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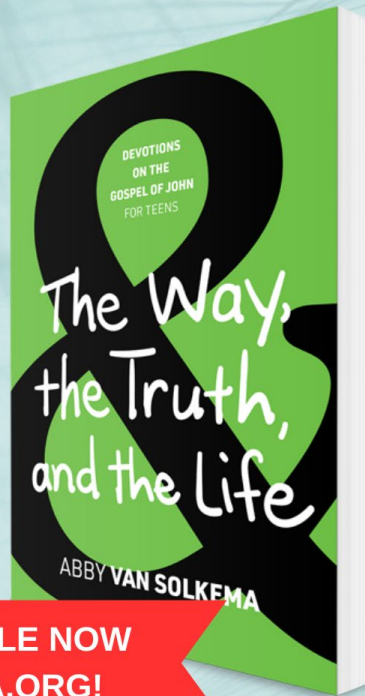
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NOT ASHAMED OF THE GOSPEL

REV. DENNIS LEE

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For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith—Romans 1:16, 17

These verses form the end of the inspired apostle's introduction to the book of Romans. The apostle Paul had begun it with such fervor and zeal for the message he was about to convey that the first seven verses are one entire sentence! That zeal carries over to verses 11-13, in which he sets forth a twofold purpose: to impart some spiritual gift to the saints in the church at Rome (vv. 11-12) and "to have some fruit" among them "even as among other Gentiles" (v. 13). So, even though past circumstances ordained of God have prevented him from preaching to them at Rome, Paul declares that he is nonetheless ready to preach the gospel to them.

What zeal and readiness the apostle had for the gospel and its witness! He gives us an explanation for his zeal and readiness in these verses. My heartfelt desire and prayer is that the apostle's zeal and explanation may more and more be yours and mine!

NOT ASHAMED—OF WHAT?

The reason that Paul is ready to preach the gospel to the church at Rome is that he is not ashamed of the gospel (v. 16a). Indeed! For why should he, or any Christian man, woman, or child be ashamed of the gospel, which is literally, "good news"? This is not fake news or bad news, both of which are so prevalent in our society and world today. Nor is it even good news concerning the weather or the economy. This is good news concerning the greatest need of all mankind: salvation from the universal misery of sin!

For Paul is not ashamed of the "gospel of *Christ*." Who is Christ, and what blessed work did He do? Christ is the promised Savior of God from sin, prophesied way back in time and Scripture (Gen. 3:15). He is the *Servant of Jehovah* (Is. 42:1), the only begotten Son of God who came from the bosom of His Father in heaven (John 1:14) into this world and in our flesh in order to perform the blessed work of saving His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). This blessed work has been confessed among Christians for two thousand years in the Apostles' Creed, which sets forth the depths of our Savior's humiliation, begun by His divine conception and lowly birth and concluding with His descent into hell; and the heights of His exaltation, beginning with His resurrection from the dead, and ending with His triumphant return in judgment. What a blessed work this is for Christians, because they will enjoy unspeakably glorious blessings in "the resurrection of the body" and "the life everlasting"! You who confess Jesus as your Savior and Lord, are you not longing for these blessings to be applied to you one day? What good news the gospel of Christ brings to all who believe!

Little wonder then that the apostle tells us that he is *not ashamed* of the gospel of Christ, and that he is willing, ready, and desirous to give a witness of it in Rome! He glories in its God-given message! He is humbled by it and considers it a privilege to share it with others. What about you, dear reader? Are you also not ashamed of it? Do you have something of the apostle's zeal and desire to share it with others?

NOT ASHAMED—WHY?

The apostle had good reason—and we with him—not to be ashamed of the gospel, do we not? Why? The apostle gives us the reason, and does so in a threefold way.

First and most directly, he says, “...for it is the power of God unto salvation” (v. 16b). In other words, there is *inherently* and *within* the gospel itself a power. Just as the power of a strong wind effects the swaying of the trees and the power of electricity effects heat and light for our homes, so also gospel power has an effect. The apostle tells us that it is the power of God unto *salvation*: gospel power effects *salvation*! A salvation from being trapped in sin and enmity against God! A salvation unto the greatest good! Not only freedom from sin and its consequences but unto everlasting life, friendship and fellowship with God!

Further, understand that gospel power is an awesome and invincible power. For the apostle tells us that it is the power of God—not man, but God! And that immediately rules out the notion that the gospel is an offer. For he who makes an offer has no power, does he? And, on the other hand, a gospel offer leaves the *hearer* with the power—to accept or reject it. The gospel is not an offer, but a command—a command of God! And there is divine power in the commands of God, for He spake and it was done, He commanded and it stood fast (Ps. 33:6, 9). Truth be told, the gospel sets forth Jesus Christ and commands its hearers, “Repent! Believe! Come to Jesus, all who are weary and heavy laden, and He shall give you rest!” And because this is the power of God, it is invincible, for who has ever defeated or will ever defeat God?

Second, and more deeply, Paul tells us in verse 17a: “For therein is the righteousness of God revealed....” This brings us to the heart of the apostle’s answer, and the heart of the book of Romans. And it is this: in order to save a sinful, totally unrighteous people, God graciously provides the only righteousness that is needed. And He reveals this righteousness in the gospel of Christ. Without this gospel righteousness of God, all that mankind can look forward to is receiving God’s righteous punishment for sin, which is death. For all that unrighteous man can do is to try to satisfy the justice of God by earning righteousness with God through his works. And all our “do-it-yourself” righteousnesses are as “filthy rags” in the perfect judgment of God (Is. 64:6). If this righteousness, which is of the deeds of the law, is all we have, then ours is a hopeless cause and we are doomed to death by the perfectly righteous God.

But now comes the gospel of Christ with another kind of righteousness—entirely different from the righteousness that is of the deeds of the law—a *gospel* righteousness! It was promised afore by the prophets (v. 2); centered on God’s only begotten Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David (v. 3); comes to us by His resurrection from the dead (v. 4); and is all of the grace of God (v. 7)! So, it is no surprise at all that the apostle tells us that it is a righteousness that is “revealed from faith to faith” (v. 17). For our salvation is by grace alone through faith alone (Eph. 2:8, 9). This righteousness that is from God, and by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is graciously provided by God and enjoyed by faith alone, apart from the deeds of the law.

Therefore, third and foremost, when we put this all together, this gospel of Christ, fueled by God’s invincible power, and revealing this righteousness graciously given by God through Christ and His cross, never fails to save, that is, *its intended targets*. The apostle tells us who God’s intended targets are in verse 16b: “...it is the power of God unto salvation to *everyone that believeth: to the Jew first and also to the Greek*.” In other words, God’s targets are elect believers: both Jewish and Gentile believers. They are ones who have been gifted with faith. They are ones who enjoy salvation now and will enjoy it fully one day. They will enjoy salvation’s fullness because of this invincible gospel power of God operating on them!

NOT ASHAMED—WITH WHAT RESULTS?

The apostle has an eye on these wonderful results when he declares in verse 17b: “...the just shall live by faith.” For there is a twofold meaning here.

First, the righteous, that is, those who enjoy this gospel righteousness of God through faith, are *spared* the punishment of God for their sins. They do not suffer the punishment they deserve because Christ has suffered it all on their behalf. The perfect righteousness Christ has obtained for them has now been imputed to them through faith. As a result, God, the perfectly just Judge, declares to them His once-for-all verdict that stands forever: “*Not guilty!*” Accordingly, despite not having done a single thing that makes us worthy of this verdict, the gospel righteousness of God in Christ is freely accounted to us by faith. We are spared!

But also, second, the righteous *live*! They are not only spared God's just punishment for sin, they live—as ones freed from the bondage of sin! They live—we live—no more in the fear of punishment and bondage again to sin! They live—we live—in thanksgiving for this wonderful righteousness and salvation, living each day by faith! They live—we live—in sweet communion with Him, which will be enjoyed to the full in heaven one day!

And so, those who are justified by faith are also being sanctified by faith throughout this life unto a future glorification of soul and body in the Lord! Such is the full salvation of the Lord, which is also the message of the book of Romans. For in it, the apostle sets forth not only the doctrine of righteousness by faith alone and its necessity and proof in chapters 1-4, but he also continues to set forth its absolute effectiveness in

chapters 5-8, the demonstration of it by God in time and history in chapters 9-11, and its beautiful display in godly living by all who know this righteousness in chapters 12-16. What a wonderful righteousness that, when bestowed on us, also guarantees that God will bestow on us *all* His wonderful salvation blessings!

Dear reader, do you know this gospel righteousness of God? Paul who knew it was not ashamed of the message of Romans. He was not ashamed of the gospel.

Likewise, you who know it must also not be ashamed of the gospel, but be assured of the fullness of the gospel blessings that are yours through Christ. Know its absolute effectiveness! Demonstrate it by a beautiful display of godly living that arises out of it! Live in its comfort and hope, and tell others of it by your life and witness!



ARE YOU PAYING ATTENTION WHEN THE LAW IS READ?

PROF. CORY GRIESS

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

As a pastor and a professor who teaches Reformed worship in the Protestant Reformed Seminary, I am always trying to think of ways to help God's people embrace and carry out Reformed worship with mind and heart. As you know, we are to offer every aspect of our worship to God "in spirit" as well as "in truth." Yet, at times God's people struggle to maintain the proper spiritual mindset as the service progresses through the elements of worship. It seems to me this is especially true when the law of God and the summary of that law are read on Sunday mornings. How important it is that we hear both declared to us week after week! Even so, it can be difficult to keep our attention focused on examining our own rebellions and shortcomings from the week past, our need for the Savior, and the life of grateful obedience the law lays before us.

In this article, I attempt to provide aid with this, all the while informing you about a trip some of the youth made to Mexico this past summer.

SUMMER VISIT TO MEXICO

In July, Ethan Mingerink, who teaches Spanish at Covenant Christian High School (Grand Rapids, Michigan), a few chaperones, two PR Seminary students, and I, took a group of youth who had taken the Spanish 3 course at Covenant to Mexico City for a conference on the preservation of the saints. The conference was held at the Juan Calvino Seminary, which is the seminary of the Independent Presbyterian Church of Mexico. In addition to a local seminary professor who gave a speech on the correct (Reformed) understanding of

John 3:16, the speakers were Arend Haveman (now Rev.), Seminarian Bruce Feenstra, and myself.

One of the purposes of this trip was for the Spanish 3 students to perfect their Spanish abilities even as they became acquainted with some of God's people in Mexico. One particularly memorable day of interaction was a day trip to Teotihuacan (tay-oh-tee-wa'-kan). Teotihuacan is the site of two massive ancient pyramids that centered a city likely built by the Olmec civilization



around AD 500. The city was taken over by the Aztecs in the 1400s, and at its zenith became the largest city in the Americas and the sixth largest in the world.

Although visitors are no longer allowed to climb the pyramid of the sun and the pyramid of the moon, they are an impressive and chilling sight to behold.

These pyramids were altars of a violent pagan civilization, and the child of God beholding them comes into contact with a blood-curdling paganism he otherwise knows only from the pages of Scripture. Both the Olmecs and the Aztecs repeatedly made human sacrifices. After archaeologists unearthed the road leading to the pyramids, they appropriately named it “the avenue of the dead,” lining both sides of the boulevard were thousands of human skulls.

The local church members in Mexico City hired a tour guide for our visit to the pyramids, a man who energetically and captivantly told the story of what happened—sometimes daily—at the summit of these ghastly peaks. As he told it, a priest would lead a sacrificial victim—male, female, adult, or child—to the apex, where there was nothing between them and the clouds. The priest would then command the poor victim to stretch his arms out leaning slightly back, as if to offer himself to the sun. With a sharp obsidian knife, the priest would stab the victim in the chest below the ribs. While the offering was still very much alive, the

priest would dive his hand into the slit, push his arm in to the elbow up under the rib cage, and pull out the beating heart, leaving the victim to drop dead. The priest would then hold the now vainly pumping muscle up to the sky, offering it as appeasement to the god *del sol*.

