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THE STRIKING HUMILITY OF CHRIST

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Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross— Philippians 2:5-8

A church needs humble servants. A church needs people who lower themselves to serve others, or trouble abounds. Where humility is present, there is love, and a wonderful witness of Jesus, to God's glory. Where humility is not present, there is pride. Pride tears a church apart. No one who is in it wants to stay. No one from outside wants to join.

Philippians 2:5-8 motivates and strengthens us to be humble servants. Here, Paul directs us to Christ as our example. His purpose is that we believers be moved to humility in thankfulness for the Savior who lowered Himself for us.

HIS INCARNATION

Christ was and is in “the form of God” (v. 6). The term “form” refers to the inner, essential nature of a person. Christ has always been and is God by nature, having all the attributes of God. He is eternal, almighty, unchanging, and infinitely loving, gracious, and holy.

Being in the form of God, Christ “thought it not robbery to be equal with God” (v. 6). This means that He never viewed equality with God as something to be stolen, for He always had it. As the eternal Son, He always possessed all the perfections of God and the same existence as God, dwelling in the heights of divine glory. In every way, He was rich. Hosea 2:7 indicates that He owned all things. He was rich in honor too,

the angels in heaven “hearkening unto the voice of his word” (Ps. 103:20). He had abundant power, turning the king's heart “withersoever he will” (Prov. 21:1). Infinite joy was His also, for He experienced no sin around Him, pain, or disappointments, but only perfect life and friendship within the Godhead.

Christ enjoyed the highest blessedness in heaven, but verse 7 tells us that He “made himself of no reputation.” This means, according to the rest of the verse, that He became a man. He took on the “form,” or nature, of a “servant,” and “was made in the likeness of men.” He had a human body, a mouth, feet, and hands, and looked no different than the men around Him on earth.

That Christ “made himself of no reputation” means He became flesh; but that phrase must be looked at closer because it so clearly reveals His humility. It literally means that He “emptied Himself.” The idea is not that He temporarily emptied Himself of all divinity and became only human. The original language of the phrase, “being in the form of God,” indicates that Christ continued to be in the form of God even after taking on the form of a servant. He became One who had a divine nature and a human nature.

That Christ emptied Himself means positively that taking on a human nature was loss for Him, loss in many ways. First, He gave up His favorable position before the law. He entered the state of guilt and condemnation where all the vials of God's wrath could be poured over His sacred head. Second, He emptied Himself of riches. The one who owned the cattle on a thousand hills was born in a cow barn and had to borrow throughout His life: a boat to preach from, a donkey to ride on, a room in which to institute the Lord's Supper, and a tomb in which to be buried. Christ gave up honor also. He who was perfectly glorified in heaven looked like a regular

man to others on earth, and He was subjected to mockery. Fourth, Christ emptied Himself by hiding His power. He became a baby dependent on His mother, and He had a weakened human nature that could feel pain and get sick. Hardest of all, Christ gave up the wonderful joy of heaven to have God's anger against sin come upon Him.

What is truly astounding is that this was all His own thoughtful act too. So often, we must be essentially forced to do things for our peers, but verse 7 says that Jesus "*took upon him the form of a servant.*" The Lord of all willingly and actively operated upon Mary's flesh and blood by the Spirit so that she conceived a son.

HIS DEATH

To see Christ's humility even further, understand that after He took on flesh, He could have become great on this earth. Was He not in the form of a servant while also in the form of God? Was He not in position then to make a name for Himself? He possessed the power to call down the angels of heaven and overcome all His enemies. He had the strength to give sight to the blind, cure diseases, raise the dead, feed multitudes, and cast out devils. He could have taken over the whole world and brought all nations to His feet.

Yet, after He took on flesh, Christ continued assuming the position of a servant. He obeyed the Master and submitted to His plan. What was that plan? It was not that He would become an earthly king and enjoy glory here. It was that He would walk the way of suffering all the way to death (Is. 53). In obedience to the Father, Christ rejected the Devil's temptations to become an earthly king. Even when Jesus came into Jerusalem on a donkey and the multitudes were ready for Him to unite all under His rule, He would not.

The phrase, "even the death of the cross," in verse 8, shows that His obedience and submission knew no bounds. At the end of Jesus' life, it became clear that God willed for Him to die on a cross, the Roman way of execution. Christ understood that this was going to be horribly painful and shameful. Even more, Jesus knew that this death was "accursed of God" (Deut. 21:23). He would die under the fullness of His own Father's wrath, experiencing the depths of hell. The Lord Jesus could have stopped all this by striking Pilate down and escaping Jerusalem, but He did not. He humbled

Himself as a servant, following God's will. He emptied Himself even of life.

Why Christ humbled Himself to death reveals even further His unmatched humility. He did not empty Himself for the selfish purpose of ending His own life because He was dissatisfied with it. Jesus went to die the accursed death under God's anger to save us believers from the guilt of sin, the punishment for sin, and the power of sin within us (1 Pet. 2:24). He put what we needed above His own ease. If His precious but guilty church was to be filled with the riches, joys, power, and life of salvation, He must empty Himself. So, He did. He lowered Himself for people who have sinned against Him and denied Him millions of times.

OUR EXAMPLE

Verse 5 shows how we are to respond: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus." Christ's mind considered the advantage of others even when it was to His own disadvantage. The ruling philosophy of people today is the opposite: Not self-emptying for the good of others, but self-fulfillment at the expense of others. We think the same way by nature, but God calls us to empty ourselves as His servants in gratitude for Christ.

Let us ask ourselves these questions: When there is a need for help at home or school, am I thinking about myself or am I putting on the mind of Christ? When my name comes up for church office or another committee, who am I thinking about? Am I lowering myself to serve?

Let us consider this question too: How am I treating those who have fallen into terrible sin, or families that have had a rough past? It does seem that we are often ready to lower ourselves and serve those who face difficulties that are not their fault. When someone from church gets cancer or a family has a house fire, many offer to help them. Praise the Lord for this humility! While we might do well at lowering ourselves to serve those who face troubles due to no fault of their own, are we just as willing to lower ourselves and help someone caught in a sin? We are often good at talking about the sinner and all the problems he or she has, but not so good at truly helping them. After the word spreads about the sin, we frequently avoid the sinner. We do not make them feel like they are truly part of the church or school anymore and might even be slightly embarrassed

that they are. The ones who sinned and their family members do not want to complain. They know what happened was wrong, but it is hard for them because we often do treat them differently.

Yet, what did Jesus do with us believers who have sinned so terribly against Him? Did He say, “I’ll have little to do with them”? Of course, not! He knows all our corrupt thoughts and actions, and yet He emptied and lowered Himself to serve us and save us. So, let us humbly serve others in the church even when they fall into sin, and especially when they fall. Let us include those that have a difficult past or are part of a family that does. May we watch how we speak about them. When we do not, we have lost sight of the gospel, and our attitude is just as terrible as their sin. When we do not, we have lost sight of 1 Timothy 1:15 and what should be every believer’s confession, “I am the chief of

sinners.” If someone you know was caught in an awful sin, go be with them and take them to the cross with you. Encourage them as they work to turn from their error, and pray for them. If you know someone who simply has troubles in the past and we have not always included them as we ought, seek to incorporate them into the church and school.

After considering our calling to put on the humble mind of Christ, we see that we have failed. We realize that in pride we have often not been humble servants towards our neighbors even after all that Christ has done for us.

Keep your eyes on the Savior. He humbled Himself to the death of the cross to pay for all our pride and selfishness. He shows us His humility in this text to empower us to lower ourselves in gratitude. Continue going to the Word every day to see Jesus’ humility, and then live as humble servants to His glory.

EDITORIAL



THE INEFFECTUAL OPPOSITION OF THE GATES OF HELL

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THE CANONS OF DORDT

The Canons of Dordt are steeped in rich theological concepts that afford tremendous comfort to all who believe. The comfort found at the end of Head 2, “Of the Death of Christ, and the Redemption of Men Thereby,” is particularly striking in its description of the opposition of the gates of hell as “ineffectual.”

In Articles 8-9, the final two articles of Head 2, the Canons outline a threefold purpose of God in the efficacious death of Jesus. First, the *narrow* purpose of God in the death of Jesus is the personal salvation of all the elect. Throughout history, God’s purpose is to redeem out of every nation His eternally chosen people by giving them justifying faith and leading them infallibly to the enjoyment of glory in His own presence forever (Canons 2.8). Second, this narrow purpose serves God’s *broad* purpose of gathering, defending,

and preserving the elect as Christ’s *church* on earth. There *is* and will *always be* a church. While earthly kingdoms rise and fall, the *church* endures forever, having its foundation in the blood of Jesus. Finally, both these purposes serve God’s *ultimate* purpose in the death of Jesus, and that is the universal celebration of His praises now and eternally.

This purpose [the salvation of the elect] proceeding from everlasting love towards the elect, has from the beginning of the world to this day been powerfully accomplished, and will henceforward still continue to be accomplished, notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell, so that the elect in due time may be gathered together into one, and that there never may be wanting a church composed of believers, the foundation of which is laid in the blood of Christ, which may steadfastly love, and faithfully serve Him as their Savior, who as a bridegroom for His bride, laid down His life for

them upon the cross, and which may celebrate His praises here and through all eternity (Canons 2.9).

Did you notice that the Canons identify one outstanding threat to God's threefold purpose? It is the opposition of the gates of hell. If anything could interfere with and prevent my salvation, the preservation of the church, and the praise of God, it would be the gates of hell. But what a devastating and humiliating adjective the Canons use to describe the opposition of the gates of hell: ineffectual! Since the death of Jesus guarantees the salvation of the elect, and thus the security of the church, the death of Jesus also seals the doom of the gates of hell. God's purposes shall certainly be accomplished, "notwithstanding all the ineffectual opposition of the gates of hell." According to sight, the gates of hell look invincible and cause so much hurt and trouble in Christ's church throughout the world, perhaps even in your own congregation. But we believe by faith that the gates of hell will never prevail.

THE GATES OF HELL

In ancient times the city gates were not merely physical structures for entering and exiting, but places of governance, judgment, and commerce. They were places of authority and power. "The gates of hell" is a biblical expression found in Matthew 16:18 and it refers to all the evil powers of spiritual destruction that Satan and his hosts marshal against the church of Christ. "Hell" is the prison-home of Satan and all his demonic underlings so that 2 Peter 2:4 states, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment...." The "gates" of hell represent all the powers of darkness concentrated in Satan—evil machinations he devises and diabolical instruments he assembles for spiritual warfare against the church. Therefore, the expression, "the gates of hell," refers to the active, dynamic, raging power of Satan who with great fury hurls at Christ's church everything hell has to offer. Think of hell as teeming with hordes of demons who come charging out of hell's gates bent on storming the citadel of Christ's church to massacre Christians in a spiritual bloodbath.

As a metaphor, consider the gates of CECOT—the Center for the Confinement of Terrorism in El Salvador. CECOT is a maximum-security mega prison

with a capacity for 40,000 inmates, and by prisoner capacity, it is one of the largest in the world. It is home to former mass murderers who formerly ruled the streets and cities of El Salvador in gangs, gripping the nation in terror. CECOT is variously described as "the world's most feared prison," and a "hellhole" where "the world's most evil people" are kept. This prison was built in late 2022 and it just opened its doors to the news media for the first time this past February. Instantly, CECOT became the subject of international media attention and fascination.

I have watched a documentary on CECOT, and it is not for the faint of heart. As the camera peers into the barren cells, viewers can lock eyes with hordes of terrifying mass murderers, whose bodies and faces are darkened with the tattoo ink of gang symbols, and whose eyes defiantly stare. The only thing more powerful than the murderous hatred of their totally depraved hearts is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is "not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

Apart from the fact that someone could bring the gospel to CECOT, and perhaps God would be pleased to rescue one of those evildoers, the gates of CECOT are a good illustration of the gates of hell. Imagine the dread terror of the citizens of El Salvador if they would all wake up one morning to discover that there was a prison break overnight and tens of thousands of CECOT inmates had infiltrated their neighborhoods. They would cry, "The gates of hell have been opened on us!"

