body. I have observed and experienced the good, the bad, and the ugly of the fitness world both in and out of the gym.

As a college athlete, I joined my fellow soccer players in the gym almost every day during the off-season in order to build lean muscle and maintain cardiovascular health. Between sets, I listened to the noises of music, grunts, and cheers around me. I observed others in action through the numerous mirrors...and I asked

myself questions like these: "Why are they *here*?" and "Why am *I* here?"

In the last ten years or so, my wife and I have entered the gym through workout videos. Without leaving our home, we have trained under top fitness experts. In addition to enjoying the great calisthenics, we noticed what the trainers said to motivate us, the dress code of these coaches and their assistants, and where the camera focused through the exercises as we attempted to copy the good "form" of toned athletes on the screen. The more we discussed what went on in the gym, the more we became concerned.

Our concern changed to alarm with the following: 1) An unbelieving relative from out of town asked me for a ride to the gym, shamelessly admitting that the purpose was to find someone of the opposite sex with whom to "hook-up." 2) Unofficial statistics revealed fitness facilities to be hotspots for affairs. 3) We began to hear about and counsel those dealing with sexual

sin, and too often there was a link to the gym. With more than a little unease, my wife and I have observed all this, all the while seeing our churches' young people and adults flock to the gym. Time and again, we have asked, "Are they (their parents, their spouses, their girlfriends or boyfriends, and others) *aware* of the dangers of the gym? Or are they oblivious? Maybe there should be a *Standard Bearer* article on this topic."

One reason for my delay in writing on this topic has been the concern of communicating legalism. I do not want young readers to imagine that exercising or going to the gym are evils. "Bodily exercise profiteth little," says Paul...but it *is* profitable. The warnings I write should not be misconstrued to mean that those who have a gym membership are less spiritual or to be suspected of sin. Without forbidding the use of gyms, I sound a warning about the not-so-subtle temptations to which many seem oblivious.

Rewind with me to the Greek gymnasium. About 650 years before Christ, males of various ages would gather at the gym to exercise—training for athletic events, preparing for battle, or simply showing off their strength. Significantly, the Greek word for "gym" is *gymnos*, meaning (in its most literal form) "naked," because men exercised in the nude at the gymnasium. Their explanation for stripping down had to do with clothing's hindrance to their movements during training and competitions. This *gymnos* continued in the baths of Greek and Roman culture. Normally enjoined to many gymnasiums were such houses where males socialized while washing themselves. Because of the close association of nakedness and exercise at the gym, the common understanding of the verb *gymnasia* became "to exercise" translated as such in 1 Timothy 4:7-8. As proud men sculpted their body parts, flexed their muscles, and competed to prove their superiority, it is not difficult to imagine what kind of unchaste conversations and actions these testosterone-filled arenas may have produced. Gymnasiums became places of sexual sin also of the homosexual and pedophilic kind.

The modern gymnasium has its differences, of course. But honest comparison of the early gymnasium with today's gym will unveil few differences and stark similarities. In fact, one of the few differences should alarm us. While the gyms of the seventh century B.C.

only allowed males, females today join the males in the *gymnos*. The gyms of both past and present promote more than fitness and physical strength; they are powerhouses of worldly philosophy and enticement.

It is folly for Christians to ignore the worldly origins of the gymnasium, and worse to imagine that there are no dangers of which to beware. I urge God's people to consider at least four dangers.

First, and most obviously, we must beware of immodesty. The gym's name and origin indicate immodesty has been part of its culture from the beginning and continues to this day. The Heidelberg Catechism explains the seventh commandment as forbidding "all unchaste actions, gestures, words, thoughts, desires, and whatever can entice men thereto." Yet many confessing Christians *look like* and *look at* the enticing physiques of the uncovered world that they join at the gym. Are we desensitized to this appalling immodesty? Do we imagine it is harmless for males and females to see one another contort their barely-clothed bodies? Do we really believe the excuse that the shortness and tightness is only for ease of movement? We must recognize that *gymnos* is promoted at the gym, and many strong men and women have been wounded in this house of temptation (see Prov. 7:26-27).

Secondly, we must be aware of the immediate physiological and psychological effects of exercise. Most know the many positive effects on the body, mind, and even the soul, but few consciously think about how the physiological and psychological affects the social. An article by pastor and counselor Gary Thomas provides helpful insight. Referring to a study by psychologist Dr. John Gottman, he explains, "Elevated heartbeats (95 beats or more per minute) put our brains in a heightened state of emotion, which leads to a more meaningful conversation during or immediately after the activity, which gives a couple a better chance of creating a positive memory.... The elevated heart rate creates a new vulnerability that can foster a new connection."¹ Add to elevated heart rates the euphoric release of endorphins, testosterone spikes, and encouraging words for added adrenaline, and you get powerful chemistry among individuals exercising

¹ <https://garythomasbooks.substack.com/p/why-cross-fit-might-be-more-dangerous>.

together. Positively then, when husband and wife, for example, or members of a cross-country team, work out together, good relationships are often fostered. But therein lies the danger of the gym.

