

# THE STANDARD BEARER

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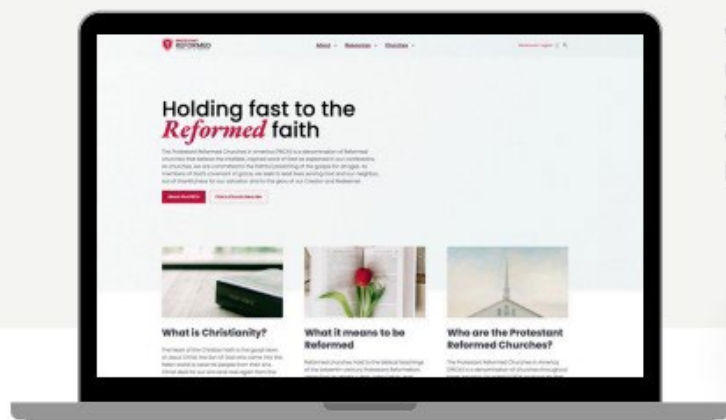
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## THE PATIENCE OF JOB

### REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA

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

Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy—James 5:11

Many of the saints were suffering terrible mistreatment at the hands of the ungodly rich. The rich kept back the wages they had agreed to pay the saints for working their fields. They took the saints to court to defraud them of the little they had. The result was that the saints were in desperate straits. Some were even dying because they lacked the basic necessities of life.

James calls the saints to be patient unto the coming of the Lord. They were to keep their eye on the coming of the Lord, at which time they would be delivered from all suffering. And all the wrongs done to them would be avenged. In that hope they were to exercise patience.

To encourage the saints in the exercise of patience, James proceeded to give examples of those who have been patient in the face of affliction. James called attention to the prophets of old as an example of suffering affliction and of patience. Many of the Old Testament prophets suffered at the hands of evil men, even as the saints in James' day did. There was Enoch, Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and many more. Patiently they endured affliction.

Then James turned to Job as an example of one suffering affliction and patience. Not only does James set before us the example of Job's patient suffering, he also gives us the key to having the patience of Job. You "have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy."

Patience is the ability to persevere in a godly life without discouragement, dissatisfaction or anger, even though

life is filled with many sufferings and afflictions. In the face of suffering, patience is even the ability to be content and find peace with God's way.

There are two words used in the New Testament original for patience. The one means to be of a long spirit. It is the virtue according to which one does not lose heart and give up on what he is pursuing as he encounters adversity. One rather perseveres in the pursuit of his goal regardless of the obstacles. The other word for patience means to remain under. It is the ability to endure or hold up under the weight of suffering and affliction so that one is not crushed by the heavy burdens that affliction places on him. He continues in the pursuit of his goal, regardless of the burdens he must carry. Both words are used in the passage we have before us. The one is translated "endure," the other as "patience." The two words complement each other. They express the idea of holding up under a heavy burden, without losing heart, thus enabling one to persevere and not give up.

James calls our attention to the patience of Job.

To appreciate the patience of Job we must first consider Job's situation.

First, Job was a rich man. He was rich in material things. According to Job 1:3, "His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east." Job was also rich in children. Born to him were seven sons and three daughters (Job 1:2). Most importantly, Job was rich spiritually. He was "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed evil" (Job 1:1).

But then affliction came. Satan entered heaven and brought accusation against Job. Job served God only

because God had prospered him. Take away these riches and Job would curse God and die. With God's permission, Satan afflicted Job. First Satan took away all of Job's riches. In one day, he lost all his herds and his ten children. Somewhat later Satan afflicted Job personally with great boils and sores. What suffering and loss! Few in history have ever been afflicted as greatly as Job.

And with tremendous patience, Job endured it. After learning that all his possessions were gone and his ten children were dead, Job responded, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed [not cursed] be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). And then we read, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly" (Job 1:22). And after Satan touched Job personally with great pain and sickness, his wife said unto him, "Dost thou still retain thine integrity? curse God, and die," to which Job responded, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips" (Job 2:9, 10).