THE SEED OF RELIGION

John Calvin spoke of the *sensus divinitatis* (perception of God) that lies in the heart of every human being and of a “seed of religion” that is found in every culture on earth. Calvin said that if one searched the world over for total ignorance of God, “surely one was most likely to find an example of it among the more backward folk and those more remote from civilization. Yet, there is... no nation so barbarous...that they have not a deep-seated conviction that there is a god.” Furthermore, Calvin continued, if the atheists are put forward as evidence to the contrary, let it be known that they too “from time to time feel an inkling of what they desire not to believe.”¹

But how vacant of grace is this understanding of God! Nowhere is the cross to be found! Apart from special revelation, men only know God's eternal power and Godhead (Rom 1:20) and nothing of His redeeming work in Jesus Christ. How man corrupts even the limited knowledge of God he has! This sense of the divine degenerates in man as he suppresses and twists the truth (Rom 1:18, 23). Unregenerated, the pagan mind (whether Olmec or modern secular) is dark, leading him to worship the creature (whether the sun, or man himself) as though it is the creator. Professing wisdom, man apart from grace shows himself a fool (Rom. 1:22).

Yet not an entirely ignorant fool. In addition to a basic knowledge of the Lawgiver, man understands that there is divine law. The “work of the law” remains ever written on man's heart (Rom. 2:15). This law is the law that was both written into God's creation and was pressed upon Adam in the garden. It is the law that says, “Do this and live. Do not and die.” That law and its central message still presses itself upon every man born of fallen Adam so that he lives with a conscience preaching to him, “You have not done it, and you will

1 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 1.3.1,2.

die.” No matter how he tries to silence that conscience, and no matter how seared his conscience becomes, he cannot silence it utterly. For the law of God is not silenced, and the conscience is testimony within to the law and judgment of God without. Thus, on some level, every man faces the quandry, “How do I turn away His wrath?”

This all lies behind the Olmec priests offering their thousands, if not millions, of human sacrifices on the altar of the pyramid of the sun and the pyramid of the moon.

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

The wonder of the gospel is found in Scripture alone. The truth is that we cannot propitiate the wrath of God for our sins by ripping out our heart and giving it to Him or by working from the heart outward in our life to achieve the standard of righteousness. Only He can do either of these things. And the good news is that He has done both! God has fulfilled His own righteousness, has appeased His own wrath by offering His own sacrifice for the benefit of His people. “He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things” (Rom. 8:32). *He* spared not His Son. *He* delivered Him up for us all! Desiring to reveal His glory by a wholly unmerited grace, God has in Christ become the priest and the sacrifice, even as He is the one propitiated. The Lord Jesus Christ *gave* His heart to God in His life by living a life of obedience. And the Lord Jesus Christ took the wrath of God *into* His heart to satisfy God’s justice against our sin. This is the uniqueness of Christianity. Every religion demands men find their own sacrifice to offer to God to propitiate His wrath. Christian truth makes known the God who offered His *own* sacrifice to propitiate His *own* wrath for *man’s* benefit.

A HOLY OFFERING

When our group came back to the Juan Calvino Seminary after the visit to the pyramids, we sat on benches in the atrium and talked about the experience. It did not take long for everyone to notice that what was etched into the benches at the seminary was a picture of a hand holding a heart up “to the sky,” offering it to God. This was no grotesque pagan symbol, however,

some remnant of Olmec works-righteousness. It was in fact John Calvin’s own seal, surrounded by his motto,



“My heart I offer to Thee, O Lord, promptly and sincerely.”

We discussed how different this offering of the heart is. An offering of gratitude for a finished work. An offering of love and devotion, not of terror. An offering out of life, not to achieve life.

HEARING THE LAW AND ITS SUMMARY

As believers, when we come to church and hear the law and the summary of the law bidding us to “love the Lord our God with all our *heart*, mind, soul, and strength,” what are we to make of what we are hearing? Lord willing, the pagan practice of the Olmecs contrasted with the seal of Calvin will help us pay close attention and understand what we are to be hearing and doing. We ought to hear the law and its summary in its first and third uses when we are gathered for corporate worship. The first use of the law is to expose our sin and drive us to the cross for hope. The third use of the law is as a guide for grateful holiness.

When we hear the law and listen for its first use, we ought to think of our sins and failures. We are as guilty by nature as the Olmec pagans, perhaps even more guilty, for we know better and we still sin. We ought then to think of the bondage and blindness of the Olmecs, ripping the physical heart out to offer it to god as a vain sacrifice to atone for sin. And we ought to flee to the cross where Christ gave Himself from the heart outward, in His life and death, both to make a full atonement and to impute to us His own righteousness. And we ought to rejoice in that gospel! Then, believing

and relying on Christ in our hearts, we can hear the law also in its third use. With Calvin, we willingly offer our hearts right there in the service, promptly and sincerely in grateful love to the God of the gospel. Hearts that we

offer as a *living* sacrifice, “rendering grateful returns of ardent love to him, who first manifested so great love towards [us]” (Canons of Dordt I.13).

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES



MARK: CHRIST THE MIGHTY KING

REV. DANIEL KLEYN

pastor of Doon PRC in Doon, Iowa

THE WRITER

While no clear indication is given in the book itself that the Holy Spirit used Mark to write it, the church has always maintained that this is so. This is indicated especially by the writings of the church fathers in the second century AD.¹

Mark's full name was John Mark (Mark being his surname). His mother's name was Mary (Acts 12:12), in whose house the church had gathered to pray for Peter when the latter was imprisoned by Herod. He was a nephew of Barnabas (Col. 4:10) and accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey (Acts 12:25, 13:5). However, due apparently to the rigors of the mission labors, he did not continue with them but returned to Jerusalem from Perga in Pamphylia (Acts 13:13). This occasioned a heated argument between Paul and Barnabas over taking Mark along on the second missionary journey. The result was that Paul and Barnabas separated, with Paul undertaking the second missionary journey with Silas, and Barnabas taking Mark with him to Cyprus. However, John Mark and Paul were again reconciled, for Paul requested that Timothy bring Mark along to Rome when Paul was in prison there because, said Paul, “he is profitable to me for the ministry” (2 Tim. 4:11).

An interesting aspect of Mark's role in writing this book is that he appears to have received some of the content from Peter.² What makes this very well possible is the close relationship Peter and Mark had (1 Pet. 5:13), along with the close relationship between their families (Peter went directly to Mark's home when he was miraculously freed from prison, Acts 12). What could also substantiate this is 2 Peter 1:14-15, where Peter indicates his desire that the church have a written account of the Lord's ministry prior to his death.

There is also evidence in the book itself that Mark could have received first-hand knowledge of certain things from Peter. This includes Mark giving details concerning Christ calling Peter as a disciple (Mark 1:16-20, 29), his record of what Peter said to Jesus on the mount of transfiguration (Mark 9:5), his mentioning the details of Peter's denial of the Lord (Mark 14:54, 66-72), and the inclusion of the words “and Peter” when he wrote about the message of the angel to the women at the tomb (Mark 16:7).

Though we cannot be certain about this, it seems Peter and Mark may have collaborated in the writing of this gospel narrative. In some instances, Mark may even have written down the very words of Peter. If indeed this was the case, then the important thing is

1 Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1954), 140-141.

2 Louis Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1915), 80-81.

that all of it took place under the direction of God and by inspiration of the Spirit so that what we have before us in this book are the very words of God Himself.

THE OCCASION

The book of Mark was written with a view to the Gentiles. More specifically, Mark wrote with a view to supplying a gospel account that could be used by Roman converts, both for their own personal understanding of the gospel as well as for use in witnessing to their fellow Roman citizens.

One evidence of this is the fact that the book makes fewer references to Jewish ceremonies in comparison to the other gospel accounts. Further evidence is found in various references being made to Roman life and culture. Among them are the following. Mark 10:12 mentions a woman putting away her husband, something that was not done among the Jews, but did occur among the Romans. In Mark 12:42 the Roman equivalent of two mites is stated, namely, a farthing. And in Mark 15:1-2, Pilate is mentioned but no explanation is given as to his identity, for the Roman reader would have known this.

One more indication that the book was written for Roman citizens is found in Mark 16:21, where Simon the Cyrenian is referred to as being the father of Alexander and Rufus. The latter was mentioned because he would have been well known to the Roman converts, being a prominent member in the church at Rome (Rom. 16:13).

CANONICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The unique place that Mark occupies in the canon of Scripture is its emphasis on Christ as the almighty King. Mark “emphasizes the power of the Lion of Judah’s tribe.”³ The book reveals Jesus Christ as the King coming in His power to conquer sin and death, and to destroy all the works of Satan.

This is demonstrated through the emphasis that is placed on the deeds of Christ. The book says nothing about Christ’s genealogy, birth, and childhood. It contains very few of Christ’s discourses. The emphasis (obvious already in the first chapter) is on

Christ’s work of performing miracles, especially that of casting out devils. In fact, the book contains nine instances of the latter, with the very first miracle recorded in the book being one of them (Mark 1:23-28). Also significant in this connection is the reference to devils in Christ’s parting words to His disciples when He commissioned them to preach the gospel in all the world and added, “In my name they shall cast out devils” (Mark 16:17).

In addition to pointing out Christ’s power over devils, Mark demonstrates in various other ways the kingly power and authority of Christ. This includes the following. He taught the people with authority (Mark 1:22). He demonstrated His power to forgive sins (Mark 2:5). He declared Himself to be the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28). He twice showed His power over violent storms (Mark 4:39; 6:51). He stated that His kingdom would come with power (Mark 9:1). He displayed His power to make use of someone else’s colt for His entrance into Jerusalem (Mark 11:2-6), as also to curse and kill a fig tree (Mark 11:13-14). He showed His authority and power when He cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15-17). He spoke of His return at the end of time in great power and glory (Mark 13:26). And the book ends with a description of the almighty Christ sitting at the right hand of God (Mark 16:19).

Mark clearly demonstrates that Christ Jesus came as the mighty King in order to conquer and overcome the powers of sin, death, and the Devil. And He did this, not merely for the demonstration of His power, but for the salvation and comfort of His people.

If we keep in mind that Mark was written to Roman converts, then those converts were also being taught that the kingship of Christ is to be distinguished from that of the emperors of Rome, who also claimed to be powerful and even divine. Mark shows that in contrast to them, Christ is supreme. He rules over all. All other kings and all other powers are subordinate and subject to Him. Mark also points out the reason and explanation for this, namely, that Christ is the King who is “the Son of God” (mentioned immediately in Mark 1:1). The Spirit inspired Mark to give to the Roman converts (and to the church in every age) a clear understanding of what true power and real kingship is, namely, power and authority over all the spiritual powers that exist.

3 Herman Hoeksema, *New Testament Introduction* (syllabus published by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary), 7.