This is how it goes for the church of Christ. How can the church stand as a little city set upon a hill? She is carefully studied and violently assaulted. Through persecution, trials of faith, and the intense spiritual warfare that Satan carries out, often through wicked men on earth, the gates of hell rage against the church. And only God knows when Satan will be loosed from the bottomless pit to deceive the nations (Rev. 20:3) in one last strike.

GOD'S EFFECTUAL POWER

Though the gates of hell could overpower any kingdom

or fortress of man, the Canons have us confess that the gates of hell are *ineffectual* in their opposition to Christ's church. To understand and appreciate this, we must grasp the nature of *effectual* power. Something is "effectual" if it possesses adequate power to produce an intended result. A craftsman who wants to cut through a piece of granite will find his circular saw an effectual power only if it bears a diamond blade. Anything less would be ineffectual.

Our God has effectual power; He does all His good pleasure (Ps. 115:3; Is. 46:10). One of the most wonderfully comforting terms in the vocabulary of Reformed theology is the adjective "effectual." It is most used in connection with God's saving call, so that we confess the "effectual call." The summons of our God carries within it all the operative efficacy of His Godhead so that by speaking He draws His people out of darkness and into His kingdom of light. What He desires, He accomplishes, because His power is efficacious.

Interestingly, Canons 2.8, which immediately precedes Article 9 and the reference to "ineffectual opposition," speaks of "the quickening and saving *efficacy* of the most precious death" of God's Son, and that Christ "should *effectually* redeem" the elect out of all nations. The cross is effectual. This is amazing because nothing looked more ineffectual and trounced by the gates of hell than the cross, yet "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Cor. 1:25).

The cross accomplished everything that God intended it to accomplish for all those for whom Christ died. The cross would not be effectual if God intended to save *all* human beings, for many perish. The cross would not be effectual if redemption were only *accomplished* as an objective reality, but not sovereignly and subjectively *applied* to all the elect by the Spirit. The cross would not be effectual if redemption were merely offered to sinners as something to be accepted by their own free will.

The cross *is* effectual because a full atonement was made for all the elect, all the treasures of salvation were acquired and hid in Christ, and based on that once-for-all sacrifice, the Holy Spirit sovereignly makes all of the elect partakers of Christ and His riches. God be praised that all His saving operations are effectual, and that not one step or aspect of our salvation, nor the

preservation of the church, depends upon us and our doing, accepting, or consenting.

SATAN'S INEFFECTUAL OPPOSITION

While all of God's power is *effectual*, all of Satan's power is *ineffectual*. God's sovereignty makes the power of the gates of hell ineffectual. That Satan's power is ineffectual is the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 16:18 when He states, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." Satan's power is akin to a craftsman using a cheap metal blade to try to cut through granite. It might scuff, scratch, and even groove the surface of the granite, but it is powerless to cut all the way through.

That Satan's power is ineffectual does not mean he is powerless and accomplishes nothing. He has despicable intentions, and he acts on them. He scuffs, scratches, and even leaves grooves in many souls. He tears apart Christian friends, spouses, families, and churches. He leads Christians down dark and destructive paths so that even after they are rescued, consequences follow them to the grave. He slinks or storms into congregations to divide and conquer, decimating some, and leaving the few who remain crying, "With sleepless eyes and speechless pain, my fainting spirit grieved in vain. The blessedness of long ago, made deeper still my present woe" (from Psalter # 210, stanza 2).

Nevertheless, Satan's power is ineffectual, and therefore, he cannot accomplish his threefold aim that lines up with the threefold purpose of God in the cross as outlined by the Canons. First, Satan cannot take from any believer his justifying faith nor prevent him from entering final glory. He cannot sever the believer's union to Christ, no matter how many grooves he cuts into one's soul. Second, he cannot thwart the spread, growth, preservation, and final triumph of the church. Third, he cannot stop God from receiving universal praise here on earth and later in the new creation. Christ and the cause of His church will triumph!

THE COMFORTED CHURCH

You, dear believer and lover of God's church, need to know that the opposition of the gates of hell is ineffectual. It does not look that way, I know. Out of the gates of hell and against the church are thrust

principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph. 6:12). Think of all hell's power to work denials of the efficacy of the cross, indifference toward pure theology, unprofitable doctrinal disputation over words, extreme positions on controversial subjects, schismatic behavior and agendas, shocking public sins, falls from respected positions, trust in men, gross wickedness perpetrated against vulnerable saints, a general spiritual lethargy, slighting of the old paths, love for the world, coldness toward and negligence of the hurting and needy, and the temptation for brothers and sisters to bite and devour, or at least suspiciously avoid one another in disagreements over how to handle problems. Lurking in the heart of all church members is pride, selfishness, jealousy, self-righteousness, anger, and evil lusts on which the gates of hell can capitalize.

Out of the gates of hell and against the church are thrust the sophistry of universities so that the confession of ungrounded youth often suffers swift shipwreck. And then think of all the “-isms” of this present evil age, like materialism, atheism, agnosticism, skepticism, relativism, evolutionism, transgenderism, fascism, feminism, racism, paganism, humanism, and more, spoiling the souls of many.

Hurled at the church is violent persecution, for example, through militant Hindus currently plotting to kill Christians in India. In prisons throughout the world, and I can think of names and faces in Southern California where I once led prison Bible studies, some former gang members serving life sentences have been brought to saving faith in Jesus, and now, with those imprisoned for righteousness' sake, they suffer persecution from the gates of hell *in prison*.

In the last hour of history, under the tyrannical reign of Antichrist, all the world will chant “Effectual is the power of the beast! Worthy is the beast to receive glory and honor!” According to Revelation 13:4, the beast, who is the Antichrist, will be given such power by the dragon, who is Satan, that the whole world will cry, “Who is like unto the beast? who is able to make war with him?”

The comfort of the church is always found in the saving efficacy of the death of Jesus that extends to all the elect so that all who are given justifying faith will be preserved unto final salvation, the church will stand victoriously with members steadfastly loving and faithfully serving God until death, and God will have all the glory world without end. What is to fear, the opposition of the gates of hell is ineffectual!

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES



NAHUM (9) THE SIEGE, FALL, AND PLUNDERING OF NINEVEH

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Previous article in this series: February 2025, p. 180.

NAHUM 2:3-10

The first part of Nahum 2 is a vivid eyewitness account of Nineveh's destruction by the Babylonians and Medes given some thirty years before the actual event, but sovereignly appointed and arranged by God. In verse 1 Nahum sees the King of Babylon coming at the head of his armies,

described by Nahum as the one who will scatter Nineveh as Nineveh scattered other nations. He calls the Ninevites to defend their city: “He that dasheth in pieces is come up before thy face: keep the munition, watch the way, make thy loins strong, fortify thy power mightily.”

Verses 3-10 describe the actual siege of Nineveh

(vv. 3-4), the vain efforts of the Ninevites to defend their city (v. 5), the capture of the city by the Babylonians (v. 6), the Ninevites being led away captive (v. 7), the news going out of Nineveh's capture (v. 8), the plundering of the city by the Babylonians (v. 9), and the horror of the Ninevites at what has happened to them and their kingdom (v. 10). This graphic account was necessary to assure God's people that Nineveh's judgment would come, for in the days of Nahum Nineveh was still at the height of its power, had just used its power to destroy and scatter the northern kingdom of Israel, and was making inroads into Judah.

The shield of his mighty men is made red, the valiant men are in scarlet: the chariots shall be with flaming torches in the day of his preparation, and the fir trees shall be terribly shaken. The chariots shall rage in the streets, they shall jostle one against another in the broad ways: they shall seem like torches, they shall run like the lightnings (3, 4).

The person referred to in verse 3a is the king of Babylon, but in the middle part of the verse it is God. The mighty men and the chariots are the king of Babylon's, but the day of preparation is God's. Nineveh, complacent in her long dominance of the nations and weakened by years of internal strife, is pictured as being entirely unprepared for the coming of the Babylonian armies; but God was prepared against her, prepared eternally as Judge and Executioner.

The reference to the shaking of the fir trees in verse 3 is almost certainly to Lebanon, far away from Nineveh, but shaken by the news of Nineveh's fall. Almost always in Scripture fir trees are associated with Lebanon; but the reference may also be to the land of Israel, on whose northern borders Lebanon lay, and who would share with Lebanon the news of the end of the Assyrian kingdom.

The red shields may either have been so colored (the more likely explanation), since the Babylonian soldiers are also described as being dressed in red, or those shields are already red with the blood of the Assyrians as the assault on Nineveh begins. The streets are not the streets within Nineveh's walls but the highways and roads leading to Nineveh. The comparison of the chariots to torches and lightning refers to the scythes

on the wheels of the chariots that flashed and glittered as the chariots were driven into battle. This remarkable scene is what the Ninevites would have seen from the city walls and what Nahum, the eyewitness, sees in his prophetic vision.

The uniforms and shields of the Babylonian soldiers, the racing chariots with their scythed wheels jostling one another as they approached the city and destroyed those who remained outside the walls, present an unforgettable picture not only of one of the great battles of ancient times, but also of the Lord's vengeance. The armies and the accompanying chariots are His instruments, prepared for battle by Him.

He shall recount his worthies: they shall stumble in their walk; they shall make haste to the wall thereof, and the defence shall be prepared. The gates of the rivers shall be opened, and the palace shall be dissolved (5, 6).

Verse 5 describes the attempts of the Ninevites to defend the city, but all their efforts were too little and too late. The complacency and weakness that led to Nineveh's fall is pictured in verse 11: "Where is the dwelling of the lions, and the feedingplace of the young lions, where the lion, even the old lion, walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid?"

An ancient Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus, tells what happened in the field just prior to the siege and does so in terms that are reminiscent of Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall:

Now just at this time it happened that the king of the Assyrians, unaware that the Bactrians had defected, and elated with false hopes by his previous victories, surrendered himself to relaxation; and as a feast for his soldiers, he distributed among them fresh meat and prodigious amounts of wine, and other things fit for the purpose, whereupon the whole army fell to carousing.¹

Historical accounts tell us that the Babylonians had been at war with the Assyrians for several years. Only in 612 BC were they, under the leadership of King Cyaxxes, able to defeat the Assyrian armies. These had retreated to Nineveh, which allowed the Babylonians to assault the city of Nineveh and take it after a three-

1 Edwin Murphy, *The Antiquities of Asia: A Translation with Notes of Book II of the Library of History of Diodorus Siculus* (Oxford: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 34.

month siege. An old Babylonian account says,

From the month Simanu until the month Âbu—for three months—they subjected the city to a heavy siege. On the Nth day of the month Âbu they inflicted a major defeat upon a great people. At that time Sin-šar-iškun, king of Assyria, died. They carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple and turned the city into a ruin heap.²

That the king of Assyria, for he is the one to whom the verse makes reference, “recounts his worthies,” pictures the king so stunned by the approach and success of the Babylonians that he can hardly think of taking leadership of the defenders. The word “recount” can be translated “remember” as though he had forgotten his own soldiers. They, that is, his soldiers, are described as faltering and wavering in their rush to prepare Nineveh’s defense.