What remarkable patience!

Job's patience was not perfect. He did curse the day of his birth. Nevertheless, Job endured it all and did so in such a way that he persevered in faithfulness to the Lord. He did not curse God as Satan wanted and his wife urged him to do. He clung to the Lord His God and even blessed His name.

We have Job as an example to follow in our lesser afflictions.

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This patience is possible only when we see the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

The end of the Lord is the end result that the Lord intends in the suffering of His people. We learn from Job's history that Satan often has a hand in our suffering and affliction. And his purpose is to destroy us. However, God is sovereign in our affliction. He uses Satan and the powers of darkness to accomplish His purpose. Not only does He preserve His people in the midst of their afflictions, but He also uses these afflictions for their advantage and salvation.

We see this with Job. The end of the Lord with

Job was to use the terrible afflictions to enrich Job. In the last chapter of the book of Job we learn that God restored Job's health. Then God gave him ten more children. Finally, the Lord gave Job double the riches he had before.

This doubling of Job's riches was only a sign of a deeper, spiritual enrichment for Job. In the Old Testament earthly prosperity was a sign of heavenly riches and blessings. From this we may conclude that the double riches Job received through his suffering was a sign of greater spiritual riches that Job received through his affliction.

Seeing the end of the Lord with Job in his sufferings, we also see that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy. To be pitiful and of tender mercy are very expressive terms in the original. Both express the idea of being deeply affected by the suffering of a loved one. "Very pitiful" expresses the idea that one is so deeply affected by the plight of another that his stomach is knotted up and it affects his bowels. "Tender mercy" expresses the idea of a sigh that one utters upon learning of the affliction of one that he loves. Both ideas are now ascribed to God. They express the fact that God is deeply affected by our sufferings. It is true that God is the One who ultimately sends suffering into our lives. However, He is deeply moved and affected by it.

This explains the Lord's dealings with Job. God (by the hand of Satan) sent suffering into Job's life. But because the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy, God sent suffering only for Job's good and enrichment. Humanly speaking, God was almost hesitant to do so. But for Job's good, He afflicted Job. God did not allow Job to suffer any more than is necessary to accomplish His end in the suffering. This is true with respect to both the intensity and the duration of his suffering.

What we see in Job's sufferings, we must now see to be true in our own sufferings. The end of the Lord in our sufferings is the same as that of Job's sufferings. The Lord sends affliction for our spiritual enrichment. Sometimes He uses affliction to correct us in our sins and faults. Certainly, He uses affliction to increase our faith by trying it. Also, through affliction He teaches us the fleeting character of all things earthly and the greater value of things heavenly so that we set our hearts on the things that are above. And through it all we are made ready for glory.

In all this the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. He is deeply affected by our sufferings. For that reason, He sends suffering only for our good. And He will certainly keep us in our suffering. He will never let us suffer more than is necessary to accomplish His good purpose. And the good we derive from our affliction will far outweigh the suffering we had to endure.

Only when we see these things in our affliction can we be patient. We cannot be patient but only bitter and rebellious if we see no reason for our suffering. Similarly, patience will be elusive if we conclude that God does not care for us in our suffering or has abandoned us. But if we can see the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy, we have the key to being patient.

And we can see this by faith. Without faith, suffering only looks as though the Lord does not care for us or even has forsaken us. But by faith we see the end of the Lord so as to enjoy His gift of patience.

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We count them happy which endure.

To endure is to persevere with steadfast trust the suffering that comes to us in this life. It is to remain faithful to the Lord, even though the Lord sends sickness or debilitating pain. It is to be content with the Lord's way, even though the Lord takes away our loved ones or causes us to struggle financially.

Those who by faith endure find happiness. This happiness comes from the spiritual riches that they have received through the suffering God brings. This happiness is being filled with God's friendship and fellowship as the sufferings God sent work their purpose. They have been corrected by God's chastisement; they have come to seek the things above rather than the things here below; they have learned to rely upon the Lord and not themselves.