This canonical significance of Mark is summarized as follows by Louis Berkhof:

The special purpose of this Gospel in the canon is to show us Christ in his divine power, destroying the works of satan, and conquering sin and death. More than other Gospels it places prominently before us the work of Christ in behalf of those that are bound by the shackles of satan and are suffering the consequences of sin. We here see the Lion out of the tribe of Juda, conquering and ever to conquer.⁴

Berkhof then concludes with this noteworthy observation regarding the significance of the central message of Mark for the church and people of God:

[T]his Gospel has special significance for the Church of all ages. It gives her the blessed assurance that her future is entrusted to One who has shown himself a mighty Conqueror, and who is abundantly able to save to the uttermost all who believe in Him.⁵

4 Berkhof, *New Testament Introduction*, 88.

5 Berkhof, 88.

OUTLINE OF CONTENT

The record of the ministry of Christ in the book of Mark is for the most part chronological. Here follows a brief outline that provides a helpful overview of the book.⁶

- Mark 1:1-13—Christ’s Preparation for His Ministry
- Mark 1:14 to 7:23—Christ’s Ministry in Galilee
- Mark 7:24 to 9:50—Christ’s Ministry North and East of Galilee
- Mark 10:1-52—Christ’s Ministry on the Way to Jerusalem
- Mark 11:1 to 13:37—Christ’s Ministry in Jerusalem
- Mark 14:1 to 15:47—Christ’s Submission to Death
- Mark 16:1-20—Christ’s Triumph in the Resurrection and Ascension

6 Adapted from Thiessen’s *Introduction to the New Testament*, 147.

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE



THE ORDO SALUTIS (7B) SANCTIFICATION: CHANGED FROM GLORY TO GLORY (2)

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But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord—
2 Corinthians 3:18

SANCTIFICATION: GOD’S WORK

In this article we continue our explanation of sanctification, the sixth step in the *ordo salutis*: regeneration, calling, conversion, saving faith, justification, *sanctification*, preservation, and

glorification. Our definition was: “Sanctification is God’s work of making elect, regenerated, justified sinners holy.” We have looked at what holiness is—separation from sin and consecration to God—and we have studied the glory of holiness in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Sanctification is emphatically a work of *God*: it is not the work of man, and it is not the work of God and man. There is some confusion about this. Sometimes theologians will say, “Justification is the act of God, but sanctification is man’s work.” They will state it in

that way because we become active in sanctification, but our becoming active does not mean that we do the work of sanctification. In none of the steps of salvation, even when we are active, do we save ourselves. We do not regenerate ourselves; we do not call ourselves out of darkness into God's marvelous light, but we do answer the call; we do not convert ourselves, but we do turn and we do repent; we do not work saving faith in ourselves, but we do believe; we do not justify ourselves, but we do lay hold upon Jesus the Savior and embrace Him by faith. Salvation from beginning to end is God's work.

Sanctification is not a work of man; and while we become active in sanctification, it is also not a cooperative work between God and us. The truth is that we become active *as the fruit of* God's activity in us. God's activity in us is first, and we live out of, and become active out of, God's activity. Without God's grace we could not subdue one lust, and could not perform one good work; and we certainly could not separate ourselves from sin or devote ourselves to God in love. Paul expresses the relationship beautifully in Philippians 2:12-13: "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for [because] it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

But neither is it this: God works in us and we do nothing. It is not this: God sanctifies us by zapping us with the Holy Spirit while we sit daydreaming in an easy chair; or, worse, God sanctifies us while we actively and deliberately walk in darkness. The truth is rather this: God works in us *so that we become active* in sorrowing over, hating, and fleeing from sin; God works in us *so that we become active* in delighting in Him and diligently pursuing holiness. John writes, "And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3). James agrees: "Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4:8). Purify ourselves? Cleanse our hands? Purify our hearts? Never without the grace of God could we do that, yet by God's grace we do that; we *do* that. We cleanse or purify ourselves *because* God by His Spirit, applying the blood of Jesus, cleanses and purifies us. We will develop that idea further in the next article.

SANCTIFICATION: THE TRANSFORMATION

That sanctification is only and entirely God's work is clear from 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all, with open

face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." Significant in that text is the passive voice: "we...are changed."

The Greek verb is *metamorphoo*, the source of the English word "metamorphosis." Some creatures undergo metamorphosis when they grow. Two examples are the butterfly and the frog. A butterfly develops from a caterpillar and a frog develops from a tadpole. A caterpillar changes into a butterfly and a tadpole changes into a frog. If you saw a caterpillar, you could never imagine that it would become a butterfly; if you saw a tadpole, you could never imagine that it would become a frog. In sanctification we are "changed into the same image from glory to glory." By God's grace a sinner, who is like a vile, wretched caterpillar, is transformed into a holy saint, who is like a beautiful, glorious butterfly.

That work of sanctification, that spiritual metamorphosis, is the work of the Holy Spirit. We do not change ourselves, although we are certainly active: *we are changed*. We are changed, "even as by the Spirit of the Lord." The Spirit of the Lord is the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit purchased on the cross, poured out at Pentecost, and worked in us in regeneration and sanctification. He changes us. He transforms us. He works metamorphosis in us.

That work is a change for the better: it is "from glory to glory." It is not "from glory to shame" or "from glory to misery" or "from glory to filthiness." It is from glory *to* glory. It is from one degree of holiness to another degree of holiness. It is from one degree of freedom to another degree of freedom. It is from one degree of purity to another degree of purity. Surely, there is nothing more wonderful and glorious than that. Perhaps, you say, "I am an ugly, vile, filthy, wretched caterpillar." But God says, "You are becoming a beautiful butterfly. You are becoming a holy, pristine, and beautiful saint. I am sanctifying you."

This transformation (sanctification) happens by means of the Word of God. Jesus teaches that in John 17:17: "Sanctify them through thy truth; *thy word is truth*." Paul says the same thing in Ephesians 5:25: "That he might sanctify and cleanse it *with the washing of water by the word*." Our text says something very similar but in a very figurative way.

That phrase in verse 18, “beholding as in a glass,” is significant. In Greek that phrase is simply one verb, which appears only once in the New Testament. It has two ideas: first, you look into a mirror (a glass is a looking glass, or a mirror, a piece of glass that shows an image); second, you reflect the image that you see. That is an unusual glass, looking glass, or mirror. When you look in a mirror, you see yourself, but you are certainly not transformed into the image of what you see. When you look in *this* mirror, you see the glory of the Lord, and you are transformed into the image of what you see. “Beholding as in a glass *the glory of the Lord*.” “Changed into *the same image*.”

That tells us something about the Scriptures: they are a mirror in which we behold the glory of Jesus Christ. We behold His glory when we read the Bible and when we hear the Bible preached. In the Scriptures, read and preached, we see the glorious Son of God: we see Him in His names, in His person, in His two natures, in His offices, in His works, and in His states. Especially we see the glory of the Lord in the cross and resurrection, which must be at the center of our Bible reading and at the center of the sermons that we hear preached. The glorious gospel of the glorious Son of God, who is the Lord of glory: that is what we see, what we behold as in a glass, when we read the Scriptures and hear them preached.

SANCTIFICATION: GRADUAL PROGRESSION

This work of sanctification, which happens by the Spirit through the Word, is also gradual. It is not that God regenerates, calls, converts us, gives us saving faith, justifies us, and then we are immediately and perfectly sanctified. That is clear from the tense that Paul uses in verse 18: “we are *being* changed.” Paul does not write, “We have been changed, and the transformation is complete.” Therefore, Christian reader, you should view yourself as having undergone a partial metamorphosis. You might feel like a caterpillar with many characteristics of a caterpillar, but you are well on your way to becoming a butterfly. You are a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. You are not a butterfly becoming a caterpillar. That must be a great encouragement to you. In fact, it will take a lifetime for the metamorphosis to be completed. Indeed, we will never reach full

metamorphosis, complete transformation, or perfect sanctification in this life.

Nevertheless, our calling is not to be passive, but to be active and to strive toward perfection. Our calling is, first, to behold as in a glass the glory of the Lord: to be in the Word of God. Our calling is, second, to fight against sin and Satan in this life: we must be active in mortifying the flesh. “Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit” (2 Cor. 7:1). “If ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom 8:13). Our calling is, third, to be active in bringing forth good works in obedience to God. We do not wait passively for God to work good works in us: we actively, deliberately, consciously seek good works to do, and we do them. We do them as those good works that God has prepared for us to do (Eph. 2:10). We do them by the power of God’s grace. And we *do* them.

In that connection, we must understand the relation between sanctification and good works. We are not sanctified by good works: sanctification is *salvation*; we are not saved by good works. We are sanctified by God’s grace and through faith alone. Acts 15:9 speaks of “God purifying their hearts by faith,” while Acts 26:18 speaks of being “sanctified by faith.” First Corinthians 6:11 speaks of being “washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God,” while 1 Peter 1:22 speaks of “purifying your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit,” where “obeying the truth” is a reference to believing the truth, and, therefore, faith.

Here is the relation, then: when God sanctifies us by His grace, and through faith, the fruit is good works. If we are sanctified, the evidence of that transformation will be that we will turn from sin, that we will walk in God’s ways, and that we will bring forth good works. In sanctification, then, we are delivered more and more from the dreadful power and dominion of sin, and the shameful pollution and defilement of sin, and we are transformed by the Holy Spirit from glory to glory as we behold the glory of the Lord in the Holy Scriptures read and preached.

SANCTIFICATION: THE GOAL

We are, says the apostle, being “changed” into the “same image.” That is, the same image as the one whom

we “behold as in a glass.” That is wonderful about the gospel of the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ: it is a transformative message. No one can read the Scriptures and hear them preached without being changed. That is both a warning and an encouragement. Either you read the Scriptures and hear them preached, and you are changed for the worse, that is, you are hardened and confirmed in unbelief; or you are changed for the better, that is, you are sanctified through the Word. The goal of Bible reading, Bible study, and biblical preaching is to become like Christ. Make that your goal and your prayer: “May I see in the sermon the glory of the Lord, and may I, as I behold that glory, become like the image of my blessed Lord whom I see.” “May I see in the Bible that I read the glory of the Lord, and may I, as I behold that glory, become like the image of my blessed Lord whom I see.” “May I see in the catechism lesson the glory of the Lord, and may I, as I behold that glory, become like the image of my blessed Lord whom I see.”

That is, of course, the pinnacle of glory: Jesus Christ is the image of God, the perfection of holiness; if we are like Him, we are holy. Insofar as we are unlike Him, we are unholy. Therefore, sanctification is this: it is the gradual removal *from us* of the image of the Devil that we have by nature; and it is the gradual restoration *to us* of the image of God in Jesus Christ. That is the purpose of our salvation: “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29).

I finish with the prayer of the apostle in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24: “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole spirit, and soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.”

Next time, we will look more particularly at the believer’s activity in sanctification.

BELIEVING AND CONFESSING



A KOSHER RESTAURANT OR, THE DIETARY LAWS OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

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INTRODUCTION

Suppose that you walked into a Jewish eatery in the Old Testament, let us say a Jewish Russ’ Restaurant in Nazareth. The noon specials might not strike you so much for what they were as much as for what they were not. There would be no BBQ pork or Reuben sandwich on the menu. There would be no shrimp salad. You would not be able to order a ham and cheese sandwich. And no ham and pea soup or clam chowder. None of these would be kosher dishes. None of them would be acceptable fare for an orthodox Jew.

In my last article on the Second Helvetic Confession, I covered the first several paragraphs of chapter 12, “Of the Law of God.” In that connection, I explained the

distinction that the SHC makes between the ceremonial and the judicial, or civil laws of the Old Testament. In response to that article, I received an email from an interested reader inquiring where the dietary laws of the Old Testament fit. Should they be classified as ceremonial laws or as judicial (civil) laws? This is an interesting question, worth a response in the *Standard Bearer*.

Usually, the dietary laws are classified with the judicial laws, the laws governing Israel’s life as a nation. Admittedly, there is some overlap with the ceremonial laws, the laws that have to do with Israel’s worship of God. Many of the sacrifices, for example, involved eating portions of the sacrificial victims by the

Israelites who brought the sacrifices and by the priests who offered the sacrifices. Jesus and His disciples, for example, ate the last Passover in the upper room on the night of His betrayal. But for the most part, the dietary laws have to do with the day-to-day life of the people of God in the Old Testament and, therefore, are considered judicial laws.

There are at least three incidents in Scripture in which the dietary laws come into play. The first of these concerns Daniel and his three friends in Daniel 1:3-16. This is a story familiar even to our small children. In the account, Daniel and his three friends refused to eat the “daily provision of the king’s meat, and of the wine which he drank” (v. 5). Daniel and his friends would not “defile” themselves, verse 8 says, with the king’s meat and drink. Instead, they requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might give them “pulse to eat, and water to drink” (v. 12). There were undoubtedly two main reasons behind the request of the young Israelite princes. First, much of the king’s meat would have been “unclean” according to the dietary laws of the Old Testament. And second, the king’s meat and drink would almost certainly have been meat and drink offered to (blessed by) the idol gods of the Babylonians.