Thomas continues: “We have counseled many couples with infidelity, and about seventy percent of the time the affair is between a spouse and a cross fit or gym trainer, especially for the wives.” Bring immediate physical effects of exercising into the environment of the *gymnos*, and what often results? We would say, “Duh!” And even a worldly periodical admits, “Workout classes supercharge libidos, leaving lusty exercisers ready to romp.”² From a purely physiological and psychological side of things, we should see a danger.

Thirdly, we must beware that the gym is not a spiritually neutral environment but rather a place of spiritual attack. The ungodly of this world are present, and we must remind ourselves of total depravity in the context of the gym: “Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6:5b). Besides the motive of maintaining a healthy body, there are often many ulterior motives for going to the gym. Many go because they enjoy the view of the *gymnos*. Their sensual interest is “seeing sweat-soaked, scantily-clad patrons huffing and puffing....”³ Males and females undress, flex and strut like peacocks in love with themselves, and yearn to attract the unholy attention of others. A friendly conversation here, a nice compliment there, a gentle touch “to help with your form”—these may not be as innocent as they seem. Join bodies of this world heated up by exercise and sinful desires, and you have what looks like a friendly arena promoting good health but what may invisibly be a colosseum of gladiators against your soul.

Finally, we must be aware of idolatry. The activities in the gymnasium of old were often connected to the pagan worship of the Greeks or Romans. Gymnasiums were devoted to gods and goddesses, and athletes dedicated their carved bodies and developed skills to the deities of Olympus. In today’s gyms, fitness gurus can be like worship leaders in the cult of body worship. This works-based religion preaches a false gospel that declares that comfort and joy is found in diets,

supplements, exercising, and making your body match the vain image of beauty or strength promoted by the media. Devoted gym members are more regular in attendance at their centers of worship than any church member might be. Congregants at the gym are even united in heart-felt worship—to move, stretch, and prostrate their bodies as living sacrifices before their god or goddess...often found in the mirror. They are passionate about their muscle tone, their core, their cardio, their shape, their weight, and the bodies of others like them. According to God, your body is *His* temple (1 Cor. 6:19), but according to the gym, your body is your god and *your* temple.

This passionate idolatry makes one wonder whether Paul had the gym in mind when he wrote to the Romans who were very familiar with our topic:

Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man.... Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves.... For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: and likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet (Rom. 1:22-24, 26-27).

Although all kinds of idolatry may lead to vile affections, it should be obvious how the gym’s body-worship would especially stimulate such gross desires.

Aware of the dangers, those who proceed to the gym must do so cautiously. Going with a friend of like faith and honest disposition would help with accountability and regular examination of motives. Others may choose to avoid the gym altogether and work out at home. Although the gym is not an evil of itself, these seek to flee youthful lusts that war against the soul (2 Tim. 2:22; 1 Pet. 2:11). In this case, self-righteous legalism must not be the motivation—only the thankful pursuit of holiness. As we live *in* the world, remember that we ought not be *of* the world (John 17:15-16). Exercising discernment must accompany the exercising of the body. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom. 12:1).

² <https://nypost.com/2024/01/05/lifestyle/places-affairs-start-in-the-new-year-watch-out-for-micro-cheating-red-flags>.

³ <https://nypost.com>.

THE 2024 BRITISH REFORMED CONFERENCE

Caleb Buitter, Hope PRC, Redlands, CA

On Saturday, August 3, the British Reformed Fellowship Conference convened at Cloverley Hall, a 150-year-old mansion and hall in the Shropshire countryside of central England. Some 130 people were present including day visitors. Attendees included believers from various parts of the UK, the USA, Norway, Brazil, the Republic of Ireland, Singapore, Canada, Malaysia, and Australia. The hall itself had a fascinating layout of assorted rooms on the second floor, with hallways twisting and turning back and forth in a maze-like way. The building consisted of three assembly rooms, three dining rooms, a tea room, a clock tower, and more. The weather was fantastic and fair, and free time was spent singing, talking, and enjoying soccer, volleyball, tennis, ping-pong, and swimming, as well as going on several planned day trips. The staff at Cloverley treated us extremely well in providing all our meals, packed lunches for day trips, sporting equipment, and general service.