Let us therefore be patient in every affliction. We have before us the example of Job. We have seen the end of the Lord, that the Lord is very pitiful and of tender mercy. We see this with Job. Let us also see it for ourselves by faith. In that faith let us be patient, that we may obtain the blessing of enduring.



## A WARNING TO THE PRCA AGAINST LEGALISM

**REV. JOSHUA ENGELSMA**

pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

It is my conviction that one of the dangers (certainly not the only one) that the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) must be on guard against is legalism. I do not mean this in the sense that the opponents of our churches falsely accuse us, that there is a theology of works-righteousness being taught and defended in the PRCA. Instead, I am referring to a practical form of legalism that manifests itself in a person subtly relying for salvation upon his own status or achievements, even while he confesses salvation by grace alone.

I realize that, while many readers of the *SB* belong to the PRCA, not all do. I hope that readers from

other churches can still take this warning to heart, a warning that needs to be heard by all who confess to be Reformed Christians.

### DIAGNOSIS

Before explaining how this practical form of legalism might show itself in our hearts and lives, I want to look at two important biblical passages that touch on this very issue.

The first passage is Romans 2. In Romans 2, the apostle Paul exposes the self-righteousness of the Jews. He gives a catalog of privileges that the Jewish man



enjoyed in verses 17-18: “Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law.”

Paul goes on to address the Jewish man’s greatest source of confidence in verses 25ff.: his circumcision. For the Jewish man in Paul’s day, being circumcised meant that he had Abraham as his father, that he belonged to God’s covenant people, that he was the recipient of God’s covenant promises, that he was a member of the true church of God on earth.

The issue in Romans 2 is not that these things were not privileges for the Jewish man; they were privileges, as Paul acknowledges (cf. Rom. 3:1-2). The problem is that the Jewish man trusted in these things for his everlasting security. This is plain from verse 17 where it says that the Jewish man *rests* in the law, the idea being that he relies upon or depends upon the law. This is evident elsewhere in Scripture, for example, in Jesus’ interaction with the self-righteous Pharisees in John 8 where repeatedly they appeal to the fact that, “We be Abraham’s seed; Abraham is our father.” The Jew thought, “I must be saved because I have the knowledge of God, I have the law, I have circumcision, I belong to the church. All who have those things must be safe from the judgment of God and be the objects of His favor.”

One of the evidences of this legalistic mindset of the Jews was a sense of superiority with respect to others. The apostle refers to this in verses 19-20: “And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.”

Even though we are not Jews ethnically, the privileges that the Old Testament Jews enjoyed are mirrored in the privileges that we enjoy as New Testament Christians, as we will see in a moment.

The other pertinent biblical passage is Philippians 3. After warning the church to “beware of dogs” (v. 2), by which he meant Jewish false teachers who insisted that Gentile converts be brought under the Old Testament law of circumcision for salvation, Paul lays out his credentials (if he were to trust in himself) in verses 4-6: “Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath

whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” The things Paul lists include matters of his status by birth and his achievements.

With these passages as a guide, let’s reflect on how we may be guilty of the same kind of legalistic mentality.

There may be things related to my *status* or birth in which I put my trust for salvation. I might put my trust in my birth to believing parents. I might put my trust in my family line of believing forefathers going back many generations in Reformed churches. I might put my trust in my baptism when I was a little child. I might put my trust in my membership in a true, instituted church of Christ on earth, such as the PRCA. The fact that I have all these benefits must mean that I am saved, right?

There may be things related to my *achievements* in which I put my trust for salvation. I have a remarkable knowledge of the Bible gained through years of instruction in catechism and a Christian school education. I show up for Bible studies and lectures and other church events (even if others do not). I have read theology deeply and can debate its finer points. I am zealous to condemn the false doctrine found in other churches. My life is cleaned-up, well-ordered, and law-abiding. Surely it is safe to presume that I am saved if all these things are true, right?