The second incident concerns Jesus’ disciples and is recorded in Mark 7:1-13. In this passage, the scribes and Pharisees fault Jesus’ disciples because they “eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashed hands” (v. 2). Verses 3 and 4 explain: “For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders. And when they come from the market, except they wash, they eat not. And many other things there be, which they have received to hold, as the washing of cups, and pots, brazen vessels, and of tables.” The rationale of the Jewish leaders was that it was quite likely that some uncircumcised Gentile or ceremonially unclean Jew touched the produce or meat that had been purchased in the market. By coming into contact with that unclean food item, a Jew would become ceremonially unclean. This uncleanness was prevented by washing one’s hands after returning from the market and before cooking any food items. The concern of the Pharisees was not for hygiene. Their concern was for “the tradition of the elders” (v. 5), a tradition that was connected to the dietary laws of the Old Testament.

And the third incident involving the dietary laws of the Old Testament was the vision of Peter, recorded in Acts 10. This is another familiar incident, in which a sheet was let down from heaven three times. Contained in the sheet were “all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air” (v. 12), which were unclean according to Old Testament law. Three times this occurred and each time there was a voice from heaven, “Rise, Peter; kill, and eat.” Invariably, Peter’s response was, “Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean” (v. 14). The Lord’s reply each time was, “What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common” (v. 15).

OLD TESTAMENT DIETARY LAWS—“KOSHER”

In the Old Testament, God specified foods that the children of Israel might eat, as well as foods that were off limits to them. The word that describes approved foods is “kosher.” The word “kosher” comes from a Hebrew word that means “fit, proper, or correct.” *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary and Thesaurus* defines “kosher” as “ritually fit for use according to Jewish [dietary] law.” Although the word “kosher” is a modern word, not strictly speaking a biblical term, it describes accurately the laws concerning food that applied to the Old Testament people of God. Those laws are contained primarily in Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 12 and 14.

The dietary laws concerned especially meat. To a far lesser extent, they concerned beverages and cereals (grain), fruits, and vegetables. In the case of the latter, it was primarily a matter of how they were produced and prepared that determined whether they were kosher.

Although the Old Testament laws had to do mainly with what might and might not be eaten—clean versus unclean—the dietary laws were more extensive than that. They also specified how an animal was to be slaughtered and the care that was to be taken of the carcass after the animal was slaughtered. Ordinarily, an animal’s throat was to be slit with a sharp knife and it was to be thoroughly bled before its meat was to be eaten. “Only be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood is the life; and thou mayest not eat the life with the flesh. Thou shalt not eat it; thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water” (Deut. 12:23-24). Further, the laws extended to the cooking and preparation of the meat of

the butchered animal. Meat was to be prepared in the right way if it was to be classified as kosher and edible for the Jews. The Old Testament law was, “Thou shalt not seethe a kid in his mother’s milk” (Deut. 14:21). “Seethe” means “to boil.” The prohibition of boiling a kid in its mother’s milk was applied broadly by the Jews to forbid cooking of any meat and dairy together, so no cheese over your burger. All kosher dishes had to separate dairy products from meat products.

DISTINGUISHING CLEAN FROM UNCLEAN

The Old Testament law carefully distinguished the clean animals from the unclean.

Unclean Animals

1. QUADRAPEDS (four-footed animals that do not ruminant (chew the cud) or have uncloven feet (hooves). Examples: pigs, horses, camels, rabbits, coneys, lions, dogs.
2. BIRDS that are scavengers or carnivorous. Examples: hawks, eagles, ravens, vultures, owls, herons, ospreys, storks, bats.
3. FISH without scales and without fins. Examples: eels, dolphins, shrimp, lobsters, squid, octopi, clams, oysters.
4. SERPENTS, reptiles, and creeping insects. Examples: snakes, lizards, scorpions, centipedes, spiders, crocodiles.

Why did God make a difference between the clean and unclean animals in the Old Testament? Why were some animals on the forbidden list and other animals placed on the list of animals permitted to be eaten?

One reason was God’s concern for the health of the children of Israel. That was especially the case in the heat of the land of Palestine and during a time when animals were not always raised in the best of conditions. Having created our bodies and the animals, God knows which animals are more likely to make us unwell and which animals are better for our health. Best of all are the cereals, fruits, vegetables, and nuts. Nevertheless, since the time of the flood, God has permitted man to eat certain animals. “Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat” (Gen. 9:4-5).

God’s care for the health of His people contributed

to the Old Testament distinction between the clean and unclean animals. Scavengers, for example, eat dead and rotten flesh, often infested with parasites. Pigs eat nearly anything. And pigs do not have sweat glands, which means that everything bad is stored in their fat. When you eat pork, you eat whatever they have eaten, which in a controlled environment and with modern feed mixtures is not a problem. But in the Old Testament it could have been. Shrimp, crabs, lobsters, crayfish, and other shellfish, besides being high in cholesterol, are bottom feeders. They eat decaying fish, dead matter, and garbage on the ocean floor. When you eat them, you are again eating everything that they have eaten. For the safety and health of His people, God set limits to the meats that they might eat.

But the second and main reason on account of which God made distinction between the clean and the unclean was for the *spiritual* health and wellbeing of His people. There is gospel significance to the dietary laws of the Old Testament. The distinction between clean and unclean highlights the *antithesis*. The dietary distinction was one way in which God impressed upon the children of Israel their calling to live antithetically. They were called to make the spiritual distinction in their lives between the clean and the unclean. Their calling was to reject and disassociate themselves from the unclean; their calling was to embrace and fellowship with the clean—the spiritually clean.

The apostle Paul makes this application of the dietary laws of the Old Testament in 2 Corinthians 6, where he warns God’s people, “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? Or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?” (vv. 14-15). From this he derives the calling, “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, *and touch not the unclean thing*; and I will receive you.”

Notice that the apostle phrases the calling to live antithetically as not touching that which is unclean, which is a clear application of the Old Testament dietary laws. The people of God are to live spiritually separate from the wicked world, those who are unbelieving and ungodly, those who are living not for Christ but in service to Belial, that is, Satan. Based on the Word of

God, Christians are to distinguish between clean and unclean. And the promise is: “And I will receive you, and

will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (2 Cor. 6:17b-18).

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD



RE-ENTRY: LEAVING THE MISSION FIELD AND GOING BACK (3)

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In addition to the steps of release, return, and refreshment, another significant step for a foreign missionary's departure from his field of labor and going back to his passport country and sending churches is the step of *rehearsal*. While the activity of rehearsal should be a part of a missionary's lengthy furlough from his field of labor, it also should be part of a missionary's permanent release from his field of labor and return to his passport country and sending churches.

REHEARSAL

Rehearsal was an activity that the apostles had been trained to do by the Lord in His earthly ministry. Jesus had sent out His disciples by two and two into the towns and villages in Galilee with the mandate to preach that men should repent and believe the gospel. Jesus even gave them the power to do miracles, including the casting out of devils. As commissioned, so the disciples “went out and preached that men should repent. And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them” (Mark 6:12-13). Having completed their appointed mission, “the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught” (Mark 6:30). Early on, Jesus Himself directed them to report and rehearse to Him what they had done as His servants and what had happened as a result of their preaching and teaching.

At that time of rehearsing with Jesus their completed mission, we expect that the apostles would have reported about the various towns and villages in which

they had labored. They reported what homes opened their doors unto them and welcomed their preaching and teaching. They reported about how those believing homes had provided for their earthly care and lodging. They reported about those households, villages, or towns that did not receive them and concerning whom, as commanded, the apostles shook off the dust of their feet for a testimony against such unbelief (Mark 6:11).

This practice of rehearsal to the Lord as represented in the church became a normal practice for the apostles in their labors after Pentecost. After Peter and John had been imprisoned, tried, threatened, and released reluctantly by the Sanhedrin for the healing of the lame man in the temple, they immediately “went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them” (Acts 4:23). The apostles reported to the church what they had suffered, what they declared in defense of the exalted Lord's truth and work, and what the rulers had said and threatened to do.

This practice continued in the mission labors of the apostles. This was true for the apostle Peter. He was sent by the Lord to labor in Lydda, Joppa, and then in Caesarea. Directed by special revelation, he came to the household of Cornelius, a Roman centurion. At the household of Cornelius, he preached the gospel to Cornelius and his household and, by the Holy Spirit who came upon them, they believed. Upon receiving the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Cornelius and his household were baptized in the name of the Lord (Acts 10:44-47). Following the joyful addition of a Gentile

household by the Lord into His church, the apostle Peter and those with him remained certain days in Caesarea, enjoying the thankful and refreshing hospitality of Cornelius.

However, upon his return to Jerusalem, when the news began to spread about the apostle's labors in Caesarea, the apostle was summoned before the church and he "rehearsed the matter from the beginning and expounded it by order unto them" (Acts 11:4). He gave a detailed rehearsal of all that happened to him in Joppa and in Caesarea at the house of Cornelius. While the primary purpose of the reporting was for the church, yet a secondary purpose was to confirm that he was faithful in all of his missionary labors. This was encouragement not only for the church, but also for the apostle Peter.

The apostle Paul followed the same practice in his mission labors. At the conclusion of the first missionary journey in Cyprus and in Asia Minor, he with Barnabas returned to his calling church in Antioch. "And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles" (Acts 14:27). Paul and Barnabas together rehearsed their labors as we now find them recorded in the infallibly inspired Scriptures. They described anything that was significant for the church in Antioch to know about all that the Lord had done through them in gathering into His church a remnant out of Cyprus and Asia Minor. This report would be important information for the church to know as they would oversee the direction of the subsequent labors of Paul and Barnabas in their future mission labors.

Closely connected to Paul's reporting to the church in Acts 14:27 is his second rehearsal of the labors of his first missionary journey in Acts 15. Paul and Barnabas

were summoned from Antioch to a church meeting of elders and apostles in Jerusalem. Along the way in Phoenicia and Samaria, they declared in the churches what they had first rehearsed to the church in Antioch about the conversion of Gentiles into the church. When they finally appeared before the honorable assembly of elders and apostles in the church of Jerusalem, they again "declared all the things that God had done with them" (Acts 15:4). After there had been much disputing and after Peter had given a summary of what God had taught the church by his labors in Caesarea with the Gentile Cornelius, "then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (Acts 15:12). This formal report was beneficial to the assembly at the church in Jerusalem for their debate, their concluding decision, and their letter that was later delivered unto the Gentile churches for their edification and guidance.

A third example in the labors of the apostle Paul occurred after his third missionary journey and soon before his capture in Jerusalem. Paul had been absent from the Jerusalem church for a few years since his brief furlough between his second and third missionary journeys. Although he had labored in a similar area in both his second and third missionary journeys, he still took the opportunity to rehearse in the presence of the church of Jerusalem a summary of his work. Luke records the following about this: "when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry" (Acts 21:17-19).

Although these examples of the rehearsal of events by the apostles might often be overlooked as merely

...these examples of the rehearsal of events by the apostles... actually point to the benefits of regular reporting during the entire time of a foreign missionary in his field of labor, but especially during the process of leaving his field of labor and going back to his passport country and sending churches.

incidental details in their missionary stories, they actually point to the benefits of regular reporting during the entire time of a foreign missionary in his field of labor, but especially during the process of leaving his field of labor and going back to his passport country and sending churches.

This activity of rehearsal in the re-entry of the missionary is beneficial to the churches. First, this activity of reporting and pointing out what the Lord did through the missionary for the gathering and edification of His church helps the calling and supporting churches in the understanding of their work. Although foreign mission work often involves significant distances between the calling churches and the missionaries, it is not a “one-man” operation but is the work of the body of Christ in the local calling and supporting churches. The activity of a face-to-face rehearsal by the missionary to his calling and supporting churches about his mission labors recognizes the work as denominational. This activity further gives substantial content to the mind of the churches about what they have done through their missionaries.

Second, this activity of rehearsal gives the sending and supporting churches the opportunity to give thanks and praise to the Lord. In response to the apostle Paul’s rehearsal of all that the Lord had done through Paul, the church “glorified the Lord” (Acts 21:20b). It is true that, in response to the reporting and rehearsal by the missionaries of the activities and fruits of their labors, the sending and supporting churches do express thanks for such labors. Nevertheless, the purpose of this rehearsal is not that the churches might glorify the missionary or themselves, but rather that they might give thanks and praise unto God for His work by His Spirit in the gathering and preserving of a remnant of His grace in Jesus Christ.