The theme of the conference was “Then Comes the End—the Reformed Doctrine of Eschatology.” The speakers explained the doctrine of the last things as they are revealed in Scripture. Rev. Angus Stewart welcomed all the attendees and gave an opening address

on Saturday evening taken from Daniel 2. He explained Nebuchadnezzar as a type of antichrist, Daniel’s three friends as believers, and the pre-incarnate Christ appearing among the friends in the fiery furnace.

On Sunday morning, Rev. Ron Hanko preached “The Offering of the Prayers of All Saints” from Revelation 8:1-6, in which God answers our prayers that His kingdom come. That afternoon Prof. Brian Huizinga led a study on “The Mark of the Beast” from Revelation 13:16-18, with questions and answers afterward. In the evening, he preached “As in the Days of Noah and Lot” from Luke 17:26-30. In the text, Jesus warns against being apathetic to God and the return of Christ.

On Monday, the conference attendees took a day trip to the Victorian-era mining town of Blists Hills and the famous Iron Bridge. The town was complete with working machinery and people dressed in Victorian-era apparel showing what working life was like during the Industrial Revolution. Later that evening, Prof. Huizinga presented the first speech of the conference, “The End That Is Coming,” in which he gave an overview of eschatology and how all things are moving toward their God-appointed goal.



Rev. Hanko addressed us the next day, speaking on “The Day of the Lord in the Old Testament,” and reflecting on how the Old Testament prophets viewed the coming of Christ. After an afternoon of free time, Prof. Huizinga spoke later that night on “The Antichrist in Daniel 8,” a comprehensive speech on the vision of the text and what it teaches us about the future antichrist and his fury.

Wednesday saw our second day trip, this time to the historic town of Chester with all its fascinating shops and eateries, walls dating back to medieval times, and a personal tour guide dressed as a famous “Cheshire archer.” In traveling to and from Chester via coach buses, we were treated to an energetic history lesson on Chester by Rev. Stewart. Later in the evening, Rev. Stewart gave a historical lecture on a saint known as “The Venerable Bede.” He was a monk who lived from AD 672-735 in northeast England with eschatological views very similar to our Reformed understanding.

Rev. Hanko brought the address on Thursday, “The Battle of Armageddon,” from Revelation 16, which details the great war that will occur between nations at the time of Christ’s coming.

On Friday, Rev. Hanko spoke on the topic, “The Final Resurrection” using 1 Corinthians 15. During the

afternoon, a local falconer came on site and flew various birds of prey, such as the peregrine falcon, which is capable of speeds up to 200 mph! In the evening, Prof. Huizinga gave the final speech on “The New Heavens and the New Earth,” using 2 Peter 3.

The BRF Conference is a good gift of God to us, that we might be encouraged in the faith, learn from His Word, and join with others in praising Him. We see how God gathers His people unto Himself from all over the world, and we thank Him for this small foretaste of that perfect fellowship we will enjoy with Him in heaven.

Many thanks are expressed to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland and the council members of the BRF for organizing the conference and for the sheer amount of labor that is needed to support it.

Plans have been made for the 2026 BRF Conference to be held at Castlewellan Castle, Co. Down, Northern Ireland. The topic chosen is “Knowing God,” and Rev. Hanko and Prof. Huizinga will return as conference speakers, the Lord willing.

The recordings of the speeches are available at www.britishreformed.org.

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES IN COMMON—CLASSIS EAST

REPORT OF CLASSIS EAST SEPTEMBER 18, 19, AND OCTOBER 1, 2024

Georgetown PRC (in Hudsonville, MI) hosted classis for three days. Rev. Nathan Decker served as the chairman of the meeting. Through his leadership classis worked its way through all the matters on the agenda in a careful and brotherly manner.

Rev. Audred Spriensma requested approval for emeritation (retirement from active ministry) from Cornerstone PRC (Dyer, IN). After a consistory approves the retirement of a minister, it must also be approved by classis and synod. Classis East concurred with the decision of Cornerstone to approve Rev. Spriensma’s request and approved a decision that states, “That Classis express its deep appreciation and thanks to God for the 43 years of Rev. Spriensma’s dedicated service in the ministry and chaplaincy, and especially for his faithful work as both foreign and domestic missionary” (Art. 15, II, D).

The churches of Classis East received reports of

sexual abuse from an organization that synod hired to help investigate child sexual abuse in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The church visitors and Providence PRC brought recommendations for how Classis East could provide accountability for how consistories respond to these reports. Providence PRC’s recommendation, which came by way of overture, was approved by classis. Classis appointed a committee of ten elders (with three alternates) to work with the church visitors “to provide accountability, ensuring that consistories respond rightly to the reports from Guidepost” (Art. 26, II, A).