Verse 6 continues the story by comparing the fall of Nineveh to the breaking in of a river that washes away and dissolves the buildings of Nineveh including its palace. That old account of Nineveh’s fall by the Greek historian, Diodorus Siculus, suggests that his fall was not only like the breaking in of a river but was actually caused by the flooding of the Tigris River:

But in the third year great storms of rain fell without cease, with the result that the Euphrates [Tigris, RHH] became swollen, inundated part of the city, and overturned the wall for twenty stades [about two miles, RHH]. Thereupon the king, realizing that the oracle had been fulfilled, despaired of all deliverance. But that he might not fall alive into the hands of his enemies, he built within the palace a pyre of enormous size, onto which he piled all his gold and silver and all his royal robes as well; and having shut his concubines and eunuchs in a chamber built into the middle of the pyre, he committed himself to the flames along with all of them and the palace itself. When the rebels learned of the death of Sardanapalos, they captured the city by attacking at the collapsed segment of the wall.³

Diodorus Siculus is not always reliable, as many scholars believe, but his account is likely since the walls of Nineveh were made of mud bricks and the excavations of Austen Henry Layard in the mid-1800s confirmed that Nineveh and its palace had been

destroyed by fire and water. Chapter 1:8 and 3:14 with its reference to brick kilns also suggest that this account is accurate. God knew in the days of Nahum every detail of Nineveh’s fall.

And Huzzab shall be led away captive, she shall be brought up, and her maids shall lead her as with the voice of doves, tabering upon their breasts. But Nineveh is of old like a pool of water: yet they shall flee away. Stand, stand, shall they cry; but none shall look back (7, 8).

Most commentators believe that Huzzab, mentioned in verse 7, was the queen of Nineveh. The verse then describes her and her maidens being led up before Cyraxes the conqueror stripped⁴ of their royal finery and captives, her maidens bewailing their fate like mourning doves and beating (“tabering”) their breasts. The king dead, the queen a captive, the palace burned, the wall broken, the Babylonians in control of the city: truly God would have made an “utter end” of Nineveh when all this was fulfilled (1:8).

Nineveh destroyed is described in verse 8 as a drained pool, a figure that does not seem very appropriate to us, but would have meant much more in that dry and desert land. Drained of her armies, her power, her wealth, her former glory, she would be as desolate and waste as any desert and her fall would be a catastrophe on the order of finding a pool of water in the desert drained and dry.

Whether the last part of the verse refers to the waters of Nineveh’s glory or to the people who depended on her really makes no difference, since there would be nothing and no one left where Nineveh once reigned supreme. Layard, the archaeologist, having excavated some of Nineveh’s remains, said, “Without the evidence that these monuments afford, we might have doubted that the great Nineveh ever existed, so completely ‘has she become a desolation and a waste.’”⁵

Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold: for there is none end of the store and glory out of all the pleasant furniture. She is empty, and void, and waste:

2 <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-3-fall-of-nineveh-chronicle>

3 Murphy, *The Antiquities of Asia*, 35.

4 The word “captive” is a word that means “denuded and a captive.”

5 Austen Henry Layard, *Nineveh and Its Remains*, Lion’s Press, 1882.

and the heart melteth, and the knees smite together, and much pain is in all loins, and the faces of them all gather blackness (9, 10).

Fallen to the invading armies, Nineveh would be plundered and her immense wealth taken away. That is the point of verse 9. Of this wealth the kings of Assyria had boasted on their monuments and in their inscriptions, some of which remain to this day, but all the wealth she had gained by plundering the other nations would now be taken away from her.

So it is always with the treasures of this world. They can be lost and stolen and will be until finally the kingdoms of this world become the inheritance of God's people. Then the wealth of nations will be theirs. But even then those material things will not be their chief treasure, for God Himself and their Lord Jesus Christ, and all the riches of salvation and of their heavenly inheritance exceed the riches of this world as the light of the sun exceeds a flickering candle.

Nineveh's wealth was beyond calculation. But Nineveh had forgotten that God is sovereign owner of all, and He, who had given Nineveh her wealth at the expense of the other nations, now would take it away and give it to others. He plundered Nineveh and He gave its wealth to the Babylonians and their allies.

The description of Nineveh's downfall concludes in verse 10 with a description of the terrorized inhabitants of Nineveh. The verse begins with a reminder that when God visited Nineveh in judgment she would not only be waste and desolate but would be without inhabitants: "empty and void." Her citizens, now captives, would be facing the wrath and cruelty of the Babylonians and where they had enjoyed an abundance, those of them who were left alive would be faced with hunger, even starvation: on every face would be the blackness of famine.

All this is recorded without a hint of pity or mercy. It raises the question whether those who read this account should read it without any feeling for the Ninevites and the suffering that would come on them. Scripture's inspired account of Nineveh's destruction not only suggests that such lack of pity is possible but in other places enjoins believers to rejoice in the destruction of the enemies of the kingdom of God. The fall of Babylon in Revelation 18, a picture of the end of all the kingdoms of this world, is presented as an occasion for rejoicing on the part of God's people: "Rejoice over

her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her" (v. 20). So too here in Nahum, the fall of Nineveh is "glad tidings" (1:15).

That such an attitude is foreign to our society reflects what O. Palmer Robertson calls a "sentimental blindness to the realities of history."⁶ In view of the description of Nineveh's brutality as described in the following verses, Nineveh's return to wickedness after having been shown mercy in the days of Jonah and Nineveh's implacable enmity towards God's people, there is no room for such sentiment. The only thing we may say is, "So let all thine enemies perish, O Lord."

Only we must be sure when such calamity falls on God's enemies and ours that we are rejoicing in their destruction as the enemies of God and His kingdom and not as our enemies. Until the final day of calamity comes and it is forever evident that they are destroyed as the enemies of God, we must pray for them and do good to them as we have opportunity to do so. We must always remember that vengeance belongs to God and not to us. If God does show mercy, we must not be like Jonah who in a different era begrudged that mercy towards Nineveh because of what they had done to God's people.

Nevertheless, the destruction of the enemies of the kingdom of God is deliverance for God's people and therefore a reason for rejoicing. William Henry Green says,

Thus Nahum's predictions have a meaning for all time to come, so long as there remains aught in which the spirit of Nineveh survives—aught which has inherited its criminality and its hostility to God's people. The doom of Nineveh shall attach in substance, if not in form, to all its successors. Not until the last foe of God and of human salvation shall be finally destroyed, shall it in its full import be accomplished.⁷

Isaiah said it best: "Zion shall be redeemed with judgment, and her converts with righteousness. And the destruction of the transgressors and of the sinners shall be together, and they that forsake the LORD shall

6 O. Palmer Robertson, *The Books of Naham, Habakkuk and Zephaniah* in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, ed. R. K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 82.

7 Review of *Nahum's Prophecy Concerning Nineveh Explained and Illustrated from Assyrian Monuments* by Otto Strauss, *Biblical Repertory* 27 (1955), 131. Quoted in Robertson, *The Books of Nahum, Habakkuk and Zephaniah*, 84.



TASTE

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Although we human beings are creatures of dust, our creaturely frame is a marvel of divine handiwork, fearfully and wonderfully made. God endowed our earthly frame with amazing senses—sight, hearing, smell, touch, and taste—by means of which we perceive, understand, and experience the physical world. Although the eternal God is exalted above all that is called creature, and thus inaccessible to our human senses, nevertheless, He is a God who condescends to His lowly creatures and reveals Himself in ways that we can understand. The whole creation is a most elegant book that presents to our senses Jehovah’s “eternal power and Godhead” (Rom. 1:20). God has revealed Himself in His written Word, the Holy Scriptures, in which He is pleased to clothe the eternal thoughts of His divine heart and mind in human language. God reveals Himself most gloriously in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, the Word made flesh (John 1:18). The Scriptures call us to, “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Ps. 34:8).

Taste, as well as the other senses, are used by Scripture to describe the character of true and saving faith. Faith is the unique God-given, God-designed, grace-formed spiritual sense, by means of which the child of God perceives, understands, appropriates, experiences, and enjoys spiritual realities, the blessings of salvation and, ultimately, God Himself. Whereas our world prioritizes sight above all senses (I must see it to believe it!), the Bible gives hearing pride of place. For God is a speaking God, whose people know Him first of all by *hearing* Him. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Rom. 10:17). We have received the Spirit, not “by the works of the law,” but “by the hearing of faith” (Gal. 3:3).

Having heard, the child of God begins to see *spiritually*. By faith, he sees the unseen, the eternal that lies beyond the earthly and temporal (2 Cor. 4:18). Faith is not blind; it is clearest sight. Faith sees spiritual realities and ascertains truth beyond the grasp of earthly senses, as it lays hold of and holds for truth all that God reveals in His Word. Like Moses, the Christian walks by faith “seeing him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:27). We see the invisible God in the face of Jesus Christ, of whom John exclaims, “which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1). In the incarnation of Christ, God the Son came down to our senses. By faith, our spiritual senses rise to Him. With the eye of faith we see our Savior. With the ear of faith we take in His Word. In His Word we smell the sweet savor of eternal life. By faith, the hand and mouth of the soul, we embrace Christ our righteousness, and taste that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet. 2:3).

Faith *tastes*, yes, tastes more richly than the tongue. Our earthly sense of taste is a means by which we come to know something experientially. Taste discerns the quality of a substance, such as food, discerning whether it is good or spoiled (Job 6:30). Especially, taste is a source of delight. So we read of Jonathan, whose eyes were enlightened when he “tasted a little of this honey” (1 Sam. 14:29). The knowledge of faith is of this character. It is not a dry, abstract knowledge, but a personal experiential knowledge of Christ, whom I know as my Lord and Savior, my Friend, who bought me with His precious blood, and to whom I belong, body and soul, in life and in death. Christ is our Bread of life, the true Manna come down from heaven to feed our souls amidst the wilderness of this world. Nothing is more delightful to faith’s spiritual taste buds than

the savor of the knowledge of Christ! To know Him—and taste the goodness of God in Him—is life eternal (John 17:3). As one might exclaim after a tasty meal, the believer confesses with relish, “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth” (Ps. 119:103)! No surprise, then, that Jesus appeals not only to our sight and touch, but also to our taste, in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper. In Holy Communion, Christ gives us to taste, with the spiritual mouth of faith, the benefits that come to us through His passion on the cross. He causes us to rejoice in the delightful fruit of His finished work. In the Lord’s Supper, we taste and see that the Lord is good! For God gave His only begotten Son to taste the bitterness of death for us—to suffer every aspect of death in our place—so that all who believe in Him, and keep His Word, may never taste death (Heb. 2:9; John 8:52).

The Shulamite sang of her beloved in Song of

Solomon 2:3: “As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste.” Is this your song, believer, that you sing of Christ your bridegroom? As we, throughout our lives, sit with great delight under the shadow of Christ’s cross...*how sweet is His fruit to our taste!* The fruit of the forgiveness of sins, everlasting righteousness, and salvation! And there is more to come. When at last we are seated at the wedding feast of the Lamb, and we taste His supper in the perfection of His kingdom (Luke 14:24), then shall we experience joy and delight the likes of which has not yet entered into the heart of man to conceive.

Savor the gospel of Christ! Look forward to the fullness to come! “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him” (Ps. 34:8).

PILLAR AND GROUND OF THE TRUTH



THE PROPER METHOD OF BIBLE INTERPRETATION: THE GRAMMATICAL-HISTORICAL-SPIRITUAL METHOD (1)

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No one reads a Bible passage without interpreting it.

Perhaps that is an overstatement. One who is entirely disengaged while reading and immediately forgets what he read did not interpret it. And someone who is puzzled by a passage and makes no effort to understand it did not interpret it. While this can be true of believers at times, it ought not. Believers ought to, and usually do, read the Bible in order to understand it.

Failing to interpret at all is one danger; another is that one *misinterprets* a passage. He or she comes away with an idea of what the passage means, but his or her conclusions are wrong. Preachers, seminary professors, Bible study leaders, and people sitting in a church pew are all capable of misinterpretation. The consequence will be that we fail properly to understand the meaning of the passage, to grasp the gospel as revealed in that

passage, and/or to apply the passage properly to one’s own life. Sometimes misinterpretation is the result of using unsound or wrong methods of interpretation; other times it is the result of wrongly applying the sound method.

All of this is to say that knowing sound methods, distinguishing them from unsound methods, and implementing the sound methods properly, is essential to good Bible study. This article begins a short series of articles regarding *biblical hermeneutics*, that is, the study of sound principles of Bible interpretation.