For the missionary, this activity of rehearsal by lectures and presentations is also beneficial. First, it reminds him that he is a servant in the churches laboring on behalf of his sending and supporting churches and in behalf of Christ and His gospel. Second, this rehearsal serves the confirmation of the faithfulness of the missionary in his labors. This confirmation was given to the apostle Peter by the church after his labors in Caesarea with Cornelius were questioned as unfaithful (Acts 11:1-18). After Paul and Barnabas

rehearsed in the ears of the church their labors in Asia Minor, the church confirmed their faithfulness over against objections to their work with the Gentiles. In fact, the church declared in a letter to the Gentile churches concerning “beloved Paul and Barnabas” that they were “men that have hazarded their lives for the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 15:25-26). They were commended by the church for the grace given to them to submit themselves fully to the will of the Lord in their labors, even to the extent of great suffering, for the sake of the gospel and the church. This commendation was a means of encouragement to the brothers in their difficult labors. Finally, for those missionaries who have been released from their labors and are returning to their passport country and supporting churches, the phase of rehearsal, with a helpful measure of hindsight, helps the missionary to process the Lord’s direction and working in the missionary’s release and return for the good of the church of Jesus Christ and his own profit.

Finally, the phase of rehearsal in a missionary’s re-entry is beneficial to the missionary’s family. They have been an integral part of the life and labor of the missionary, and they also need time and a forum to debrief informally regarding what God has done in their lives and how they are dealing with re-entry. This rehearsal helps the family to cope with a measure of disappointment in leaving a place with fellow saints that they have come to know and love, to overcome any discomforts of being out of cultural balance for a while in their new place, and to move forward in the adjustment in their new, God-given place with new people and unfamiliar surroundings. Rehearsal can be particularly useful to missionary children and teenagers, commonly referred to as TCKs (Third Culture Kids), as they navigate the cultural changes and seek to blend into their new surrounding as soon as possible. TCKs also need to debrief and discuss the hand of the Lord in their lives in removing them, sometimes abruptly, from their home and transplanting them into an unfamiliar place. This helps them to focus upon the Lord, to consider what He has done in their lives, to trust in His grace and strength in the way forward, and to find contentment in His perfect way for them, as His dear children, in their new home.



IS YOUR BRAIN BEING WIRED FOR DEEPER THINKING? THE CHRISTIAN'S CALLING AND INCENTIVE TO READ

MR. JOEL MINDERHOUD

Science teacher in Covenant Christian High School, and member of Hope PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan

The following is adapted from the speech the author gave at the RFPA's annual meeting on September 26, 2024 at Southwest Protestant Reformed Church.

Dear friends and supporters of the RFPA,

To us whom God has graciously given the gift of faith, comes the exhortation of the Word of God to read and to give attendance to doctrine; to grow in grace and knowledge of God; to get wisdom. God has given us means to grow in grace and in knowledge of Him. While reading is not the only means God has given us, reading is one of the best means. As covenant people who desire to grow in knowledge of God, we do well to read and to develop our reading skills.

Listen to the good instruction of Jim Koole, who as the RFPA secretary in 1985, encouraged the RFPA supporters to be readers, especially of the *Standard Bearer*, when he wrote the following:

With joy in our souls we give thanks to our God for His goodness in giving us another year of publishing the *Standard Bearer*. It is only because of His covenant faithfulness to us as churches that we can publish a paper that is true to His Word. May we use this paper to gain knowledge of our God, as our editor-in-chief stated in his March 1, 1985 editorial: “*May we read it, teach our youth to read it, digest it, learn from it, and become established in the truth.*”¹

To grow in the knowledge of our God, we ought to use the means God has given us—particularly the means of reading. As Christians, we need to be readers! As supporters of the RFPA, you *are* readers. But, you and I alike, recognize that in the day and age in which

we live, there are plenty of things that distract us and compete with our reading time.

From a statistical perspective, the trends on reading are not good. Consider the findings of Twenge, Martin, and Spitzberg, in their 2018 research paper, entitled, “Trends in US Adolescents’ Media Use, 1976-2016: The Rise of Digital Media, the Decline of TV, and the (Near) Demise of Print.”² They noted that legacy media (defined as books, magazines, newspapers, TV, movies) has significantly declined in the past 40 years. They examined data tracked for the past 40 years for 10th graders and 12th graders regarding their use of media, and their findings are shocking! In 1976, 60% of 12th graders reported reading a book or magazine every day, whereas in 2016 only 16% of 12th graders reported doing such (p. 338). Furthermore, in 1976, adolescents reported having 2.5 hours per day of screen time. Contrast that with 2016, where 12th graders spent just under 8 hours a day on screens during their *leisure* time (not including the amount of time behind a screen at school or the workplace, p. 339). That is significant screen time, which did not include “reading” on the device!

Add to these discouraging statistics what Rev. Ron Hanks writes in the introduction to his book *Doctrine According to Godliness*. He notes that in the church world at large “doctrine is not highly regarded anymore.... Almost nothing of substance is read, and most would consider a book of doctrine too deep in spite of the fact that their fathers and grandfathers, who had far less education, were not only able to read theology, but read it widely and well.”³

1 Koole, James. “Annual Secretary’s Report of the RFPA.” *Standard Bearer*. Vol. 62, No. 3 (November 1, 1985), 70. (Emphasis added.)

2 *Psychology of Popular Media Culture*, 2019 (Vol. 8, No. 4), 329-345.

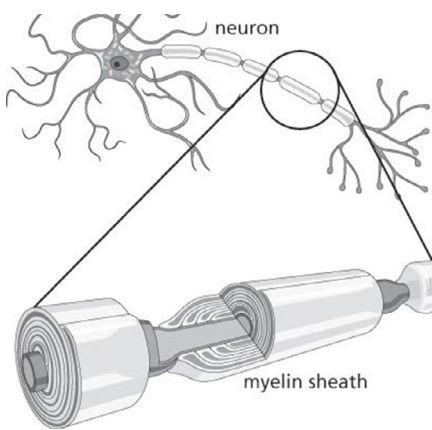
3 Ronald Hanks, *Doctrine According to Godliness*, (Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2004), 3.

With the incredible increase of screen time and the decrease of reading books and magazines, combined with our natures that are not interested in reading doctrine nor inclined to grow in the knowledge of God, we need to hear the encouragement to be a regular reader. In addition, we need to realize that the digital environment in which we live is not helping us—the digital technology is not wiring our brain for the kind of wiring needed to *digest* what we read. Therefore, the Board of the RFPA asked me to speak on the importance of reading and to encourage you to be readers, doing so from both a physical, natural perspective, as well as from a spiritual perspective.

BRAIN DEVELOPMENT

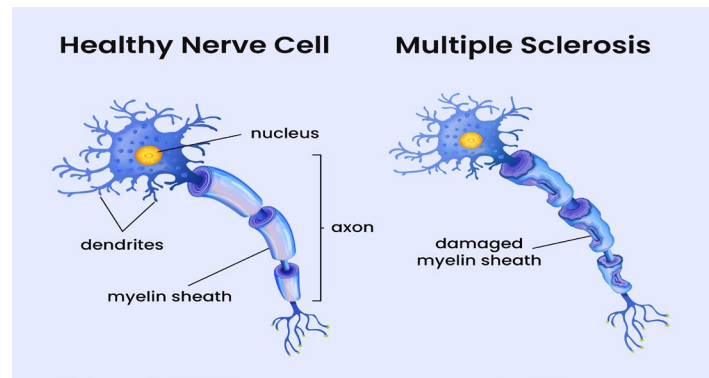
You were born with about 100 billion neurons in your brain. As a rule, your brain will not make any more neurons. In fact, as you age, neurons actually will die—decreasing the number in your brain. While your brain cannot make new neurons, there are things in your brain that can grow and develop throughout your life.

First, it is important to understand that the insulation around the wire part of the nerve cell (called the axon) can thicken. This insulation is called myelin.⁴



When a nerve cell is regularly and repeatedly stimulated, it will develop a thicker myelin sheath. As the myelin sheath thickens, the speed at which the electrical signal passes and the efficiency of the transmission

increases. This is important because faster and more efficient signal transmission relates to an increase in cognitive abilities, such as increased learning and memory. For this reason we often say, “practice makes perfect.” The more often a nerve is stimulated, the more the myelin layer develops. This leads to better signal



transmission, and thus, better execution of the skill. The opposite is also true—less myelin leads to poorer transmission of the signal. If the myelin is damaged, as in the case of multiple sclerosis, the signal does not pass quickly or efficiently, resulting in a lack of muscle control.⁵

While your brain does not make new nerve cells, we know that, with repeated use of the nerve cells, there is a thickening of the myelination, and thus, an increase in the transmission of signals.

Second, it is important to understand that another part of the nerve cell can grow or develop as it is stimulated. This part is the finger-like extensions at the end of the nerve cell, called axon terminals. As a nerve cell is triggered *repeatedly*, it produces more axon extensions to reach other nerve cells. This activity of making more axon extensions creates more connections with neighboring nerve cells so that the electrical signal is transmitted broadly to many other nerve cells (creating what are called synaptic/dendrite connections). The result of this is a denser and more complex pathway for signal transmission. This denser and more complex pathway is associated with greater cognitive activity. To illustrate this, consider that a child is born with about 2,500 synapses (connections) per neuron. But as the child develops and has new experiences, these nerve cells grow more axon terminals, forming more synapses. The number of synapses blossoms to 15,000 synapses per neuron by the age of three, due to all the new stimuli the child receives in these early years of life. This process of developing more axon extensions is very active among young children and young adults, but slows as we age.

4 <https://www.gosh.nhs.uk/wards-and-departments/departments/clinical-specialties/neuroimmunology-centre-information-parents-and-visitors/what-neuroimmunology/>. Accessed 11-19-24.

5 <https://www.healthcentral.com/condition/multiple-sclerosis/multiple-sclerosis-myelin-sheath>. Accessed 11-29-24

This demonstrates the great significance of faithfully instructing children when they are young! How thankful we are for the publishing work of the RFPA and for the children's magazine *Ignited by the Word*! And what a blessing we have with God's good gift of our Christian schools!

While our brains do not generate new neurons during our life, we know that through *regular, repeated* activities, the myelin thickens and new axon terminal extensions form. Both of these relate to strengthened cognitive ability, that is, stronger memory and thinking skills.

NEUROPLASTICITY

The third important concept to understand is called neuroplasticity. The brain not only can make new neural connections, but can even rewire itself, that is, it can repurpose nerve cells to communicate with other neurons. This concept is summarized by two important and common sayings: "Neurons that fire together, wire together" and "Use it, or lose it." Negatively, we know that neural connections which are *not regularly used* will be "*lost*" and the neurons will be repurposed for another neurological need ("use it or lose it"). Positively, we know that neural connections that are *regularly used* will be reinforced and strengthened ("neurons that fire together, wire together").

There are plenty of examples to illustrate this concept. For example, if one loses his ability to see, the large visual cortex (35% of the brain volume) is repurposed for other senses than vision. For example, many blind people have elevated senses of hearing or touch. This is due to the fact that some of the neurons in the visual cortex are repurposed for the senses of hearing or touch.

Another example, to which many of us can relate, is the rewiring of the brain to learn a new language. Many of our ancestors came to the United States or Canada from the Netherlands or from Germany. Our ancestors arrived in this country not knowing how to speak English. Many of them, who were in their twenties or older when they immigrated, became very fluent in English. The ability to learn a new language—to think in that language, to freely and capably converse in that new language—requires the forming of many new neural connections. What an amazing

accomplishment many of our parents and grandparents mastered in learning a new language at a relatively old age! This demonstrates that new neural connections can be made, *even in later years*. This has important application to our calling and incentive to read, even at an older age. New growth and development are not limited only to the young. "Old" people can yet learn new things—including developing their reading ability. Just like regular physical exercise can lead to improved stamina, so you can slowly improve your reading ability and become a stronger reader with regular practice.