In closed session classis spent much time on a protest. The substance of the case is sensitive and cannot be explained, but the fact that there are seven articles in the minutes about this case reflects how much time classis took to handle the sensitive matter carefully.

A special committee report was also treated in closed session. The special committee was appointed by classis to assist a Consistory on a sensitive case. Classis

approved the labors of the committee and mandated that the committee continue in its work.

Another special committee submitted a report in May 2024. Classis did not treat the report in May in order to take more time to read and reflect on it. The report reflects on a specific case of child sexual abuse and explains lessons that can be learned from this case about how the church should handle disclosures of child sexual abuse. Classis decided to receive the report and to make it available with a cover letter for the officebearers and members of Classis East. The report and cover letter have been sent to the Councils of Classis East for distribution.

Rev. Smidstra brought an overture that was

approved by the Consistory of First PRC of Holland, MI asking that Classis East and synod adopt a rule “allowing protestants and appellants to speak on the legality in their cases” (Art. 18, I, A). Classis approved the request and adopted the rule for its own rules. The overture has been sent to synod with the approval of Classis East for synod to consider adding this rule to the Rules of Synod.

Classis also treated several matters that are commonly part of its work, including deciding that its next meeting will convene January 8, 2024 at Zion PRC (Jenison, MI) at 8:00 A.M.

Rev. Clay Spronk, Stated Clerk, Classis East

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES IN COMMON—CLASSIS WEST

NEWS REPORT OF CLASSIS WEST OF THE PRCA MEETING SEPTEMBER 25, 2024

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on September 25, 2024, in Hull (IA) PRC. The Hull congregation did a fine job of hosting the delegates.

The day before the meeting, Hull’s Council hosted an officebearers’ conference on the subject of “The Conclusion of PRCA Foreign Missionary Labors in the Philippines.” The speakers were two of our former missionaries to the Philippines, Rev. Daniel Kleyn and Rev. Richard Smit, who each gave two speeches. Rev. Kleyn spoke on “The History of Our Mission Work” and “Concluding Our Work in the Philippines.” Rev. Smit spoke on “Lessons Learned in Our Mission Work” and “The Current Status of the PRC in the Philippines.”

Delegated to classis were 26 men (10 ministers, 15 elders, and 1 deacon), and they were joined by three synodical deputies from Classis East. A number of visitors were also present, including grade-school children from three area Protestant Reformed schools and high-school students from the area high school. By alphabetical rotation, Rev. R. Smit chaired the meeting.

Five men signed the Formula of Subscription as first-time delegates to classis, the minutes of the previous meeting of classis were approved, and the chairman appointed five committees of pre-advice.

The highlight of the meeting was the examination of Pastor-elect Arend Haveman, who had accepted the call to serve as pastor of Loveland (CO) PRC. The night before classis convened, the delegates gathered with the Hull congregation to worship God and to hear the specimen

sermon of Mr. Haveman. He preached on 1 Peter 2:9-10 under the theme “A Chosen Generation,” and displayed clearly the gifts that God has entrusted to him for the proclamation of the gospel. The majority of the morning of Classis was taken up with the joyful work of examining Mr. Haveman in theology, knowledge of Scripture and the Reformed confessions, controversy, and practice. Throughout the exam the brother gave a good account of the intellectual and spiritual gifts necessary for the ministry. Classis unanimously approved his examination, and the synodical deputies from Classis East heartily concurred. The brother plans to be ordained and installed into the ministry in the next few weeks [October 13]. We give thanks to the Lord of the harvest for supplying our churches with another faithful laborer!

After the conclusion of the exam, classis took an extended break for the committees of pre-advice to prepare their advice. When the delegates reassembled in the afternoon, the four questions of Article 41 of the Church Order were asked of the Consistories and satisfactorily answered by all.

In closed session, classis treated the report of a special committee assigned by classis to help a Consistory regarding a case of sexual abuse. Classis approved the work of the special committee up to this point, gave advice to the Consistory, and gave further mandates to the special committee as to their work with the Consistory going forward.

After supper, routine reports of the stated clerk, classical committee, and reading sermon committee were read and approved.