Seminaries teach these principles to prospective pastors in greater detail than will be set forth here. Not every seminary and not every book on the market teaches *sound* principles. A seminary that is committed to the Reformed and Presbyterian confessions and that

rejects most developments in biblical hermeneutics that have arisen in the last two or three centuries is more likely to teach sound principles than are those seminaries that reject the confessions and appreciate recent developments.

The method that we teach in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary is known as the Grammatical-Historical-Spiritual method. This, I contend, is *the sound method*. Some teach or use essentially the same method but refer to it by another name. Others use a similar name (Grammatico-Historico, or Grammatical-Historical) to refer to a higher-critical method of Bible interpretation that we reject. More important than the *name* that one uses are the *principles* that one uses. But the term “Grammatical-Historical-Spiritual” summarizes in three headings all the fundamental principles necessary to interpret a passage.

What is the benefit of setting forth these principles for the average Bible reader? First, people can more consciously apply these principles when having personal or family devotions or preparing for Bible studies. Second, those listening to preachers who apply the methods well can understand better how and why the preacher arrived at his interpretation. Third, those listening to preachers from pulpits, on television, or on the internet can also better understand how and why a preacher went wrong in his exposition of a text.

This first article will set forth foundational points regarding the doctrine of Scripture on which the Grammatical-Historical-Spiritual (GHS) method rests. It will also state the fundamental principle of Bible interpretation. Future articles will explain each of the three aspects of the GHS method and explain briefly why this method is the only proper method of Bible interpretation.

THE DOCTRINAL FOUNDATION

One who has a wrong view of Scripture cannot rightly interpret Scripture. What follows are three basic components of a right doctrine of Scripture that are necessary for proper interpretation.

First, the Bible is God’s inspired Word. It does not set forth merely human ideas, but declares *Truth*—realities that God eternally determined and providentially realizes. Nor is it an anthology of how people have viewed religious topics in ages past, relevant only as

a history of religion. Rather, it is *revelation*, much of which comes to us in the form of history.

That the Bible is God’s inspired Word is the teaching of Scripture itself. The prophets repeatedly declared, “Thus saith Jehovah.” The apostle Paul explained that “all scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16) that is, spoken by God Himself. Already here one comes to a translation and interpretive question: Does Scripture *breath* of God, or is it *breathed by* God? The Holy Spirit through Paul means the latter. Through Peter the same truth is made known: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). “Moved,” the way a sailing ship is moved by the wind that fills its sails.

Here is not the time further to develop the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture, but to say that one who denies this doctrine will certainly go wrong in interpreting the Bible. Our interpretation will be affected by our understanding of what kind of document Scripture is.

Second, Scripture is God’s *saving* revelation to *His people*. It is authoritative and “profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16). In other words, it reveals God and Christ and saving truth (“doctrine”), helps expose wrong teachings about God and Christ and salvation (“reproof”), helps expose the error of bad actions (“correction”), and directs us in the way of obedience (“instruction in righteousness”). Having Scripture, we know about our salvation and the blessedness of living in covenant fellowship with God. Apart from Scripture, we cannot know Him, glorify Him, or fellowship with Him. One who has a wrong understanding of Scripture’s *purpose* will go wrong in interpreting it.

Third, Scripture has various characteristics, or attributes. It is inerrant (has no errors), infallible (is not capable of error), internally coherent and unified (points to and reveals Christ), perspicuous (clear), reliable and trustworthy, and sufficient for salvation. That it is inerrant, infallible, reliable, and trustworthy means that the believing child of God can, when studying Scripture, find the meaning that God genuinely conveys. That it is coherent and unified means that we can find the revelation of our Savior and His saving work in it. And that it is clear

means that believers can interpret it without thinking that perhaps they are attempting the impossible.

More could be said about the high view of Scripture on which these principles rest, but the goal here is brevity. On the basis of all this, we can state the foundational principle of Scripture interpretation.

THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE

The foundational principle of all Scripture interpretation is this: *Scripture interprets Scripture*. This principle is not meant to be simplistic, as if one Scripture passage will set forth exhaustively the meaning of another passage. Rather, the point is threefold. First, as one reads the entire Scripture, one will better understand individual passages of Scripture. Second, one should understand a particular concept or doctrine in a passage in light of all that the Bible teaches about that concept or doctrine. Third, when trying to understand a more difficult passage, one should be guided by clearer passages that address the same doctrine.

The reason for this foundational principle is twofold. First, because Scripture is God's Word, revealed through the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit can interpret His own writings. Second, the organic unity of Scripture—sixty-six books, written in different times and cultures and languages, that nevertheless all testify of being the Word of the same God, speaking of salvation in Jesus Christ—means that Scripture interprets itself.

Evidence in Scripture for this principle includes 2 Peter 1:20: “No prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation.” No one person alone has the key to understanding Scripture and the fulfillment of its prophecies. Positively, an interpretation of a passage must be one that other believers recognize to be true. This is true because the Holy Spirit interprets Scripture, and makes known His interpretation to all in whom He works faith.

No Reformed confession specifically states this principle, but the Westminster Confession of Faith does: “The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself; and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly” (WCF I.9).

This means that the goal of Bible study, of personal and family devotions, of sermon preparation, and of listening to sermons is to understand what the Holy Spirit is teaching us in any given text. What I *think* the text means, or what *another* says the text means, is beside the point if I or another have not set forth the Holy Spirit's meaning that God intended us to learn from the text.

To accomplish this goal, one must use a sound method of Bible interpretation. In the next article we will examine the components of that method.

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE



THE ORDO SALUTIS (7C) SANCTIFICATION: OUR CALLING TO CLEANSE OURSELVES (3)

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Previous article in this series: January 2025, p. 142.

Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God—2 Corinthians 7:1

CLEANSING OURSELVES

The Bible teaches two main things about sanctification: first, God sanctifies us; and second, just as important, we are active in sanctification. In a text like 2

Corinthians 7:1 the latter aspect of sanctification is on the foreground, although the former is always presupposed. Some people might view it as improper that we should be called to cleanse ourselves, but we must not seek to be wiser or more orthodox than the Holy Spirit: if the Holy Spirit can use the language, “Cleanse ourselves,” we must use it too. God makes us active so that we also cleanse ourselves. God includes our activity in His cleansing of us. God’s work of cleansing is always first, so that our activity flows from His, but our activity is never neglected or rejected but emphasized in Scripture.

We cleanse ourselves from filthiness. Filthiness is moral defilement, ethical pollution, or spiritual uncleanness. This filthiness is of two kinds: “of the flesh and spirit.” Since the flesh is the body, filthiness of the flesh is any action performed by the members of the body, or any action that defiles the temple of the Holy Spirit. Examples of filthiness of the flesh include fornication, idolatry, and drunkenness. Anything you might do with your hands, your feet, your eyes, your ears, or your tongue that would displease or offend God is filthiness of the flesh.

Filthiness of the spirit refers to sins that defile the inward, spiritual life of man—his heart, mind, and will. Unrighteous anger defiles the spirit. Envy, malice, and selfishness defile the spirit. Pride defiles the spirit. Lust, covetousness, and greed defile the spirit. Wicked, blasphemous thoughts defile the spirit. We are to cleanse ourselves from filthiness of the flesh: *all* filthiness of the flesh. We are to cleanse ourselves from filthiness of the spirit: *all* filthiness of the spirit.

We cleanse ourselves by doing what a number of passages teach. Take note of the verbs in the following passages. “*Mortify* therefore your members which are upon the earth” (Col. 3:5); “But now ye also *put off* all these” (v. 8). “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye through the Spirit do *mortify* the deeds of the body, ye shall live” (Rom. 8:13). “Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be *put away* from you, with all malice” (Eph. 4:31). “If a man therefore *purge himself* from these, he shall be a vessel unto honor, sanctified, and meet for the master’s use, and prepared unto every good work” (2 Tim. 2:21). “Wherefore, *laying aside* all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as

newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:1-2). “Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, *abstain* from fleshly lusts which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11). Those verbs denote intense, spiritual activity on the part of the believer: mortify, put off, put away, lay aside, abstain from, purge yourself.

The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 33 describes this activity of the believer: “What is the mortification of the old man?” The answer is “it is a sincere *sorrow* of heart that we have provoked God by our sins, and more and more to *hate and flee from* them” (Q&A 89). Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh—from fornication, from idolatry, from drunkenness, from lying, from swearing, from stealing, from murder, from every sin committed by and with the body. Let us be truly sorry that by those sins of the body we have provoked God to anger. Let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the spirit—from unrighteous anger, envy, malice, selfishness; from pride, lust, covetousness, and greed; from wicked, blasphemous thoughts. Let us be truly sorry that by those sins of the spirit we have provoked God to anger. Let us hate all filthiness of the flesh—let us hate fornication, let us detest idolatry, let us loathe drunkenness, let us abhor lying, let us abhor swearing, let us hate stealing, let us detest murder, let us hate every sin committed by and with the body. Let us hate all filthiness of the spirit—let us hate unrighteous anger, let us detest envy, let us loathe malice, let us abhor selfishness, let us abhor pride, let us hate lust, let us detest covetousness and greed, let us hate every sin committed by and in the heart, mind, and soul. Let us flee from all filthiness of the flesh—let us flee from fornication, from idolatry, drunkenness, lying, swearing, stealing, murder, and let us flee from every sin committed by and with the body. Let us flee from all filthiness of the spirit—let us flee from unrighteous anger, envy, malice, selfishness, pride, lust, covetousness and greed; let us flee from every sin committed by and in the heart, mind, and soul. That is what it is to cleanse ourselves.

PERFECTING HOLINESS

The apostle continues: “Let us cleanse ourselves... perfecting holiness.” “Perfecting holiness” further describes and explains what it means to cleanse ourselves.

Cleansing ourselves from filthiness is a negative idea: we cleanse ourselves *from* sin, *from* all uncleanness. We put away, put off, lay aside, abstain from, and avoid sin, defilement, and filthiness. Perfecting holiness is a more positive idea: it is to devote oneself to God. In other words, sanctification would be incomplete if we only put away sin or put away all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. Sanctification must also include that we devote ourselves to the service and glory of God, perfecting holiness. We must be positively, actively, and deliberately holy.

More than that, we are called to *perfect* holiness. The verb “perfect” has the idea of bringing something to completion or making an effort to reach a goal. The word “perfect” here does not mean sinless perfection. The idea is that we grow, increase, and make progress in holiness. We make progress as we strive towards that perfection. There is no progress in holiness for the one who does not cleanse himself. There is no progress in holiness for the one who makes no effort to walk in holiness.

Again the Heidelberg Catechism in LD 33 describes this activity of the believer: “What is the quickening of the new man?” The answer is “it is a sincere joy of heart in God through Christ, and with love and delight to live according to the will of God in all good works” (Q&A 90). Let us perfect holiness by having a sincere joy of heart in God through Christ. The more joy we have in Christ, the less joy we will have in sin, and the more we will seek to devote, dedicate, and consecrate ourselves to Him. Let us perfect holiness by living with love and delight according to the will of God in all good works. Those good works will be acts of worship toward God: increased devotional reading of the Scriptures, increased attention to sermons, increased praising of God in singing. And those good works will be acts of love and service towards others: increased willingness to serve others selflessly, humbly, and kindly.

IN THE FEAR OF GOD

We do this in the fear of God, which is the opposite of the fear of man. Our behavior is often determined by a desire to please another human being: sometimes we call this “peer pressure.” What man thinks is a powerful motivating factor, whether positive or negative. Sometimes fear of man is a means to restrain us if the

people whom we fear are holy. We might modify our behavior in the presence of another Christian, which is good—but only to a point. It is good to have Christian peers who hold us accountable to walk in holiness and to avoid sin. But fear of man, more often than not, is a hindrance to godliness: “The fear of man bringeth a snare, but whoso putteth his trust in the LORD shall be safe” (Prov. 29:25).