One of the things that makes this form of legalism so insidious is that these privileges in which we place our trust *do* have an important place in the Christian life. No Reformed Christian would dare say that believing parents, the sacrament of baptism, and membership in a true church are bad things to be despised. No one would dare argue that knowledge of the Bible, involvement in church life, zeal for sound doctrine, and godly living are evils to be condemned. These are good things that have a legitimate place in our lives. The danger is not in having these things, but the danger is in putting our trust in them and resting in them as the basis of our salvation.

Another reason why this form of legalism is so deceptive is that it often appears under the guise of grace. That is, the one who enjoys all these benefits boldly

confesses with the mouth the doctrine of salvation by grace alone, all without seeming to realize that the confession of his heart and life is that of salvation by works. It has been rightly said that the greatest sin lies so close to the highest privilege.

I realize that I am basing what I say not on any written evidence but merely on personal experience. Perhaps the reader judges that my personal diagnosis is incorrect. But I would have you consider two key indicators of this form of legalism and whether or not they have been evident in our churches.

One indicator of practical legalism is that we think ourselves superior to others. We think we alone see clearly, we alone have the light, we alone possess wisdom, we alone have matured beyond childhood (see again Rom. 2:19-20). Rather than a spirit of genuine gratitude for the privileges we possess, we view them with a spirit of proud superiority over others.

A second indicator of this legalism is dead orthodoxy, like that found among the Jews in Jesus' and in Paul's days. This is a spiritual sickness that infects churches when their confession remains orthodox but the depth of sincerity is lacking and genuine spirituality declines. Legalism and dead orthodoxy go hand in hand; as one man put it, when true religion of the heart declines, there is a corresponding emphasis placed on the externals of religion.

Has this been true, generally speaking, of the PRCA? It is my judgment that we must humble ourselves before God and confess that this has been the case. The fact that we are willing to acknowledge that this spirit has been present among us is an indication of our growth, by the grace of God.

## PRESCRIPTION

The two passages referred to above (Rom. 2 and Phil. 3) not only expose the problem of legalism but also provide the solution.

In Romans 2, the apostle's point in addressing the issue of Jewish legalism is to disarm the Jews of their weapons of self-righteousness. He is showing them that external things like possession of the law and circumcision cannot serve as their righteousness before God. He is driving at the conclusion that "there is none righteous, no not one" (Rom. 3:10) and that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh

be justified in his [God's] sight" (3:20). What then is needed is "the righteousness of God without the law... the righteousness of God which is by faith of [in] Jesus Christ" (3:21-22).

Paul's line of thought is similar in Philippians 3. After listing his "credentials," what does the apostle conclude with respect to these things? He continues in verses 7-9: "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith." As in Romans, the apostle's answer to such self-righteousness is the doctrine of justification by faith alone. As some have put it, these verses are like a meteorite dropped down into Philippians from the book of Romans.

What is necessary for us to combat a subtle form of legalism is a deeper understanding of and appreciation for personal *faith*, that is, what it truly means to renounce all trust in self and to rest and rely on Jesus Christ alone. What is also necessary is a deeper understanding of and appreciation for *justification*, that is, our right standing with God, not on account of our status or achievements but only the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. This is the source of true humility before God and men, and is the source of genuine religion and spirituality.

To mention faith and justification is only to say that what is needed to combat legalism is a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the grace of God to us in Jesus Christ. As we come to appreciate more deeply the wonder of the cross, and in that also the awfulness of our own sins, all forms of legalism will be driven out.

The only proper way to evaluate our status and achievements, those things we are tempted to think of as gains, is, with Paul, to consider them as losses! Every deposit is a debit; every asset is a liability. What is more, we count them as dung! Revolting refuse! Stinky manure! They make us pinch our nose, make us turn away in disgust, make our stomach turn.

The reason for renouncing our status and

achievements is not that all of those things are unimportant. We can be thankful, for example, for the Christian homes and education we received. But the point is that they are loss and dung if we are viewing them as the basis upon which our standing with God rests and upon which we build our hope for the future. Grace plus anything else results in the canceling out of grace. If these things are not renounced as the basis for our standing with God, then we are deprived of Christ, the one real gain.

We must come to stand before God totally naked, stripped bare of every supposed advantage and achievement. We must come to stand before God with hands empty.