Classis also treated a request from its church visitors. In March 2024, classis had given the following mandate to the church visitors with respect to reports received by consistories from the third-party investigation into cases of sexual abuse: "...instruct its church visitors that, prior to the meeting with each consistory for the annual church visitation, they request a report of all correspondence received from the third party with the names redacted. The church visitors would then discuss this correspondence with the consistory at the annual meeting, document the correspondence, and report their findings in summary form with names redacted to the classis." In light of Synod 2024 deciding that the previous synod had erred in authorizing a secular organization to do this work, the church visitors asked to be relieved of this mandate. Classis did not approve this request of the church visitors, but decided that the mandate should stand, judging that the church visitors had not demonstrated why the decision of Synod 2024 was reason that their mandate must be rescinded nor why the fulfilling of this mandate would be improper.

Classis also treated the protest of a Consistory

against a procedural decision of the previous meeting of classis. Classis upheld the protest and declared its previous decision to be in error on the grounds that (1) Classis had wrongly entered into a matter that had just been declared not legally before it; (2) that the material entered into had not appeared in the agenda or on the Consistory's credentials; and (3) that classis' decision rested upon a faulty understanding of Article 30 of the Church Order, because, while Article 30 says that classis may deal with matters "such as pertain to the churches of the major assembly in common," this does not give classis the right to enter into any local matter it wants to.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply through March of 2025 for the vacant congregations of Hope PRC (Redlands, CA) and Lynden (WA) PRC.

The expenses of the meeting were approved in the amount of \$12,762.48.

Classis finished its work a little after 9:00 p.m.

Classis West will meet next in Calvary PRC (Hull, IA) on March 5, 2025, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk, Classis West

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Randolph PRC express our Christian sympathy to Kay Huizenga in the death of her husband, **Mr. Ronald Huizenga**, whom our heavenly Father in His goodness and wisdom gathered to Himself on September 16. We also express our sympathy to Dave and Jennie Braaksma, and David, Hannah, and Kimberly in the death of their beloved father and grandfather. "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Rev. Richard Smit, President
Jeff Krosschell, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Hope PRC (Walker, MI) expresses our Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Eugene Kamps and his wife Sharon in the deaths of Sharon's parents, **Cornelius Jonker** on July 2, 2024 and **Truda Jonker** on September 25, 2024. Psalter #31, stanza 7, "When I in righteousness at last Thy glorious face shall see, when all the weary night is past and I awake with Thee. To view the glories that abide, then, then I shall be satisfied."

Dave Kamps, President
Jon Rutgers, Clerk

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Providence PRC (Hudsonville, MI) expresses our sincere sympathies to our member Edie Brummel, in the death of her beloved husband, **Cornie Brummel**. Praying God will bring comfort with the words of Psalm 116:15, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

The Council of Providence PRC (Hudsonville, MI) expresses our sincere sympathies to our member Judy VanBaren in the death of her beloved husband, **John VanBaren**. We also express sympathies to John's children, Jeff and Melanie VanBaren, Joel and Brenda VanBaren, and Jon and Janis Van Dyk, and many beloved grandchildren. Praying God will bring comfort with the words of Psalm 48:14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death."

The Council of Providence PRC
Jon VanDyk, Clerk

SB FOR BINDING

The September 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 100. If you would like your own issues of volume 100 bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of November. For additional orders, call the RFPA at (616) 457-5970.

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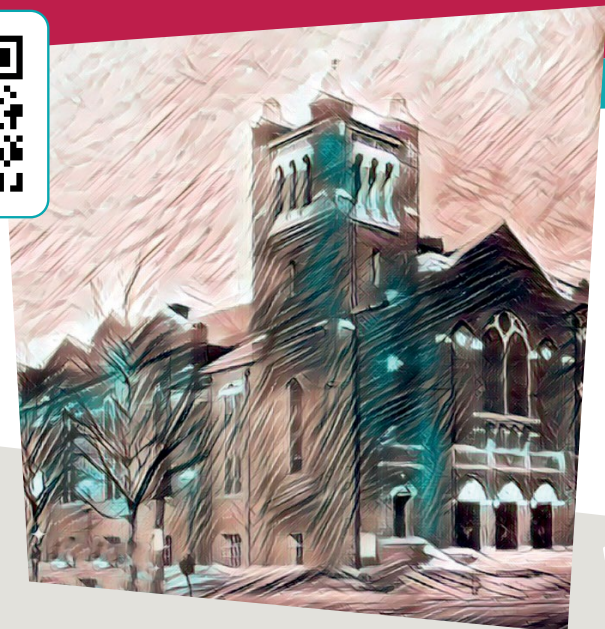
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11/3 Waiting on Jehovah, Ps. 27:14

11/10 The Final Gathering of the Church, 1 Thess. 4:13-18

11/17 The Heart Defiles a Man, Matt. 15:10, 11, 15-20

11/24 Satisfied with Marrow and Fatness, Ps. 65:1-3