The fear of God is the effective antidote to the fear of man. The fear of God is a holy reverence for God. Fear of God is a certain attitude of heart flowing from our knowledge of God and love for Him. We know who our God is—almighty, infinitely glorious, perfectly wise, abundant in goodness and truth—and we love Him. Fear of God is an awestruck wonder of who God is and what He has done. In that sphere we perfect holiness: “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.” As we live, are we conscious of being in the presence of God? If God could see me—and He can—would He approve or disapprove of this action of my body? If God could hear me—and He can—would he approve or disapprove of this word of my tongue? If God could search me—and He can and does—would He approve or disapprove of this thought of my heart? Such fear in your heart will restrain you from wickedness: you will cleanse yourself from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit because you want to please God, because you fear Him. Remember Psalter #1: “That man is blest who *fearing* God from sin restrains his feet,” and “Yea, blest is he who makes God’s law his portion and delight.”

HAVING GOD’S PROMISES

The incentive to be active in sanctification is God’s promises: “having, therefore, these promises, dearly beloved” (2 Cor. 7:1). “These promises” refer back to 2 Corinthians 6 where the apostle emphasized and enforced the antithesis. The antithesis is the spiritual separation from unbelievers, and the spiritual opposition to unbelievers, by believers. Spiritual separation and opposition do not require the shunning of all unbelievers by believers or the refusal to have any contact with them whatsoever. Paul explains the difference in 1 Corinthians 5:9-10: “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then

must ye needs go out of the world.” Interaction, even cooperation to a degree, is one thing; fellowship is quite another.

The apostle illustrates: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers” (2 Cor. 6:14). The illustration is of two animals joined together with one yoke—an ox and a donkey, for example—which are not the same size and do not work well together. Similarly, the unbeliever cannot serve God and even hinders the believer in serving God—therefore, from a spiritual point of view, they must be kept separate. Paul adds: “Come out from among them; and be ye separate” and “touch not the unclean thing” (v. 17). “The unclean thing” is not necessarily unbelievers, although they are not excluded, but in the context the unclean thing is idolatry. The unclean thing is, more broadly, “all filthiness of the flesh and spirit.” “Be ye separate” is further explained by “perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”

To the one who lives the antithesis—and to none other—God makes precious promises: “I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (v. 16). That is the promise of the close, intimate fellowship of the covenant; it is to know God and to be known by God in a relationship of love and friendship; it is to have such close communion with God that He dwells in our hearts. “And I will

receive you” (v. 17). This is the promise that God will take us to be with Himself, to love us, to delight in us, to bless us, to guide and protect us. “And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty” (v. 18). This is the promise that God will adopt us, bestowing upon us all the privileges of God’s children; He will love us, He will provide for us, He will protect us, and He will guide and teach us.

Paul takes those promises—promises of God’s fellowship with us, promises of God’s reception of us, promises of God’s adoption of us—and he makes them a powerful incentive to holy living: “*Having therefore these promises*, dearly beloved, let us....” The idea is “*because* we have these promises.” We do not say, “Because God has promised to be with me and to be my Father, I will live freely in sin.” God forbid that we should conclude that! Rather, we say, “Because of these precious promises, I will strive to please the God who has made these promises to me: I will cleanse myself from all filthiness of the flesh; I will cleanse myself from all filthiness of the spirit; I will perfect holiness; and I will do so in the fear of God.” That is the active life of sanctification.

Next time, we will study the truth of the preservation or the perseverance of the saints, for “he which hath begun a good work [regeneration and sanctification] in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil. 1:6).

STRENGTH OF YOUTH



AN OPEN LETTER ABOUT MODESTY TO SISTERS IN CHRIST

REV. JONATHAN MAHTANI

pastor of the Pittsburgh PRC in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

The following letter is written from the perspective of a believing young man to believing young ladies of the church.

Dear sister in Christ,

The topic of modesty so often results in the blame game—sons of Adam claiming that it is the women’s

fault, and daughters of Eve countering with accusations against the men. So instead of finding fault with you, I begin this letter by acknowledging *my* sin. A wise teacher of mine once showed me how God calls us to think of the young women in the church “as sisters, with all purity” (1 Tim. 5:2b), and I am disgusted with myself for looking upon a sister *that* way. I am

sorry. Trusting in Jesus, I repent and seek the Lord's forgiveness daily for my unchaste thoughts and desires, which is to commit adultery in my heart (Matt. 5:28). I ask for your forgiveness also.

Although it is humiliating, I believe it is important for you to know that this is a continuing fight for me and for my brothers in Christ. Galatians 5:17 describes my battle well: "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would." Dear sister, there is a war inside of me! Yes, there is also a Spirit-empowered new man from Christ in me, and by God's grace, I hate the lust of my flesh. Because it is almost impossible for me to use social media without letting my eyes and thoughts wander, I have deleted these apps from my phone. Yet every day, I still fail. My eye so quickly finds what is pleasing to the flesh. I have made a covenant with my eyes (Job 31:1), vowing not to take that sinful second-look, but it is a frequent struggle. I could be reading a book, listening to music, trying to pray even, and I can feel temptations pulling me in the wrong direction.

Why am I telling you this? I am humbly requesting your aid in this spiritual war. Please help me, your brother in Christ. I am not blaming you but asking you for your assistance. The woman was made to be a "help" to man (Gen. 2:18), so I ask for your help in this daily battle by adorning yourself with modest clothing.

Dear sister, I want to remind you that modesty is especially important when you come to church. Indeed, the idea to write this letter initially came to my mind while I was sitting in church a few Sundays ago. I was shocked by what some young ladies wore! I asked myself, "Do they know that when God speaks of modesty in the Bible, He specifically applies it to what women wear in worship?" 1 Timothy 2 shows Paul explaining proper behavior in church. He addresses proper prayer in worship, proper preaching of the gospel in worship, and the proper place of women in worship. In the midst of instruction on worship services, we find, "In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety..." (1 Tim. 2:9a). This verse, of course, also applies to what you wear to school, to the store, on the court, at the gym, and at the beach, but its first application is to what you wear when you come to worship your Savior.

Giving you the benefit of the doubt, I do not think most women who come to church have the intention of tempting men to unholy thoughts in God's holy house. You do not aim to distract us from His Word when you wear something that reveals your body's curves or skin. You are not trying to make us lust instead of trust in Jesus. You do not want attention drawn to your beauty instead of Christ's glory. But Satan does. I plead with you, sisters, not to let him use you, even if unintentionally, to tempt men, especially in God's house.

I believe there is a conspiracy going on. You need to be aware that men and women of the clothing industry are designing fashions of today with this sinister goal: to unclothe women. Imagine the worst kinds of sex worshipers gathered in a meeting to discuss the next new style (rapists, pimps, and sexual abusers along with prostitutes, porn stars, and LGBTQ+ lovers). In order to make money and fulfill their twisted desires, these males and females conspire to popularize what their lewd minds have imagined so that all the women especially dress (or should I say, undress) like them. With a plan similar to the clothiers of the well-known tale, "The Emperor's New Clothes," contemporary fashion designers today sell products they dare call new "clothing," though even a child can tell: "She doesn't have any clothes on!" And not wanting to be considered fools, the masses in both world and church seem to be falling for this trickery. A little child-like faith and a bit of common sense about this sex-crazed culture would find this "conspiracy theory" not so far-fetched.

Urgently, I write to you, dear sister, not only to seek your help in my warfare but also to seek your spiritual and physical safety in the midst of a sexual revolution seeking to consume you. Slowly but surely, we are being desensitized to immodesty. What many wear to "fit in" and "be cute," God forbids. Look at the words of the Heidelberg Catechism when it explains the seventh commandment. It prohibits "whatever can entice men thereto" (Lord's Day 41, Q&A 41). Again, I write not to blame you for my sin of lust but to exhort you to examine your clothing and your heart so that you avoid that which provokes others to lust.

Although modesty *is* about what you wear, it is first a matter of the heart. An insightful pamphlet influencing my thoughts in this letter gives a good

biblical definition: “Christian modesty is the inner self-government, rooted in a proper understanding of one’s self before God, which outwardly displays itself in humility and purity from a genuine love for Jesus Christ, rather than in self-glorification or self-advertisement.”¹ In other words, it is not just about *what* you wear but about *why* you choose to wear it. There is a proper, natural desire for a woman to look beautiful, but when your heart’s motive is to attract attention to yourself, that is called self-advertisement or exhibitionism, which is the opposite of modesty. A compounding problem is that the standard of beauty has become what the *world* calls beautiful. The heart’s goal becomes wearing what makes other girls and guys think of you as attractive... even if it is ugly in *God’s* eyes.

Dear sister in Christ, do not seek man’s favor! The gospel is that God has clothed you. He came to Adam and Eve, who with their fallen minds had fashioned fig-leaf outfits insufficient to hide their shame. As He mercifully covered them with lambskins, so He covers you. He clothes you with the beautiful white robes of Christ’s righteousness. He embraces you as His daughter, and Christ embraces you as His wife. Cherish Him who thinks of you as already beautiful in His sight! Look forward to the gift of a believing husband who will see you the same way. In this way, recognize that you do not need to gain God’s favor, and you certainly do not want the favor of immoral men who only want to use you as an object of their lust.

Practically speaking, I also warn you about social media. Think about how social media is going to tempt you to think that something is “attractive” when it is immodest. Consider cutting it out of your life as I have. You will save a lot of time while you are at it. Have you heard of Rosaria Butterfield? In her latest book, she makes this striking statement in a chapter on modesty: “Indeed, a social media-infused life will always choose exhibitionism over modesty.”² Think about how social media constantly pressures you towards the opposite of modesty: posting to show off yourself. Think about what standard of beauty

it flashes before your eyes and impresses upon your hearts. How much is social media conforming your mind to its worldly standards?

No, modesty does not mean dressing like women of a different culture or time period. It does not mean wearing a head covering, a frumpy dress, and hiding every square inch of skin. In fact, that would probably also be a way to draw attention to yourself. There is a skill and creativity that godly women have had through different cultures adorning themselves in modest apparel as they live *in* this world but not *of* it.

With this letter, I do not mean to accuse all girls who read this of immodesty. In fact, to you modest sisters in Christ, I want to express gratitude. On behalf of other godly young men, thank you. We thank God for the confidence in Christ that you display. You truly believe that He sees you as beautiful in His sight, and thus your priority is not to seek the favor of men. We thank God for your courage to maintain a certain standard even if you must dress differently than your trend-following peers. We thank God for your meekness as you refuse to join the silent beauty competition. We thank God for your perseverance in the difficult search of shops for clothing that fits—both godly standard of modesty and the fashions of today.

If you find yourself to be a leader among other girls at school or work, I encourage you to be an example of modesty to the younger ladies who examine everything you wear. You know they are watching. Don’t flatter your friend by calling what is immodest “cute,” but rather encourage the modest with your compliments. If you are tempted in any way to give up on modesty or to start lowering your standards, please don’t. Remember that you are helping us fight a spiritual battle. According to the new man in us, we really don’t think that the shorter, the lower, or the tighter is truly attractive. When we see a sister in Christ like you, dressed modestly, we want to tell you, “Well done. You are truly beautiful.”

Sincerely,
Your brother in Christ

1 Jeff Pollard, *Christian Modesty: The Public Undressing of America*, <https://www.chapellibrary.org/read/cmod>.

2 *Five Lies of Our Anti-Christian Age* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2023), 281.



TEACHERS OF GOOD THINGS (1)

MRS. SARAH MOWERY

wife and mother in Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado

AN OLDER WOMAN

Suddenly, and somewhat unexpectedly, I find myself among the middle aged. For many years after Sunday worship services I clustered with women who were adorned with burp cloths and diaper bags. We bounced babies and placated toddlers with snacks as we discussed birth plans and disciplining our young children. Now some of those same women and I seek each other out with questions about driver's training or our children's dating relationships. When I video call my mom on Sunday afternoons, I am startled by the face that first looks back at me from my phone screen—not hers, mine. It's starting to droop, and there are silver highlights in my hair. I may not be old, but I am older.