And we must trust alone in Jesus Christ. He alone is the one great gain. Having Him, we have all. Only when stripped bare can we be clothed upon with the robes of His righteousness. Only with hands empty do we cling to the cross.

Belonging to Christ, we have the greatest gain. We can suffer the loss of all things, including our status and achievements, knowing that we have the greatest, everlasting gain. We have this now since we have right standing with God. And we will have this forever as we are found in Christ in the judgment day. What gain!

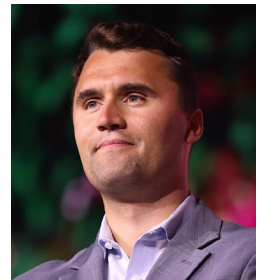
## ALL AROUND US



## CHARLIE KIRK: 1993-2025

**REV. JACOB MAATMAN**

pastor of Southeast PRC in Wyoming, Michigan



On September 10, 2025, Charlie Kirk, Christian, husband, father of two, at thirty-one years of age, was assassinated by a gunman on a college campus in Utah where he was publicly debating with college students. It was a day we, especially the younger generation, will never forget: shocking, appalling, a day of great heaviness.<sup>1</sup>

The suspected shooter, twenty-two-year-old Tyler Robinson, grew up in a conservative home, but allowed himself to be radicalized by a dark, twisted ideology. He felt that Charlie Kirk was spreading hate, and so in an act of hatred he murdered him. He now faces the death penalty.

But who was Charlie Kirk? If all we saw was the title of an article in *Christianity Today*, we might

think he was just an “Activist Who Championed ‘MAGA Doctrine.’”<sup>2</sup> Involved in politics, yes he was, and with prowess. When he was eighteen, he co-founded Turning Point USA, an organization whose mission is to promote conservatism, especially among the youth. Charlie Kirk was known for his open, public debate on college campuses (a political lions’ den for conservatives) around the country, where he invited those who disagreed with him to ask questions and prove him wrong in his tireless effort to persuade students away from the ideology in which universities are often steeped and to win them over to the conservative cause. He played a pivotal role in the outcome of the 2024 election, evident in the swing that took place in the youth vote (a points difference in the double digits compared with 2020). His influence extended to the vice president’s name

<sup>1</sup> For further reporting and analysis from a Christian perspective I commend Albert Mohler’s “The Briefing with Albert Mohler,” which profited me and was of influence in the writing of this article.

<sup>2</sup> Daniel Silliman, [www.christianitytoday.com/2025/09/died-charlie-kirk-maga-doctrine-tpusa-political-activist/](https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/09/died-charlie-kirk-maga-doctrine-tpusa-political-activist/)



being on the ticket, and to the composition of the current cabinet.

But there is far more to the story than the title of the CT story suggests. Charlie Kirk was a Christian. He confessed with his mouth that Jesus is Lord and believed in his heart that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). He frequently confessed his faith before men; even, it was a habit of his to bear witness of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. When asked earlier in the year, “If everything completely goes away...how would you want to be remembered?” he answered, “I want to be remembered for courage for my faith. That would be the most important thing.”<sup>3</sup> He said about one of his favorite verses, Romans 8:28, “It is a very freeing and liberating verse for those of us that are Christians, because we believe that when things can be really bad God is working it for His good, His perfect and pleasing will...I do not have to be in charge of everything. There is a God and I am not Him and I surrender to His will.”<sup>4</sup> He said this in an interview less than one hour before he was killed.

Charlie Kirk was a husband and a father of two, and his faith worked by love. Let us pray for his wife, Erika, who is now a widow, and her children, who must now grow up without their father. What goes through the heart of a wife and mother when she learns her husband has been killed? What goes through the hearts of a three-year old and one-year old when they realize they are not going to see their father again in this life? Their Father in heaven knows, and may He, a Father of the fatherless and a Judge of the widows in distress, comfort this family in the hope of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, when we shall be together again with the Lord. Thank God for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. No hope without it.