The ability of the brain to make new connections and rewire emphasizes an important principle: what is practiced and reinforced is learned better. What do you want to learn? How to play piano? Drive a stick-shift? Crochet? Speak another language? Do calculus? Whatever it is that you want to learn, reinforce that skill or activity with regular practice, and new and stronger neural connections will be made. And in time, after 10,000 hours of practice of that skill, you will become an "expert" in that field. So regularly practice your piano lessons! Do those practice-driving hours! And develop your mind by reading a book!

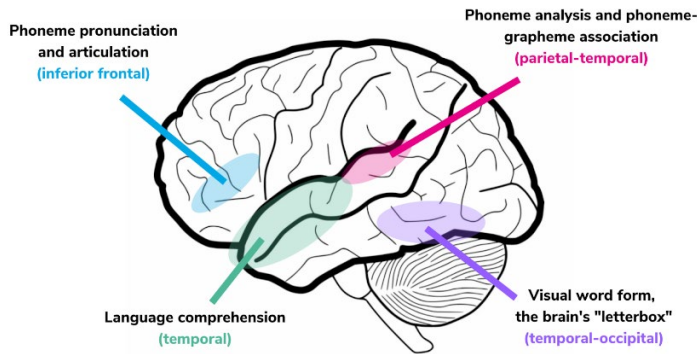
It is true, of course, that there are natural gifts and natural wiring in the brain. In some families, even several generations deep, we find strong abilities in art, music, woodworking, or mathematics. And yet, we *all* can exercise our brains—improving our abilities in all sorts of areas. In this context, let us *all* read every day, with the incentive that in the way of your reading, stronger neural connections will form, leading to stronger memory, deeper thinking, and stronger problem-solving skills.

Not only has God given each of us a particular set of gifts, but He also calls us to develop those gifts. By sin, laziness, or neglect some might harm their bodies or not develop their gifts as they should. But others, in the providence of God, develop their gifts by diligently using the means God has provided. May we be encouraged to develop our gifts for the glory of God and the good of His church!

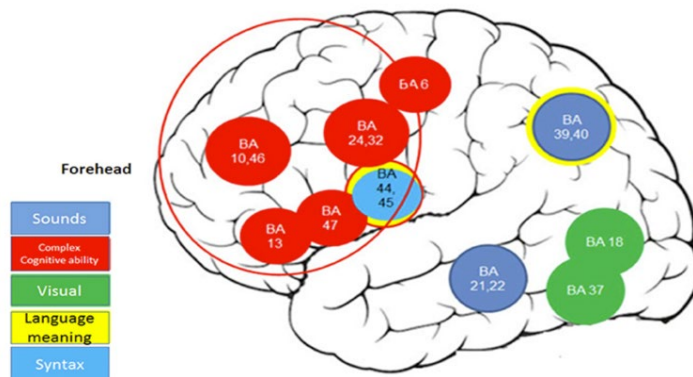
BENEFIT OF READING ON WIRING THE BRAIN

What does all this biology and brain development have to do with reading? Reading is important for good cognitive development—for deep thinking. Reading

helps us grow in the ability *to digest* what we read, that is, to evaluate critically and discern what we read. Reading helps develop the kind of mental activity needed to study and grow in doctrinal understanding. In fact, reading is one of the best means to develop the cognitive abilities needed to grow in our understanding of God's Word.



The reason reading is such a good means to develop cognitive abilities is that reading is a highly complex skill that involves several sections of the brain *simultaneously*. From studies conducted with students who struggle to read because of dyslexia, we understand that effective readers use three or four major sections or lobes of the brain.



When we read, we use the brain's memory, concentration, attention, and thinking regions (red dots), vision (green dots) and hearing regions (dark blue dots), language skills (light blue dots), and sections of the brain to create meaning (yellow dots). When we read, *all* these sections work together, simultaneously!⁶

Not only are all those sections stimulated

when you read, but *as they are repeated*, stronger neural connections are formed between those areas, strengthening those pathways and skills.⁷ Therefore, reading stimulates many, many neurons, which results in more myelination and denser connections between neurons in the brain—all of which is associated with an increase in cognitive ability, such as, the abilities to remember, think, reason, understand, comprehend, and discern. These skills are all very important to the Christian who desires to grow in the understanding of God's Word and in the ability to digest what he reads. From this perspective, we can see why *reading* should be so important to the Christian.

DANGERS OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

There are few activities that promote the kind of cognitive development needed for the Christian like reading. For example, studies have shown that playing video games activates *limited* regions of the brain—primarily the regions related to vision and movement.

Research also shows that using the internet requires only cursory reading, hurried and distracted thinking, and superficial learning. As we practice internet skills, such as scanning and multitasking, our “plastic” brains will develop so that these tasks become easier. But this “multitasking gain” comes at a loss. Nicholas Carr, in his book, *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains* says, “The constant shifting of our attention when we’re online may make our brains more nimble when it comes to multitasking, but improving our ability to multitask actually hampers our ability to think deeply and creatively.... You become...more likely to rely on conventional ideas and solutions rather than challenging them with original lines of thought.”⁸

Due to our regular use of screen-based technologies, we can “rotate objects in our minds better than we used to be able to. But our ‘new strengths in visual-

6 <https://relay.libguides.com/science-of-teaching-reading-resource-guide/reading-brain>. Accessed 11-29-24.

7 <https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2018.00066#ref4> (This article referenced: Tzipi Horowitz-Kraus, “Reading vs. Playing on a Tablet: Do They Have Different Effects on the Brain?” *Frontiers for Young Minds*. December 2018). Accessed 11-29-24.

8 Nicholas Carr. *The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains*. W.W. (New York: Norton & Company, 2011), 140.

spatial intelligence' go hand in hand with a weakening of our capacities for the kind of 'deep processing' that underpins 'mindful knowledge acquisition, inductive analysis, critical thinking, imagination, and reflection.'"⁹

FEARFULLY AND WONDERFULLY MADE

Truly we are fearfully and wonderfully made. How complex are our brains! But very importantly, we must understand that we are not *just* a brain. We must be careful not to reduce man to a bunch of electrical signals and neural connections! We are far more than this. Herman Hanko, in his *Biblical Psychology* syllabus, emphasizes how complex we are with all our facets of body, soul, spirit, mind, will, heart, emotions, and much more. One important relation is that of the mind and the will. Part of the reason why some things are more difficult to learn than others is that we do not have a *desire* to learn them. "It is also true that memory is stronger of things which we ourselves enjoy or desire. It is for this reason that the will plays a major role in the memory, and this is a clear example of the interaction between the mind and the will."¹⁰

God has given us a marvelous gift with the brain. And He has given us a means to develop our cognitive abilities that assist us in understanding His Word. We do well to recognize that the ability to focus, to comprehend, and to retain information is improved by regular reading. As good stewards we ought to continue to develop the gifts God has given us, including the ability to think deeply about spiritual things. Let us, therefore, be readers!

But God also works in us the gift of faith. Mysteriously, the Holy Spirit unites us to Christ, works in our hearts that we believe, imparts to us spiritual wisdom, assures us of salvation, testifies with our Spirit that we are sons and daughters of God, and gives us the spiritual eyes and ears to understand His Word. Let us remind ourselves that what we have learned so far about the brain is just a *piece* of the whole marvelous picture of how we learn and grow as God's people.

SPIRITUAL BENEFITS

It is clear that reading promotes good cognitive development. Besides being a good steward of God's gift, why else should we as Christians want to be readers? While we can answer that question from several perspectives, we begin to answer that question by asking another question. Why did John Wycliff and William Tyndale hazard their lives translating the Bible into English so that the common layman could read it? Wycliffe wrote: "The laity ought to understand the faith and, as doctrines of our faith are in the Scriptures, believers should have the Scriptures in a language which they fully understand."¹¹ The Reformers desired the Bible to be in the language of the people so that the common people could read and understand the doctrines themselves. And, as we read other good material, we are prepared to read and understand the Scriptures themselves. Martin Luther pointed out the importance of literature and reading when he wrote,

I am persuaded that without knowledge of literature pure theology cannot at all endure, just as heretofore, when letters [literature] have declined and lain prostrate, theology too, has wretchedly fallen and lain prostrate; nay, I see that there has never been a great revelation of the Word of God unless he has first prepared the way by the rise and prosperity of languages and letters, as though they were John the Baptists....¹²

What Luther was teaching is that reading prepares the mind so that we may progress from consuming the milk of the Word to the meat of the Word. We need to read, because reading is one of the best ways to develop cognitive abilities for the goal that we can read and understand the Word of God.

Reading is important for Christians, in the first place, and most fundamentally, because God has revealed Himself to us in the written Word, the Bible. Our desire is to learn more about God, and God reveals

⁹ Carr, 141.

¹⁰ Herman Hanko, *Biblical Psychology*. Federation of Protestant Reformed Christian School Societies, 1984.

¹¹ <https://christianhistoryinstitute.org/magazine/article/archives-why-wycliffe-translated>. Accessed 11-30-24.

¹² Martin Luther, Letter to Eoban Hess, 29 March 1523. *Werke*, Weimar edition, *Luther's Briefwechsel*, III, 50. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/luther-on-connection-between-good/>. Accessed 11-30-24. (Cited in Leland Ryken, "The Bible as Literature and Expository Preaching," in *Preach the Word*, ed. C. Ryken and T. Wilson, [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2007], 38).

Himself to us in the *written* Word. Our ability to read, in general, is important so that we can read the Scriptures and spiritual writings. Let us, therefore, be *readers*, so we can be *readers of God's Word*!

Second, God has given us the gift of reading by which we can grow spiritually. “But grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.” (2 Pet. 3:18). “And as it hath pleased God, by the preaching of the gospel, to begin this work of grace in us, so He preserves, continues, and perfects it by the hearing and reading of His Word, by meditation thereon, and by the exhortations, threatenings, and promises thereof, as well as by the use of the sacraments” (Canons of Dordt, V.14). Let us be encouraged, therefore, to learn to read and develop our skill of reading. There is a great incentive in developing our reading skills because as we learn to read, we develop our ability to think, to reason, and to understand the Word of God! As we do this, *in the way* of our reading God's Word, we grow in our knowledge of God and our faith grows richer and stronger! What an encouragement to read! Let us read God's Word more faithfully than we do. And let us read good Reformed literature that teaches us God's Word!

There are several other spiritual incentives to read. Reading helps us to grow in our capacity to serve in the church. For example, we grow in our ability to comfort those who need assistance, encouragement, and comfort. When we are regular readers, we also grow in discernment, becoming better able to evaluate critically the teachings of others and to *think deeply* about spiritual things. Finally, reading helps us grow in our ability to give a reason for the hope that is in us. Reading helps us articulate the truth more clearly both in verbal and written forms. Thus, we become better witnesses to the truth.

WARNING

But there is one warning we should consider. The warning is this. Let us be careful that all these excellent theological works do not become the only thing that we read! The danger becomes that slowly, ever-so-slowly, the infallible Word of God will have a smaller and smaller place in our lives. Luther, who praised the value of literature, also sounded this warning:

Indeed, the writings of all the holy fathers should be

read only for a time so that through them we may be led into the Scriptures.... Our dear fathers wanted to lead us to the Scriptures by their writings, but we use their works to get away from the Scriptures. Nevertheless, the Scripture alone is our vineyard in which we must all labor and toil.¹³

Let us be careful! Do not let good theological works take away from our reading of the Bible. Our theological books must be like John the Baptists, not only preparing the way for us to read the Bible, but as John the Baptist said “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). That is, He (Jesus, the Word of God) must increase, but I (John, and man's theological explanations) must decrease.

The reduction in our Bible reading can start in small ways. While we may use devotionals and commentaries, we should ask the question: Are we quick to pull out the commentaries when we prepare for Bible study? Are we quick to read, almost exclusively, what Spurgeon, or *Table Talk*, or Rev. J. Heys wrote on a particular passage? At the end of the day, how much do we *actually* read the Word of God and personally meditate on what the Word of God says? While reading good Reformed literature is of great importance to us as Christians, let us be reminded of the goal and the emphasis of the Reformers! Read the Word of God!