TEACHERS OF GOOD THINGS

According to Titus 2:3, there are things that older women should be—holy in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things. Years ago my mom-in-law would renew a subscription to *Martha Stewart Living* for me every Christmas. One of my favorite features of that magazine was its regular column “Good Things.” Each month I would skim Martha's good things—décor ideas, sewing projects, and recipe pointers—on my walk back from the mailbox. But the good things that Titus 2 calls older women to teach younger women are duties that far surpass Martha's most ingenious tips: “to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed” (4–5).

Duties. That is the word Calvin uses in his commentary on Titus 2:4. He writes that this list of good things is not merely “a recapitulation of the advices which elderly women should give to those who are younger.” Rather, he insists that they are duties

that belong to Christian women regardless of their age. To put it another way, older women are to teach these things not only in word but also by example. That these good things are duties means that they are responsibilities. They are things that godly women are *behooved* to do. My grandpa used to begin his prayers, “Father, it behooves us to come unto Thee....” If one is behooved to do something, he is obligated to do it. Like prayer to a Christian, he knows it is essential to his station and calling. Sisters, it behooves us as those who occupy the office of Christian woman to do—and to teach—these good things.

What makes these things *good* things? Martha Stewart's good things were clever and helpful. But the good things listed in Titus 2:4–5 are good in a far superior sense of the word. They are good works as Answer 91 of the Heidelberg Catechism defines them: they proceed from a true faith; they are performed according to the law of God, and to His glory; and they are not founded on our imaginations of the institutions of men. These are things that are essential to the life of the new man within the Christian woman. This is how her life adorns the doctrine of God our Savior (v. 10). Failure to do these things gives occasion for others to blaspheme God's Word.

WHY OLDER WOMEN?

If these good things are the duties of godly women regardless of their age, why are older women called to be the teachers? The passage assumes that the older women are qualified to teach these things because they have experience. From that point of view, the category “older women” is a flexible one. I have the privilege of encouraging and helping mothers of young and middle-school aged children, but in the past few years I have needed and been blessed by the counsel of women who have navigated

the teenage years, witnessed their children marry in the Lord, and are now delighting in their grandchildren. In one situation, I am an older woman; in the other, I am a younger one. Perhaps you have been married for a time, and a newlywed sister who is several years your senior comes to you with questions about marriage. In terms of experience, you are older. Teach her.

With experience comes perspective. What if the opening paragraph in this article mentioned *fruit* snacks instead of just *snacks*? Or instead of *birth plans*, *home birth*? Those details may have sparked more interest than any part of this article because we women can be very zealous about such things. The Bible sets forth principles; but, like Martha Stewart, we tend to preoccupy ourselves with methods.¹ For example, Proverbs 31:15 teaches that a virtuous woman provides food for her household. So we exchange meal ideas and recipes and alert one another to deals in the weekly grocery ad. But none of us has to look very far to find a woman who thinks less of another because she fulfills that principle using a different method—she is likely looking back at us in the mirror! One may say, “We only eat food that God made.” She might feel it her duty to point out all the unpronounceable ingredients in the frozen pizzas a sister serves her family. Or perhaps it goes the other way. The woman who whips up boxed macaroni and cheese shakes her head at all the time and money another spends preparing everything from scratch. It is likely that all of us are guilty of thinking more highly of our methods than we ought to think. We are quick to bind consciences over things like preservatives or epidurals. But because older women have more experience, they usually understand that while all methods are not equal, neither are any of them perfect, and most will change over time to better serve a particular person or family, circumstance, or season of life. An older woman has seen fads come and go, and she knows that the most important word in the previous sentence is the word *serve*. In this area too man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. It behooves us to concern ourselves as much with our motives as we do our methods.

With experience also comes wisdom. I wonder

sometimes how much the internet, that source of endless information, robs Christian women of the good gift of discipleship, of the older women teaching and the younger women seeking instruction. My husband and I were married ten years before I obtained a cellphone. During those years the Lord blessed us with six children, and we moved hundreds of miles away from family. We had internet access, but back then I was quicker to use our landline phone to call my mom or sister when I was unsure whether I should take a sick child to the doctor. I received—and now treasure—handwritten letters from my grandmother that contained recipes and a list of companion plants for my garden. Now, when in doubt, I usually reach for my phone, not to call someone but to search the internet. It is quicker, and, after all, everyone is so busy. Teaching—and learning—take time. They require intentionality. But what is gained in the counsel of one Christian woman to another is more than information: it is wisdom, the personal application of biblical principles to a specific person or situation. And that often comes from a woman who long ago forgot the details of many of her methods. Google cannot offer that. Grandma can.

BE SOBER

The first thing in the list of the good things in Titus 2:4–5 is this: “be sober.” One who is sober is not under the influence of alcohol. That this must be true of Christian women is clear already from verse three: older women are not to be “given to much wine.” Neither are those who are young.

But the word translated *sober* in verse four is figurative. It refers to the sound mind that must characterize officebearers (Tit. 1:8), older men (2:2), younger men (2:6), and all who look “for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (2:12–13). Notably, it is twice repeated in the list we consider: the same word is translated *discreet* in verse five. In John Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, Discretion is the grave and graceful woman who keeps the palace Beautiful, which was built by the Lord as a resting place for travelers on their way to the Celestial City. She assesses all who seek lodging there, and determines according to the law of the Lord whether or not they may be admitted. So the sober Christian woman, when encountered with

1 Nancy Wilson. “Principles and Methods” in *The Fruit of Her Hands* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1997).

the intoxicating ideas of the world, examines them carefully in the light of God's Word, and all that are found wanting she refuses admittance into her mind. She does so because she loves the gospel and desires that the will of her heavenly Father guide her thinking. She understands that the end of all things is not her own

pleasure or fulfillment, but His glory, and she embraces the ways in which He has determined that her life must adorn the good news of salvation.

Sisters, it is a good thing to be sober.

We will consider more good things in a future article.

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES IN COMMON—PRC SEMINARY



MONDAYS AT SEMINARY

PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER

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

Tradition has it that Monday is a minister's day off. If my own past experience is representative of pastors in the PRCA, that bit of folklore is not true. What is true is that the burden of the past week, growing increasingly heavy as Sunday approached, has been lifted. Perhaps the minister has started his Monday off slowly. But by the end of the day, especially if he is in West Michigan, he has prepared for and taught between three and five catechism classes, and attended to pastoral or committee work that he was not able to do the previous week.

Mondays at seminary are not a day off either. This might come as a surprise to those who know that seminary classes all meet on Tuesday through Friday. Mondays at seminary have a different character, to be sure. But they are not a day off.

What happens on Mondays at seminary?

SEMINARY-SCHEDULED EVENTS

Two sorts of events are routinely scheduled for Monday mornings. First, during exam week a weighty exam (dogmatics) is always given on Monday. Second, practice preaching is always scheduled for Monday morning.

Every student, except first-year students, must prepare two sermons each semester and deliver them before the faculty and other students. That means that we have six practice preaching sessions this semester: two each by Aaron VanDyke (senior), Bruce

Feenstra (junior), and Isaac VanBaren (sophomore). Each session lasts about ninety minutes. The sermon is followed by the faculty's critique of the student's interpretation of the text, formal aspects of the written sermon, the sermon's content, and the sermon's delivery. The first round of practice preaching was held on February 17 and 24, and the second round on March 24 and 31.

So I have just accounted for five Monday mornings out of sixteen. What happens the other Monday mornings? And what goes on in the afternoons?

RETURN TRAVEL

If any professor or student was outside West Michigan preaching the previous day, Monday might be a day of return travel.

One Monday, January 27, stands out as a day of return travel for the five seminarians and Prof. Kuiper. The faculty tries to be aware of profitable conferences sponsored by other seminaries, churches, or organizations. Sometimes only one faculty member attends, because the conference is specific to his field of instruction. Other times we attend as a seminary body; for example, the entire seminary has often attended the West Michigan presentation of the annual Philadelphia Conference on Reformed Theology. Another conference that we keep an eye on is the annual conference sponsored by Westminster Seminary in Escondido, CA.

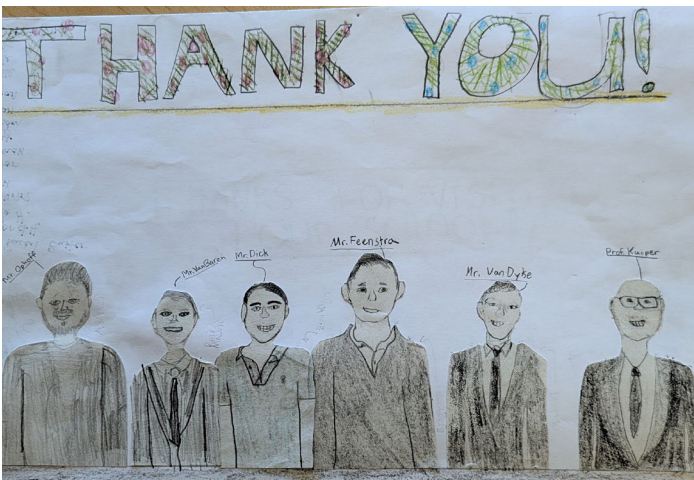
We do not attend this conference annually; the last time we did was in 2019, when the theme related to the 400th anniversary of the Synod and Canons of Dordt. In 2025 the theme was the sufficiency of Scripture. Judging the conference topic to be of value to our students, the faculty obtained the approval of the Theological School Committee to send our five seminarians and Prof.



Kuiper to the conference, and to promote the seminary among our congregation in Redlands, CA.

We flew to southern California on Thursday, January 24. That evening Prof. Kuiper gave a lecture in Redlands. Friday morning we spent time hiking with the high school students in Redlands, and then gave a presentation about the seminary to the entire student body. Friday afternoon we traveled to Escondido, where the conference began at 7:00 P.M. and resumed Saturday morning at 8:30. By Saturday mid-afternoon we were on our way back to Redlands. On Sunday Sem. VanDyke and Prof. Kuiper filled the pulpit there. So Monday was a travel day returning to Grand Rapids.

By the way, the fourth graders of Hope Christian School in Redlands are budding artists; see the rendition they drew of the seminarians and Prof Kuiper!



FACULTY

If not returning home, the four active professors—Griess, Gritters, Huizinga, and Kuiper—are at seminary on Mondays. The day involves preparing to teach catechism or lead a Bible study at night. Prof. Griess teaches two catechism classes at First Grand Rapids; Prof. Gritters teaches three in Hudsonville; Prof. Huizinga leads the Hope Monday night Bible class for post-high young adults; and Prof. Kuiper teaches two classes at Grandville.

The day also involves preparing for upcoming lectures, studying, research, and writing. Two professors who edit the *Standard Bearer* (currently Profs. Huizinga and Griess) and the one who edits the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* (currently Prof. Kuiper) might find a little time on Monday to do this work. Personally, I find it helpful to have a day that I can devote to all these tasks. While the work of researching, studying, writing, editing, and preparing or improving lectures continues throughout the rest of the week, one can only do the work in shorter increments on the later days of the week. During the school year, a quiet Monday and part of a Saturday are essential to getting this work done.

Every month or six weeks, Monday mornings will see a fuller parking lot at seminary, as members of the Contact Committee meet. Two professors (Gritters and Kuiper) are currently on this committee.

STUDENTS

The students are no less busy on Monday, and are often found in the seminary library working at their desks. Three of them (Aaron, Bruce, and Isaac) spend part of Monday preparing to teach catechism classes in the afternoon or evening. They also work to finish assignments due on Tuesday or Wednesday, especially assignments that require a chunk of time, such as exegesis papers or church history readings and projects. And the big research paper for dogmatics, due at the end of the semester, requires hours of research, study, and writing. As with the study and research that professors do, these hours require larger chunks of time. Mondays are ideal.