The apostle Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (Rom. 12:9). It is the Christian of all people who believes in God and has His Word, who can call a thing for what it is and must. This was evil. Not only the murder of a human being in cold blood, and the works of darkness that led up to it, but what took place after

it, when many filled with hate celebrated and rejoiced over it.<sup>5</sup> Human language fails to put the evilness of it into words. The good is called evil, and the evil is called good; darkness is put for light, and light for darkness (Is. 5:20). As it was in the days of Noah, the earth is filled with violence in rebellion against God (Gen. 6:13).

One word that has been used recently to describe this lawlessness is *nihilism* (“nothing”-ism): “the rejection of all religious and moral principles, in the belief that life is meaningless” (New Oxford American Dictionary). The word is often associated with the nineteenth-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who said in reference to modern, post-enlightenment man, “God is dead, and man has killed him.” If that is true, then religion and morality is dead, and man has killed that too; the meaning of life is whatever one wants it to be; might makes right; the fundamental urge of man is the will to power; and there is nothing in any meaningful sense of the word wrong with what used to be called evil.

A more biblical word to describe this state of affairs is godlessness, which gives birth to the evil (“the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” [Rom. 1:18], in that order). As one author observes, when God is denied, the foundation of truth and morality is denied, together with the sanctity of human life.<sup>6</sup> For apart from God, who is truth, there is no truth, and human life, which has been created by God, is nothing special. The consequence is that truth becomes irrelevant and human life becomes disposable. Do we not see this all around us? What was Charlie Kirk’s life, and the lives of his wife and children, to the one who killed him? Unborn children are killed and the world promotes it as though it were a light thing. Children are mutilated in the name of, and sacrificed on the altar of, transgenderism. Assisted suicide is advertised in Canada and there is discussion about extending eligibility to people who suffer from mental illness and even to “mature minors,” because what is the value of life anyway? Our age is anti-God, and because of that,

3 “An Unfiltered Conversation with Charlie Kirk,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7QLJSsry8Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S7QLJSsry8Y)

4 “Charlie Kirk: The Last Interview,” [www.youtube.com/shorts/R0ukW4AzcSs](http://www.youtube.com/shorts/R0ukW4AzcSs)

5 Hear the outrage in the vice president’s voice when he decries this in his closing statement on “The Charlie Kirk Show”: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngofqx9EfcM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ngofqx9EfcM)

6 Robert Barron, “He Died with a Microphone in His Hand,” [www.firstthings.com/he-died-with-a-microphone-in-his-hand/](http://www.firstthings.com/he-died-with-a-microphone-in-his-hand/)

it is anti-human. God help us. Come, Lord Jesus. Come to judge the world in righteousness; come to deliver the poor and the oppressed; come to destroy the works of darkness and to put things to right.

Evil is not the end of the story. About two-thousand years ago God, for His love for mankind in the elect, came into this fallen world in the person of His Son to redeem us and make all things new. God became human, and in human nature He suffered the evil to be done against Him, and died on a cross for the remission of our sins in order to defeat the evil. The third day, early Sunday morning, Jesus Christ rose from the dead in triumph over sin and death, evil and the evil one. Because of Jesus, the end of the story for all who are in Him is resurrection and life. “And I saw a new heaven and a new earth.... And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death.... Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:1, 4, 5). May the light of Christ shine in the darkness of this world for the translating of many out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. May the church proclaim the gospel of Christ, which is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes. It will draw opposition, as our Lord told His disciples: “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). “In the world ye shall have tribulation.” “But,” Jesus said, “Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

On Sunday, September 21, there was a memorial for Charlie Kirk, attended by tens of thousands and watched by millions. The most remarkable thing about it was the witness that was given of Jesus Christ.