CONCLUSION

Thanks be to God for the gift of faith and the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts that we may truly know God, having that true, loving, heart-knowledge of God. Thanks be to God for working in us the desire and ability to grow in knowledge of Him.

Let us, therefore, hearken to the call of God to grow in wisdom and to grow in knowledge of Him. Let us read. Let us read good theological materials. In the way of that reading, our minds will be sharpened and equipped to read and digest what we read. As we sharpen our minds, we will be more and more equipped to read the infallible Word of God. And in that way, as we read the Word of God and these other theological works, we will grow in the knowledge of our gracious, covenant God—which is above all else most precious!

13 “*To the Christian Nobility.*” *Luther's Works*, American Edition, vol. 44, p. 205. <https://www.ccle.org/luther-on-education/>. Accessed 11-30-24.



THE GRIESS FAMILY: GOD'S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS (1) WORMS COLONY, RUSSIA

MR. JAMES HOLSTEGGE

member of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, Michigan, and administrator at Eastside Christian School in Grand Rapids, Michigan

Submitted by Carmen Griess, member of Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado.

The Loveland Protestant Reformed Church's roots are thoroughly German. The charter members were almost exclusively children and grandchildren of German-Russian immigrant Henry Schwarz from Sutton, Nebraska (NE). His ancestors can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation, including the 1525 marriage of Felix Ochsner and Fronegg Gossweiler performed by Swiss Reformer, Ulrich Zwingli! His family is thoroughly interwoven with two other German-Russian families, Griess and Ochsner. Both of Henry's successive wives had the last name of Griess, but both their mothers were Ochsner, as was Henry's mother. And five of Henry's children married a Griess! So, let's take a look at God's guiding hand as He led the Griess and Ochsner families out of Germany, into Russia, and then into the United States, preserving the Reformed faith all the way to Loveland, CO.

MANIFESTO OF EMPRESS CATHERINE THE GREAT

Using Theodore C. Wenzlaff's research in *Pioneers on Two Continents: The Ochsner-Griess History and Genealogy* as a guide, we will start our story with the Manifesto of Empress Catherine the Great in 1763.¹ Having overthrown her husband Peter III from the throne, she desired to have sparse areas along the Volga River in Russia settled and developed. She coaxed foreigners with generous terms of immigration, such as freedom of religion, no military service, and self-government in their villages. Russia even provided

money, land, interest-free loans, and no taxes for 30 years. Her grandson, Alexander I, obtaining the throne in 1801, followed the same plan in the newly acquired Ukraine territory, specifically the Black Sea region near Odessa. Alexander added one more stipulation: immigrants had to come in families with financial means and be talented as farmers or craftsmen. Recruiting took place particularly in Germany and Switzerland.

Back in Germany, Napoleon Bonaparte of France levied taxes on the German areas that he occupied and conscripted young men to serve in his armies. These hardships and famines presented conditions that would have made Russia's generous terms of Alexander's decree for inhabitants very inviting!

Johann Nicolaus Ochsner, 43, and his family left Edenkoben, Germany in 1809. Edenkoben was located west of the Rhine River, near France. At that time, he and his wife Klara, 38, had four sons ranging in age from 5-12 years old. We can imagine that conscription was on the mind of this family of boys! Nicolaus died sometime during that journey, yet Klara and their sons continued on to Russia and ultimately settled in Worms colony near Odessa.

Close to the same time, another family left that same German village and would also settle in Worms. Johann Henrich Gries (original spelling), 26, and wife Christina, 27, had two young children, ages one and two. Children of these two men ended up in Sutton, NE about 65 years later.

WORMS COLONY, RUSSIA

In his research, Theodore C. Wenzlaff found that the arrival of these families in Worms was not recorded. However, schoolmasters in 1848 chronicled the German colonies. Assignments were made to colonies

¹ The two maps included in this article were prepared by Wm. F. Wenzlaff as found in the book referenced here by Theodore C. Wenzlaff, pp. 25, 33 respectively.



Arrival in South Russia: Colonists arriving in 1809 wintered near Odessa in established German villages. In the spring they were assigned to the vast, treeless grasslands of Worms and Rohrbach, about 60 miles northeast.

based on religious denomination: Evangelical, Catholic, or Mennonite.

The journey to their new home would have been monotonous as this Crown steppe was a flat, seemingly endless sea of grassland. Villages were established with 50-100 families. Accessing the German Russia Heritage Society's website (<https://www.grhs.org/pages/worms>), Gries, Ochsner, and Schwarz names are found among the pioneer settlers in Worms colony. All the colonists would settle in their assigned village, which would be surrounded by the allotted land, divided among the families. Each family received a total of 162 acres in smaller plots spread out over the area. This gave no one family an advantage because each family had some land that was closer, some that required travel, some that got sufficient rain, and some that was lacking. The cultivation of this land was difficult, facing hardships such as hail, grasshoppers, crop failures, and winter starvation of livestock.

Children of the colonists were raised in their own self-supported parochial schools. Children were confirmed in the church at age 13 or 14, so the main emphasis in the schools was religion. The students received only basic knowledge of traditional school

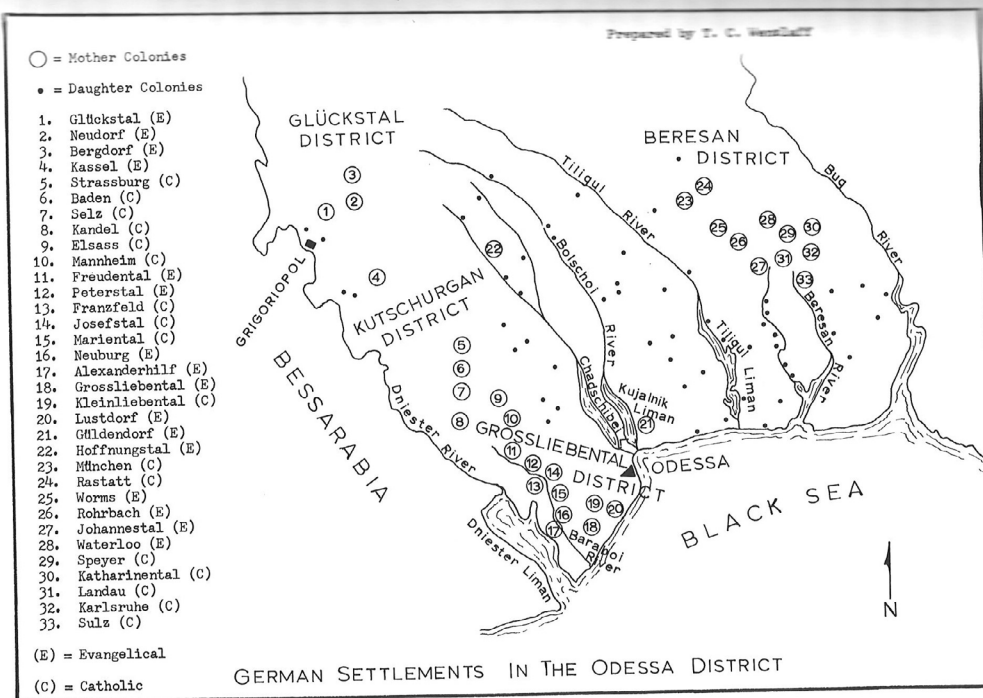
subjects as we know them. Theodore C. Wenzlaff noted that the schools' main purposes were to maintain German culture and to train students to live Christian lives. Eventually, training schools for teachers were established and education improved.

CHURCH IN THE COLONY

The religious freedom granted to the colonists resulted in them establishing churches of the same religion they had in Germany. In Worms, the Lutherans outnumbered the Reformed, but in nearby Rohrbach, the Reformed were more. Visiting ministers came once or twice a year to confirm those who were of age, but neither group had their own pastor—for 15 years!

Did you stop to ponder that? Hearing the preaching once or twice a year?! Theodore C. Wenzlaff provides excerpts from Schoolmaster Fritschle of Rohrbach (pp. 29-31) that are important to consider as we focus on the preservation of the Reformed faith.² The worship and fear of God was missing. There was spiritual starvation. The Germans' lives were worldly, with little restraint. The teachers and leaders within the villages were inept and spent most of their time in the taverns. The young people grew up the same, and most could not read. It is reminiscent of the times of the judges in Bible times: "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6). We know God had mercy in that He repeatedly raised up deliverers for the Israelites. And that is just what happened. God provided a Reformed minister in 1824, Johannes Bonekemper. Wenzlaff quotes the schoolmaster: "The happy cooperation, the censure of sin and an appropriate discipline, soon brought blessing to our people. The fear of God has returned" (p. 20). The Griess, Ochsner, and Schwarz families certainly could not have realized that in the next 84 years, God would provide 67 years of Reformed preaching by three ordained pastors in the Bonekemper family.

2 Found in the "Church Affairs at Worms-Rohrbach" section of Theodore C. Wenzlaff's book *Pioneers on Two Continents*.



German Settlements: The colonists were established according to religious denomination: Evangelical, Catholic, and Mennonite. 33 mother colonies were established and after tremendous economic growth, some 59 daughter colonies were added.

Pastor Johannes Bonekemper accepted the call to serve a combined Rohrbach-Worms Evangelical parish, meaning the Reformed and Lutherans worshipped together. He strictly clung to the Reformed form of worship, with which the Lutherans had no problem. That unity lasted about ten years. Pastor Bonekemper was ordered in 1833 by the Consistorium at Odessa to start a Lutheran form of service. After discussions and letters, the order came to hold separate services for the two groups. As Theodore C. Wenzlaff puts it, “The heretofore peacefully united church was spiritually split” (p. 30). Despite great effort of Pastor Bonekemper to keep the groups together and despite most Lutherans desiring to keep their pastor, problems still arose, causing him to resign 24 years after taking the call.

Without a pastor, peace could not be restored, so the Reformed and Lutherans established separate parishes. The Reformed church was vacant for 13 years, experiencing Jesus’ words in Matthew 9:37, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers are few.” Swiss pastor Philipp Jakob Uehlinger filled their pulpit only four years. He was replaced by Pastor

Karl Bonekemper, the oldest son of their previous pastor! He had attended seminary in Pennsylvania, served there as a Reformed pastor for three years, and then returned to Europe as an instructor for eight years in Basel, Switzerland. He would serve in their parish for 11 years before returning to America.

GERMAN THROUGH AND THROUGH

Anyone visiting Worms and the surrounding villages would have thought they were in Germany. These pioneers clung to their German heritage so that every aspect of life was German, except

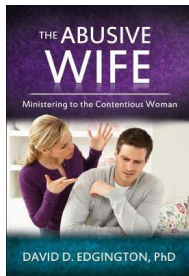
for the Russian land that they farmed. Even the villages were named after cities in Germany. The colonists were allowed self-government, which was strict and resulted in no lawlessness. Theodore C. Wenzlaff notes, “The colonists were models of hard-working, law-abiding citizens, devoted to their families, their homes, their churches and schools, and their fields” (p. 28).

The Germans continued to live gladly in isolation from the Russians, considering them an inferior people. But Russia took notice of their growth in numbers, strength, expansion, and wealth, generating an anti-German movement. The result in 1871 was the Imperial Russian Government overturning the previous manifestos. I was immediately reminded of Exodus 1:7, “And the children of Israel were fruitful, and increased abundantly, and multiplied, and waxed exceeding mighty; and the land was filled with them.” Pharaoh had felt threatened and sought ways to diminish them. Similarly, the German’s social status was reduced to Russian peasants, and their culture and heritage were now threatened by Russianization. Fearing that their freedom from military service would be taken away (it was, just three years later), leaving Russia seemed to be the only solution. They decided to move to the United States having heard about religious freedom there. We will see in the next article God’s provision for these Reformed, German families.

**MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA**

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

The following book is reviewed by Prof. David Engelsma, former editor of the *Standard Bearer*, professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, and member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan



The Abusive Wife: Ministering to the Contentious Woman, by David D. Edgington. Phoenix, Arizona: Matthew 22:37 Books, 2015. Pp. 168. \$14.99. Paperback.

When some years ago I gave the public lecture on spousal abuse in the Reformed community that to some extent opened up the reality of the evil in the Reformed churches, including the Protestant Reformed Churches, I introduced the topic with the assertion that abuse was almost always the sin that husbands committed against their wife and that the abuse of husbands by their wife was rare. I qualified the assertion with “almost.” But even as I spoke these words, I feared that I might be mistaken and that I was ignoring the reality among us of wives abusing their husband.

Succeeding years and subsequent information have convinced me that the abuse of husbands by their wife is not so rare as I then assumed.

I have erred.

At the request of one who knows the reality and misery of abusive wives by painful experience, I try here to make amends. I do this by reviewing a book on the subject that the person sent me and by commenting briefly on the evil raised by the book. Review of and reference to the book by no means imply agreement with all that it teaches, or even with the book’s style. There is, for example, a multitude of the author’s personal experiences, as a recognized counselor in the field. This way of treating the horrific subject has its effect, but the style is not mine.

The book corrects the mistake of assuming that abuse of husbands is rare in the Christian community. It also offers advice, often wise advice, as to how to recognize and deal with the evil in the church. Importantly, it calls for the church to take hold of the

evil in her membership, as some pastors and consistories scandalously do not. It also gives biblical comfort to the suffering husband.

Although she often does resort to physical violence against her husband, trusting that he will not hit her back, the abusive wife usually injures, indeed murders, her husband with her demeaning, destructive tongue. According to Q. 105 of the Heidelberg Catechism, this abusive woman is a murderess. The author rather calls the abusive wife the “reviling wife,” which is the biblical terminology. “Shrew” is also an apt, expressive description of such a woman.

In support of its contention that the shrewish wife is not rare in the sphere of the covenant, the book calls attention to the frequency of the biblical warning of reviling wives, especially in the book of Proverbs. There, another description of such a woman is “brawling” (Prov. 21:8; 25:24). These passages are helpful in locating the reviled husband, if he cannot be found at home. He will be found seeking refuge from his wife in a corner of the housetop.

The author makes a compelling case for the pastor to always meet with both parties in instances of marital conflict. The author contends that never should the pastor or other counselor meet with the woman alone, that is, in the absence of her husband. The reviling wife is often a master of deceit, convincing the counselor that all the blame is her husband’s. By the time that the husband is brought in, the pastor has made his judgment against him, adding to the abused husband’s burden.

The book demolishes some common failures of pastors and elders in counseling. These include advising the husband to “love your wife more,” as though the fault is always his failure to love his wife; or, “man up,” as though the reason for his wife’s refusal to yield to his headship is his weakness.

There is reason to believe that the cause of the trouble in a marriage may well be the woman’s. One may not

assume that the one at fault is the husband. It is an error to advise that the pastor or elder should always believe the woman and assume the guilt of the husband, even when the woman is petite and seemingly spiritual.

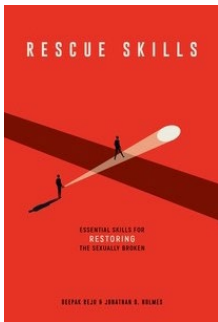
The considered judgment upon this reviling wife is damning: “she lacks empathy and appears to have no conscience. She feels no guilt over her cruel and reviling speech. She never apologizes and never asks forgiveness for what she has done wrong” (154).

Especially do I appreciate the admonition that

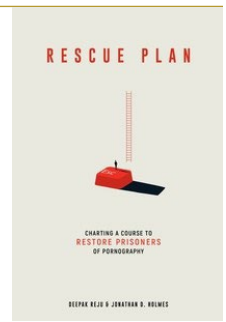
the church, in the end, must exercise discipline upon the reviling woman, with the hope that God will use this extreme measure to bring her to repentance. Consistories may not simply give up when admonition and counseling fail to accomplish repentance, leaving the woman in her sin and the husband in his misery.

And, as is the heading of a chapter, “divorce is not an option.”

Neither, the author ominously finds it necessary to warn, is suicide.



The following books were reviewed by Rev. Garrett Eriks,
pastor of Unity PRC in Byron Center, Michigan



Rescue Skills: Essential Skills for Restoring the Sexually Broken, by Deepak Reju and Jonathan D. Holmes. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021. Pp. 259. \$16.00. Paperback.

Rescue Plan: Charting a Course to Restore Prisoners of Pornography, by Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2021. Pp. 241. \$18.99. Paperback.

One of the greatest threats to the church today is pornography. This is not hyperbole. In fact, it might be the greatest threat to the present generations in the church. The statistics are staggering. According to the Covenant Eyes website, 51% of male students and 32% of female students first viewed porn before their teenage years. The average age of first exposure to porn among men is 12 years old. This problem is not just in the world, but it is also in the church. Among those who attend churches, 64% of Christian men and 15% of Christian women say they watch porn at least once a month (the Covenant Eyes website has many other sobering statistics about porn usage). So many men, women, and young people are becoming enslaved to this deadly bondage that is so easily accessible to them on their devices. You expect high porn usage rates in the world. But pornography is a problem in the church.

Therefore, the church needs good, reliable, biblical resources to help in the battle against pornography.

Deepak Reju and Jonathan Holmes, experienced pastors and counselors, have provided these two comprehensive, companion books, *Rescue Skills* and *Rescue Plan*, to help the church in this great battle. These books are meant to be read and used together. *Rescue Plan* explains the big picture of the nature of enslavement to pornography and what it looks like in the life of a single person, a married person, and in a child/young person. *Rescue Skills* explains how to disciple a believer who struggles with bondage to pornography.

These books are written for those who are in the trenches of battle alongside those who are struggling with this sin. The authors write, “Our target audience is pastors, counselors, best friends, parents, small-group leaders, roommates, fellow church members, and really anyone who is coming alongside a friend who struggles with pornography” (*Rescue Skills*, 10). This reminds us of the calling in the church to be side-by-side with each other in our sin struggles. Certainly pastors and elders want to be used to help those struggling with these sins. But parents must have a heart to help their children and church members must have a heart to help fellow church members to walk the way of purity and

godliness against these deadly attacks of the Evil one. These two books will provide the necessary resources for anyone in the church to help other members.

The highest compliment that can be given to books of this nature is that they are biblical. These two books are saturated with Scripture. At the same time, these books are the most comprehensive and practical that I have read regarding this sin and overcoming it. Because they are biblical, they are also gospel-centered and Christ-centered so that hope is provided for those struggling with this powerful enemy.

In *Rescue Plan*, the authors describe the bondage of pornography with the biblical verbiage of slavery, double-mindedness, foolishness, idolatry, and desires. With a deep understanding of this sin from experience and Scripture, the authors unpack the cycle of this bondage. With helpful alliteration, the four foes of the porn addict are identified as access, anonymity, appetite, and atheism. While no punches are pulled regarding the offensiveness of this sin against God and the neighbor, the books also explain how this sin affects the brain. They make use of science and recent discoveries about the effect of pornography on the mind, which is helpful for the addict and the counselor to understand.

The authors also tackle the often-avoided topic of masturbation in two chapters. In one chapter they demonstrate from Scripture that masturbation is wrong because it violates God's design for sex in marriage between a man and woman. In the next chapter they provide many biblical and practical strategies to fight against this selfish sin.

In our day the church might buy into the myth that pornography is only an addiction affecting men. But porn usage is rising among women. Reju and Holmes identify the unique struggles of pornography for men and women and they encourage pastors especially to preach against this sin to men and women because silence about pornography use among women is hurting them. Women are especially ashamed of this sin in their lives because they are led to believe it is only a temptation for men. Therefore, the books are not only for those helping men, they are valuable resources for those counseling women as well.

The practicality of the books can be demonstrated in many ways, but here is one example. In the chapter dealing with young people who are struggling with

pornography, the authors make the case for young people not dating while they are struggling with this bondage. Maybe you will agree or maybe you will not. But they make a strong case for it.

What will deliver someone from the bondage of pornography? These books do not provide a 12-step program to free men and women from this addiction. Instead, they provide a gospel-centered, Christ-centered, biblical rescue plan. It would be a mistake to pick up the books expecting to find a program only to modify behavior. Instead, you will find reading that is good for your own soul even if you have never battled this addiction because the focus is on Christ, the cross, and the beauty of God's grace. The biblical doctrine of repentance is covered thoroughly so that the one helping the addict can help him/her understand what true repentance looks like. This section on repentance is helpful for any sin in the life of a believer. But also, they remind those helping the addict to point this person to the cross to see the beauty of God's love. In this regard, one of the most powerful sentences in the books is this, "Sin is bad, but Christ is better" (*Rescue Plan*, 127). How true.

Each chapter of the book has at its conclusion a small gray box that includes something to reflect on, something to act on, and something to pray. These nuggets are helpful as a pastor, elder, or counselor puts together a unique way to apply God's rescue plan to one struggling with pornography. This is exactly what it should be: Not a cookie-cutter approach or one-size-fits-all approach to dealing with pornography. The books are meant to be read slowly and digested. Then the reader puts together his/her own way of applying God's plan to help someone who is struggling with this life-dominating, destructive sin. I must admit that at first I was disappointed that there was not a list or some steps to follow when counseling those caught in this trap. But then I saw the wisdom of their approach.

Because the books are gospel-centered, they are full of hope for those who feel hopeless in their sin. The authors point to the God of hope and the God of all comfort. This is a good reminder for us in our work with those who want to turn from sin and live God-glorifying lives—give them hope.

I encourage pastors and elders especially to read these books. But I also encourage counselors, parents, and all members of the church to read them. We need

more discussions about this great evil that is plaguing the church. It will not go away by ignoring it. But

more than this, we need to know that there is power to overcome this sin in the cross of Jesus Christ.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Peace PRC express their heartfelt Christian sympathy to Mrs. Janet Koontz and Mrs. Alice Dykshorn in the death on November 4, 2024 of Jan's beloved husband and Alice's dear brother in law, **Mr. Robert Koontz**. May they be comforted in these words from John 17:24: "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Rev. John Marcus, President
Barry Warner, Clerk

CLASSIS EAST

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 8, 2025 at 8:00 A.M. in the Zion PRC, Jenison, Michigan.

Rev. Clayton Spronk,
Stated clerk

CLASSIS WEST

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Calvary PRC on Wednesday, March 5, 2025, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 3 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Calvary's consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma,
Stated Clerk

CALL TO ASPIRANTS TO THE MINISTRY

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2025-2026 academic year should make application at the March 20, 2025 meeting of the Theological School Committee (TSC). Older men from the PRC who wish to apply under the new Special Seminary Entrance Program (SSEP) should approach the secretary of the TSC or the registrar (C. Terpstra) to review status and pre-seminary requirements (cf. *PRC Acts of Synod 2023*, pp. 348ff.).

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

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

All applicants must appear before the TSC for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 20 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the TSC before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the

Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

Joel Minderhoud, Secretary



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

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Register online at prca100.org to participate in the daily activities and stay on campus. **All registration closes February 14, 2025.**

DAILY SCHEDULE

Morning: Discussion sectionals for adults, Bible camps for teens & kids

Afternoon: Tours, recreation, tournaments, games, and crafts

Evening: Speeches and singing



The RFPA apologizes for the delayed mailing of your December 2024 issue. Due to a printer being broken at the printing service we utilize, this issue was not delivered to the post office as quickly as we would have liked. As a result, the December issue did not get to the post office until December 6.

**REFORMED
WITNESS HOUR**
FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED

REV. WILBUR BRUINSMA

- 1/5 Alpha and Omega, Rev. 1:8
- 1/12 By Faith Looking for a City, Heb. 11:9-12
- 1/19 Not Just Hearers, But Doers, James 12:2-25
- 1/26 God's Everlasting Glory, Rom. 11:33-36