STAFF

As is true every other day of the week, the seminary building is open from 7-5 on Monday. Our registrar-librarian-archivist-building manager-chief operating officer, Charles Terpstra, will be around doing all his

normal work. And our secretary, Bethany Engelsma, will be at her desk until 3 P.M., as usual. The work goes on.

In sum, you might run across a professor or student at a restaurant for a breakfast or lunch meeting, or at the gym for a workout, at some point on Monday. But

in September you will probably not find them at the beach; during winter you will not find them snowskiing; and if you find any of them on the golf course, it will be for a quick round of nine, and then probably after supper in April or May, when catechism is finished and the sun sets later.

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES IN COMMON—CONTACT COMMITTEE

WELCOME TO THE BBERG

PETER VANDERSCHAAF, FOR THE CONTACT COMMITTEE OF THE PRCA

On Saturday, January 18, 2025, the first synod of a new Reformed denomination met in Giessen, Germany. This denomination is the *Bund Bekennender Evangelisch-Reformierter Gemeinden* (or BBERG). This synod was a joyous occasion for the German believers who, taking part in this work, witnessed God's gracious blessing on some twenty-five years of prayer, faithfulness, and commitment to the Reformed faith. The BBERG is the new Reformed denomination in Germany that begins with two congregations and two fellowships. The two instituted congregations are the BERG in Giessen and the BERG (formally known as the BEG) in Osnabruck. There are two fellowships that meet regularly with a hope to organize as congregations and members of the new denomination. These fellowships are in Tübingen, in southern Germany, and in Nordhorn, which is in northern Germany, just on the border with the Netherlands.

The reader will recognize the name of the congregation in Giessen, the BERG. The Protestant Reformed Churches have been in contact with the BERG since 2007; and in 2024 the PRCA entered into a corresponding church relationship with the BERG. Through the officebearers of the BERG, the PRCA also came into contact with the Reformed congregation in Osnabruck. The reader can find a history of the BERG and the history of our contact with the Reformed believers in Giessen and Osnabruck in the *PRC Acts of Synod 2024*, pages 274-283; or in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 91, issue 16 (May 15, 2015). More recently, Rev. M. McGeown, the secretary of the Contact Committee, wrote about the corresponding relationship of the PRCA with the BERG in the *Standard Bearer*, vol. 100, issue 20 (September 1, 2024). So far, the official relationship

and most of the contacts of the PRCA have been with one congregation, the BERG in Giessen. The Contact Committees of the PRCA and the BBERG hope to begin to work together on an official relationship between the two denominations.

The BBERG adopted an official, English version of its name. The English version of the name of the BBERG is the *Confederation of Confessing Evangelical Reformed Churches* in German-speaking Europe. As the King of His church opens doors, the new denomination commits itself to mission work throughout the German-speaking areas of Europe. German is the official language of Germany, Austria, and many of the cantons of Switzerland. It is one of the primary languages in Luxembourg, a portion of Belgium that borders on Germany, and a part of Italy that is called South Tyrol.

The pre-synodical service was led by Pastor Ludwig Rühle of Osnabruck. The deep gratitude of our brothers and sisters for God's gracious leading of them could be seen and felt during the pre-synodical service and during the synod. It was a great joy for the undersigned, and his wife, Dorothy, to worship with the German brothers and sisters and to be present in the gallery during the meeting of the BBERG's first synod.

The synod was made up of six delegates, all of them pastors or elders, three each from Giessen and Osnabruck. The synod elected Pastor Jochen Klautke of Giessen as its chairman and Elder Klaus Brammer of Osnabruck as its clerk. After the approval of credentials, the delegates voted to establish their new denomination, and all of the officebearers from both congregations then signed the BBERG's founding document. The Contact Committee had sent greetings



Session of the BBERG's first synod

from the PRCA, which the synod noted in its minutes. The Contact Committee of the PRCA anticipates that it will receive official communication from the synod of the BBERG in the near future, which we intend to relay to our synod.

The synod adopted the denomination's proposed church order that had been agreed upon by officebearers of the two congregations and is based upon principles and practices given in the Church Order of Dordt. The Heidelberg Catechism and the BERG's additional Reformed creed were adopted as binding on all members of the denomination. The new creed was



*Eight officebearers of the two congregations:
Giessen and Osnabruck*

explained in Rev. McGeown's article in the September 1, 2024 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. This additional creed clearly states the Reformed truths given in the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dordt as it also addresses issues that have confronted the church since the time in which the Canons were written, such as the inerrancy of Scripture and the biblical truths regarding gender relations. The Contact Committee has received copies of BBERG's church order and creed and plans to translate them into English.

The rest of the synod was taken up in setting up seven standing committees, articulating the tasks of these committees, and electing their members. The date and place of the next meeting of the BBERG's synod was set for January 17, 2026 in Giessen.

The new denomination begins with an associated seminary, the ART (*Akademie für Reformatrische Theologie*), and a journal, *Die Bekenkende Kirche* (The Confessing Church). Both the seminary and the journal are governed and staffed by members of the BBERG.

We give thanks to God for this evidence of His love for His church in Germany. We rejoice with the brothers and sisters there in the abundance of grace which He has shed among them. And we pray for God's continued blessing on and care of His people of the Confederation of Confessing Evangelical Reformed Churches.

I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to them that know me: behold Philistia, and Tyre, with Ethiopia; this man was born there, and of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her. The LORD shall count, when he writeth up the people, that this man was born there. Selah. As well the singers as the players on instruments shall be there: all my springs are in thee (Ps. 87:4-7).

MYANMAR SEMI-ANNUAL REPORT: DECEMBER 2024

The Council of Hope PRC (Grand Rapids) would like to provide an update concerning the saints in Myanmar over the past few months. There have been many questions and concerns about the saints and the church in Myanmar, showing the support and care that our sister churches have for these dear saints. Throughout

these difficulties, the concern and encouragement truly has demonstrated the unity of Christ's church. The Myanmar Committee (Hope's Council) would like to express our appreciation to our sister churches throughout the denomination for their continued prayers and financial support for the saints in Myanmar.

Hope's Myanmar Committee continues to hold a video conference call with Rev. Titus monthly to offer encouragement and to be updated on the latest events. Rev. Titus has mentioned several times how encouraging it is to see our faces once a month. The committee has been scanning encouragement cards from the congregation and sending them to Rev. Titus as another way to offer encouragement and to show the support of the congregation. He and the congregation in Myanmar love the pictures that kids color and simple words of encouragement from the many saints around the globe.

Since our last report in June of 2024, the situation in Myanmar remains relatively the same, except for the growing concern around China's involvement with the military. The political landscape remains bleak, with no clear path to peace or stability. For the people of Myanmar, the outlook remains uncertain, and the road to peace and democracy appears distant. We are reminded each meeting of the difficulties that these saints face, yet through it all the perspective that the saints have is outstanding. Almost every meeting, Rev. Titus comments on how he can see God working even in controlling "wicked men" and calling a people out of this nation.

The unstable government affects more than just the dangers of bombs and gun violence. Without good government control, the sewage system does not work properly; thus, the city has become very dirty. Due to a lack of water, they must dig their own wells. Without proper sanitation, serious stomach illnesses can lead to hospitalization. One concrete example is this: Rev. Titus had coffee from a street vendor on a Saturday and struggled through Sunday worship with food poisoning. Earlier this summer, the flies were extremely bad, which was concerning because much of their food is bought at the outdoor markets. All food that was purchased had to be washed thoroughly and fly traps were put up to control the numbers in the homes.

The government situation also causes much stress and anxiety for the saints. In September Rev. Titus received a notice from the government to remain in his house because the military was going to visit his home. The military said the reason for the visit was to register how many people are in each household and collect statistics for a future election. The military

ended up being very gentle and respectful with Rev. Titus and his family. Rev. Titus believes that the good relationship with the county chief was helpful in the way the military treated them, but also maybe since Certi fed them and gave them water. It sounded like the homes around them were quite confrontational, so the respect shown at the home of Rev. Titus was a welcome reprieve.

This good relationship with the county chief is another bit of evidence for God's control over all things. One of the members of the congregation did get conscripted earlier this summer. The man asked the county chief to be relieved because of his young daughter at home. It seems that this request was granted and nothing has happened in the last couple of months. It appears that the county chief is protecting the saints in Myanmar from the conscription law in some sense. Hope PRCM continues to monitor the situation closely. They have plans in place in case the war comes to Yangon.

One such plan is to send Rev. Titus, Certi, and their son Josiah to Thailand to scout out a location to flee if necessary. Since it has been over four years since anyone has been able to meet Rev. Titus in person, Hope PRC is sending a delegation to meet Rev. Titus in Thailand since Thailand is a much safer place than Myanmar. The delegation plans to offer encouragement to Rev. Titus and his family and go over other agenda items that are usually covered in the monthly video calls in person. Our prayer is that God provides safety in the travels, and that God uses this time together for encouragement of all. [See the following report on their visit.]

In all this confusion and unrest, God still maintains His covenant promises as is evident in the life and work of the saints in Myanmar. In the words of Rev. Titus, "It is wonderful thing that our Lord had done amidst of all this confusion we had regular visitors in every Sunday worship services. Some of them are very regular in attending services. We can worship two times every Sunday and we give thanks to our Lord for it the same time we give thanks to you for your continue prayers for us." The church continues to receive visitors that express sincere interest in the Word of God. Rev. Titus has completed his translation work, which is a major accomplishment after much time editing and proofing. He is very careful to translate as accurately

and completely as possible. The young people are finishing putting the translation into an app since publishing is not possible currently. It will also serve to get this translation out to others in Myanmar—another outstanding revelation of God’s work in what appears to be a country that has no hope.

The Myanmar committee and the Council of Hope PRC have worked closely with Rev. Titus and the officebearers to offer encouragement and help wherever needed. Through all this turmoil, there is much on Rev.

Titus and the officebearers of Hope PRC in Myanmar. They ask for our continued prayers, and they ask that God gives them wisdom in the face of these difficult times and decisions. Rev. Titus and the members of his congregation continue to trust in God and in His perfect plan. May we too place our trust in the Lord and continue to remember these beloved and beleaguered saints in Myanmar in our prayers.

“The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant”(Ps. 25:14).

THAILAND DELEGATION REPORT 2024

The situation with the military coup has escalated to the point where the Council of Hope Protestant Reformed Church Myanmar (HPRCM) thought it necessary to send a delegation to a town called Mae Sot on the border of Thailand and Myanmar. Recently, China openly invited the military of Myanmar into official talks, and put boots on the ground in Myanmar. In addition to this, the military has targeted young people for conscription. They have increased the restrictions to the point that the young people (18-36 years of age) can hardly be out of their homes. The soldiers have even gone so far as disguising themselves as civilians on the street to arrest and conscript the young people as they travel to and from work. These young people are then immediately put on the front lines of the military. This is the greatest concern of Hope PRCM, which has led them seriously to consider evacuating to Mae Sot.

PURPOSE

Hope PRCM informed the Myanmar Committee of Hope PRC of their desire to take the trip in the beginning of November. Hope PRC Walker had not been able to visit the saints in Yangon, Myanmar, for over four years, so this request provided a long-awaited opportunity to meet again with Rev. Titus, his wife Certi, and his son Josiah.

Hope’s original, main purpose for sending a delegation was to encourage our brother in the work. However, the possible, weighty decision to evacuate

and relocate increased both the necessity and scope of the delegation’s work. Items on our agenda were the following:

1. Encourage Rev. Titus, Certi, and Josiah with face-to-face fellowship.
2. Get financial questions answered at Bangkok Bank.
3. Gather information about Mae Sot as a possible location to which the church can evacuate.
4. Provide advice to Rev. Titus to bring back to his Council for the development of a plan for when and how to evacuate if necessary.
5. Hold unofficial church visitation to give input on church issues (that is, discipline cases, officebearer duties, and more).
6. Worship on Sunday with the church in Myanmar over Zoom with Pastor J. Mahtani preaching and Rev. Titus translating.