Now I want you to know that Charlie right now is in heaven, not because he was a great husband and father, not because he saved millions of kids out of darkness on college campuses, not because he changed minds and chased votes to save the country, not because he sacrificed himself for his Savior—Charlie Kirk is in heaven because his Savior sacrificed Himself for Charlie Kirk.<sup>7</sup>

We should, of course, be discerning in all that we see or hear, including the memorial. Nonetheless, we should be thankful to God for the positive witness of Jesus Christ: the need for Him, His incarnation, His

death and resurrection, substitutionary atonement, and the promise of the gospel for all who believe in Him. As the same speaker quoted above said, “Ladies and gentlemen, this is the greatest story ever told, and it happens to be true.”<sup>8</sup>

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### POSTSCRIPT:

There is a difference between politicizing the pulpit (which must not be) and addressing things from the pulpit that are also current in the political arena. It does not seem at the moment that the PRCA is “bringing politics into the pulpit,” pressing the pulpit into the service of this or that party, for example (which must be guarded against). But it is also possible to overreact by being silent about something that should be said, for fear of being perceived as political, and avoiding a certain subject that ought to be addressed because it is so politically charged. As Paul said to Timothy, “Preach the word” (2 Tim. 4:2), in season and out of season, right into the midst of present society and culture in which we live, and let the chips fall where they may when it comes to politics. People need it. We need it.

In the same vein, there is a difference between entangling the Christian faith and politics and the Christian faith having an influence upon the believer when it comes to politics. What aspect of the conversation of the Christian upon this earth does not come under the lordship of Christ? So, from casting our vote at the ballot box to the labors of a Christian congressman on the hill, there will be an influence, and we should want that influence to be felt by others.

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“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain” (Phil. 2:14-16).

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7 “Charlie Kirk’s mentor Frank Turek speaks at his memorial service,” [www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9mSA1xHi6k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9mSA1xHi6k)

8 F. Turek.



# THE LAND GOD PROMISED ABRAHAM

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Numerous are the disagreements today regarding God's covenant. There are different views on what God's covenant is. Some speak of God making different covenants with different groups of people. Many say God has made both a common-grace covenant and a particular-grace covenant. In answer to the question whether God's covenant is conditional or unconditional, some would say it depends on which covenant you are talking about. With all the distinctions people make when talking about God's covenant, it can become confusing trying to explain all the different views.

So where does one begin to write about all this? I have given some thought to that, and have adopted the following approach. In each article I plan to write, I will focus on especially one passage of Scripture or one covenant promise. From time to time I will point out some of the different ways that passage or promise has been explained, with quotes from either contemporary authors or authors from the past who are being published and read today.

When studying this subject, as with others, it is of central importance that we look to Scripture to interpret Scripture, and believe Scripture's interpretation when we find it. That, sadly, is what many fail to do. Either they do not look for Scripture's explanation, or, when they find how Scripture explains it, instead of believing what the Bible says, they try to come up with some way to explain it away.

A common method used to explain away a Scripture passage is to invent a distinction. There are many passages of Scripture, for example, that show clearly that God's grace is particular. Sometimes when we show people these verses, they respond by making a distinction. They say something like this, "Yes, that passage speaks of a particular grace. But there is a

distinction between particular grace and common grace. Saving grace is particular. But there is also a non-saving grace that is common." Now, having invented this distinction, they can take all the verses you show them about particular grace and respond by saying, "Yes, but that is talking about only one kind of grace."

This invent-a-distinction approach is common in contemporary writings on God's covenant. This will be highlighted, Lord willing, from time to time in these articles.

So now, let us get started. When God called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, He called him to leave his country and his kindred to go to a land that God would show him. What is the land that God promised Abraham? We begin by considering how Scripture answers that question.

## ABRAHAM PROMISED THE LAND

God promised that He would show Abraham the land, and later He did. When Abraham saw the land, God spoke to him this promise: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Gen. 13:15).

God promised that He would give the land to Abraham and to Abraham's seed. Galatians 3:16 tells us that God's promises are to the one seed of Abraham, and that one seed is Jesus Christ. That means the promised land is promised to Christ. It is promised to Abraham as one of those chosen to be in Christ.

So it is correct to say that God promised Abraham that he would receive the land. Yet in this life he did not receive it. So how is this to be explained?