TRAVEL

The delegation consisted of Jonathon and Tricia Kamps, Eugene Kamps, Rev. Mahtani and his wife Keri. The trip would be swift, December 4 through December 11. Our travels started on Wednesday, December 4, leaving Grand Rapids at 7:30 A.M. and arriving in Bangkok on Thursday, December 5 at 11:30 P.M. We thank God for safety and no delays in our travels of approximately thirty hours there and thirty hours back.

ENCOURAGEMENT

Rev. Titus and his family arrived in Bangkok a day previous in order to make sure we had accommodations, transportation, and logistics set for our arrival. Immediately upon arrival in Bangkok, they expressed how encouraging it was to have friends who would be willing to make such a long, but brief trip for their sake. Jonathon and Tricia are good friends with Rev. Titus and Certi due to previous trips. Rev. Mahtani served at Hope PRC for four years, but neither he, his wife, or Eugene ever had the opportunity to spend much time with Rev. Titus. On account of this trip, these relationships were strengthened and the saints in Myanmar were encouraged.

BANKING

Over the years, one of the main concerns of both Hope PRC—Walker and Hope PRCM has been regarding how to assist HPRCM monetarily in a wise, legal way with decency, good order, and stewardship.

We spent most of four hours at the Bangkok Bank on Friday looking into the different options for banking that would work well for our support of HPRCM in their unique circumstances. We finished the day by taking a longer than expected drive to the coast. Even though it was dark by the time we arrived, it was still an interesting experience.

PREPARATION FOR MAE SOT

Saturday morning was spent discussing the main objectives of the visit to Mae Sot. Rev. Titus explained that the recent election of Donald Trump is having effects on the situation in Myanmar that are changing, it seems, daily. Some of the main objectives were to explore the legal manner of immigration, the safety of Mae Sot for Christians, the availability of jobs, and housing options for the congregation.

Both delegations flew from Bangkok together at 3:30 Saturday afternoon, arriving in Mae Sot roughly one hour later. Upon arrival at our hotel around 5:30 Saturday evening, we met the man Josiah had lined up to help us with our work in Mae Sot. Lyn, we discovered, was actually from the same area in Myanmar as Hope PRCM, but currently living in Mae Sot while his family resides in Myanmar.

After we got Lyn up to speed on our objectives for

Monday, he suggested we head to the border before dark to get a jump on the work for Monday. Lyn took Rev. Titus and his family with Jonathon for a short fifteen-minute drive to the border, where there is a bridge over the river that most are required to walk over to cross between Myanmar and Thailand. Lyn drove us to a spot beside the bridge and behind some buildings with a short cement wall or embankment to deter access to the river. As we stood looking over the river and up to the bridge Lyn explained that there were many spies in this area, which meant that our stay here would be brief. As we turned to head back to the car, his warning became strikingly apparent as a Thai police officer, seemingly in his teens, rode up on a bicycle in full uniform complete with an assault rifle on his back. We did find out later that this was probably more for our protection than it was a potential threat. Nevertheless, it gave us a healthy feel for the unstable situation on the border.

SUNDAY AND WORSHIP

One of the highlights of this trip for all involved was worshipping together. The hotel in Mae Sot had a room set up nicely for us to worship together. Apart from a slow start with the technology and a rather large rat wandering the outer walls of the room during the service, the worship service went great!

Rev. Mahtani prepared a sermon primarily for the encouragement of the congregation back in Yangon. However, our delegation as well as others who tuned in via livestream were all encouraged as he brought God's word from 1 Thessalonians 1:7-9. Here Paul commends the Thessalonians for echoing the gospel with their personal witness in hope. The Thessalonian church was a young church that did this during persecution, showing the transforming power of Christ in them. Rev. Mahtani passed on our encouragement to the saints in Myanmar, explaining that we hear their echo in America, as they endure in the promotion of the gospel. Like the Thessalonians, they are an example to us in many ways.

Although Hope PRCM is able to meet every Sunday, they do so in fear of the military and the Buddhists around them at this time. They can relate to the persecuted church of Thessalonica. Hope PRC—Walker makes a point of encouraging Hope PRCM with the truth that

God throughout history has strengthened and increased His church through persecution. Hope PRCM is seeing evidence of this through regular visitors and modest growth during these times of oppression.

Worshiping and singing with God's children even when you do not speak the same language is an experience that is hard to describe. Singing together the same tunes and words of the Psalter but in different languages was sweet communion in worship.

The rest of the day was spent holding an unofficial church visitation with Rev. Titus to give input on church issues (such as, discipline cases, officebearer duties, and more). This work went very well and Rev. Titus expressed that this was one of the most encouraging things for him and long overdue.

MAE SOT

Lyn had a large enough van for us all to travel together on Monday. En route to our destinations, we were able to have our questions answered together. We started by looking at the different housing options in the town of Mae Sot. Although Rev. Titus felt that these accommodations were more than were needed, we wanted to investigate these options since they were closer to the border. Related to this is the fact that the church members would be able to each get a seven-day tourist visa easily, and it seems that the only way to renew this is to go back to the border and cross the bridge into Myanmar once a week.

After this we traveled to the rural areas to look into "village" accommodations. These villages are thirty minutes to an hour from the border, but this type of housing is what the members of Hope PRCM are more

accustomed to. Many of the Burmese people who have relocated to Mae Sot do not follow the rules. Instead of renewing their tourist visa weekly, their employers pay off the police every month. Although this seems to be an accepted activity, Rev. Titus is convicted that traveling back to the border once a week is the biblical way as children of God, which is a small price to pay for freedom. Hope PRC—Walker's delegation was once again struck by and thankful for the godliness of the man we have grown to love and have had the opportunity to work with for many years.

We did have the opportunity to stop at a few beautiful places near Mae Sot as well. The negative is that every "high place" that we visited seems to be filled with the same idol worship that God's people had to deal with in Bible times.

DECISIONS

Our final day in Mae Sot was Tuesday morning December 10. The men spent the morning discussing all that we had learned, and comparing our thoughts on how to proceed. It was evident that the Lord gave us exactly what we asked for and more as we were all encouraged, and were all of the same mind regarding the process of relocating to Mae Sot. This would be a good place for the church of Yangon to move to. They would be able to live here legally. The only question remains...when and if they go. Please pray for Rev. Titus, his Council, and his congregation as they seek the Lord's will.

"But the salvation of the righteous is of the LORD: he is their strength in the time of trouble" (Psalm 37:39).

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES IN COMMON—CLASSIS WEST

NEWS REPORT OF CLASSIS WEST OF THE PRCA

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on March 5, 2025, in Calvary PRC (Hull, IA). The evening before Classis, God sent snow, ice, and powerful winds upon Northwest Iowa that impacted the travel of many delegates. In the end, representatives from twelve of the thirteen churches in the Classis were able to attend the meeting, while the delegates from one congregation could not make it and participated in the meeting virtually.

Classis began with opening devotions led by the chairman of the previous meeting, Rev. Richard Smit (pastor of Randolph PRC), who gave an encouraging meditation based on Psalm 125:1-2.

After Classis was legally constituted, the meeting was capably chaired by Rev. Ryan Barnhill (pastor of Heritage PRC).

Two first-time delegates to Classis signed the Formula of Subscription, the minutes of the previous meeting of Classis were approved, and the four questions of Article

41 of the Church Order were asked and satisfactorily answered. Routine reports of the stated clerk, classical committee, and reading sermon committee were read and approved. The church visitors reported on their annual visits with the councils, visits which included discussions regarding reports the councils may have received from a third-party organization tasked with looking into cases of sexual abuse. The church visitors expressed that the visits were profitable, that councils are faithful in carrying out their work, and that unity, peace, and love prevail in the churches.

In closed session, a consistory asked for Classis to concur with its decision to proceed to the public announcement of the name of an individual under discipline. After hearing of the labors of the consistory and the impenitence of the member, Classis advised the consistory to proceed with this announcement.

After a break for the committees of pre-advice to prepare their advice, Classis received for information a letter from the consistory of Loveland PRC, informing Classis that it is in the beginning stages of transferring the membership and oversight of the Covenant of Grace Fellowship (Spokane, WA) to the consistory of Lynden PRC (Lynden, WA).

Classis received for information but took no action on two letters from Classis East, in which Classis West was informed of Classis East's recent approval of two overtures (the first to appoint a special committee to provide accountability to consistories in responding to reports of sexual abuse from a third party organization, and the second a change to their rules of order).

Classis approved the subsidy requests for 2026 for four congregations and forwarded them on to Synod 2025 for its approval.

In the afternoon, Classis began treating in closed session the report of a special committee assigned by Classis to help a consistory regarding a case of sexual abuse.

Classis also spent the afternoon considering a protest of a decision of Classis West in September 2024 to maintain a mandate to its church visitors to request reports received from consistories from the third party organization, discuss that correspondence with the consistories at their annual visit, and report their findings in summary form with names redacted to the Classis.

Classis decided not to uphold the protest, on the grounds that: 1) the protestant did not demonstrate that Classis West violated the decision of Synod 2024 in mandating the church visitors to follow up with consistories on the reports that they received from Guidepost; and 2) the protestant did not prove that it is wrong for church visitors to follow up with the consistories regarding the Guidepost reports.

After a break for supper, Classis continued in closed session to discuss the work of the special committee. Classis approved the work of this committee, mandated them to continue their work, and gave advice to the consistory involved.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply for the two vacant congregations in the Classis: Hope PRC (Redlands) and Lynden PRC.

Throughout the meeting, Classis also voted for various classical functionaries. Rev. A. Brummel was reappointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee. Rev. J. Engelsma was reappointed to a three-year term as a primus synodical deputy, and Rev. S. Regnerus was reappointed to a three-year term as a secundus synodical deputy. Classis appointed Revs. A. Brummel, D. Kleyn, J. Marcus, and R. Smit as church visitors, with Revs. R. Barnhill and J. Engelsma as alternates.

Ministers delegated to Synod 2025 were Revs. R. Barnhill, J. Engelsma, D. Kleyn, J. Marcus, and R. Smit. Alternates are Revs. H. Bleyenbergh, M. De Boer, A. Haveman, M. Koerner, and S. Regnerus. Elders delegated to Synod 2025 were Kevin Brummel (Crete), Stephan De Jong (Peace), Glenn Feenstra (Hope), Brian Kroese (Hull), and James Regnerus (Doon). Alternates are Travis Feenstra (Hope), Alvern Miersma (Hope), Dan Poppema (Hull), Keith Van Drunen (Crete), and Jan Zeldenrust (Hosanna).

The expenses of this meeting totaled \$7,507.94.

Classis decided to hold its next meetings on September 24, 2025, at Crete PRC, and on March 4, 2026, at Heritage PRC.

Classis finished its work around 10:30 p.m.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma,
Stated Clerk, Classis West

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council of Hope PRC Walker express Christian sympathy to Elder Jeff Terpstra in the death of his brother-in-law **Tom Schipper**, and to Elders Eugene Kamps and Dan Kalsbeek in the death of their brother and uncle, **Todd DeMeester**. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

Rev. Nathan Decker, Pres.
Jeff Kalsbeek, Clerk

CLASSIS EAST

Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Grace PRC on Wednesday, May 14, 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 April 14 (30 days before classis convenes).

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

PRC SYNOD 2025

All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2025, are hereby notified that all material for this year’s synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Doug Mingerink Sr., (dougim@mingerink.com),
or mail to the same at:
4949 Ivanrest Ave., SW
Wyoming, MI 49418

REFORMED
WITNESS HOUR
FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED

REV. CARL HAAK

4/6 The Suffering of the Cross, Is. 53
4/13 The Power of the Cross, Rom. 8:1
4/20 The Power of Christ’s Resurrection, 1 Cor. 15:3, 4
4/27 The Resurrection of the Body, 1 Cor. 15:35-38