An esteemed Baptist theologian from the past, Nehemiah Coxe, brings up this question. Coxe, whose work on God's covenant has very recently been

republished, was one of the chief authors of the Second London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689), sometimes referred to as the 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith. This creed summarizes the theological beliefs held by many contemporary Reformed Baptists.

Commenting on Genesis 13:15, Coxe brings up the question concerning how to explain the fact that God promised Abraham the land:

First, the conveyance of this inheritance is directly made first to Abraham and then to his seed. “All the land which you see, to you I will give it, and to your seed” (Genesis 13:15). Now it is evident that Abraham had no possession in it all his days except that of a burial place which he purchased afterwards with money paid to its full value (Genesis 23). This was similar to the case of Isaac and Jacob who were the heirs of this promise together with Abraham (Hebrews 11:9). A question therefore arises as to how this promise was made good to Abraham.<sup>1</sup>

Coxe then goes on to suggest this as a solution:

That as to those words “to you, and to your seed”, the latter may be taken as an interpretation of the former. Then the sense is, “to you, that is, to your seed.”

Yet Scripture also says elsewhere that God promised the land to Abraham himself. Just two verses further in Genesis 13 we read that God said this to Abraham: “Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee” (Gen. 13:17).

That Abraham himself was promised the land is mentioned again in the book of Acts. Stephen referred to this when he was speaking to some unbelieving Jews, shortly before they threw stones at him. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Stephen said,

Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldaeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell. And he gave

him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on: yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child (Acts 7:2b-5).

God gave Abraham none inheritance in the land, no, not so much as to set his foot on. Yet God promised that He would give it to him for a possession. God used Stephen to point out to us that we should take note of this.

So if God promised Abraham the land, and if in this life God never gave it to him, what does that tell us?

### THE LAND RECEIVED AFTER THIS LIFE

God, obviously, always fulfills His promise. If Abraham did not receive the land in this life, then it must be that God was promising to give Abraham the land after this life.

The Bible tells us that Abraham himself realized that. Believing what God said, Abraham knew that God was talking to him about something he would receive after he died.

Our father Abraham knew that the land of Canaan was but a picture. What was promised was actually the *heavenly* promised land. One day Abraham was going to die. After this life Abraham would dwell with God forever in the heavenly promised land.

That Abraham really did see this is brought out in Hebrews 11:13-16. Verse 13 brings out again that Abraham died without having received what God had promised him. The context speaks about Abraham and Sarah among others. Then God says: “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).

They all died in faith having not yet received the promises. That makes clear that the promise was not about an earthly piece of land in this life. That earthly portion of land was the picture, not the promised reality.

Going on now in Hebrews 11, God points out to us that we should take note of the fact that Abraham viewed himself to be stranger and pilgrim on this earth. God says that this indicates that he was seeking his fatherland. “And confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on

<sup>1</sup> Nehemiah Coxe, “A Discourse of the Covenants That God Made with Men Before the Law” in *Covenant Theology: From Adam to Christ*, Ronald D. Miller, James M. Renihan, and Francisco Orozco, eds. (Macclesfield, UK: Broken Wharfe, 2025), 108.



the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country” (Heb. 11:13b, 14).

The word translated “country” could be translated “fatherland” or “homeland.” By calling themselves strangers and pilgrims, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were confessing that in their heart they were seeking their fatherland.

This passage in Hebrews then goes on to point out that the fatherland they were seeking was not the earthly land of Ur out of which they had come: “And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned” (Heb. 11:15).

God here is saying that if that earthly land in Mesopotamia was the land Abraham was seeking, he might have had an opportunity to have returned there. Yet that was not the fatherland Abraham was seeking, as the Spirit of God goes on to say: “But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city” (Heb. 11:16).

The fatherland Abraham was seeking was a better, heavenly fatherland. This was the land God had promised him. The promise, again, was not about an earthly land in this life. That land was but a picture. The promise was of a better, heavenly land. Abraham saw that, and believed what God said.

Abraham understood what many today deny. Many refer to the promised land as a portion of earthly land received while this earth is still in the bondage of corruption. Abraham was not like them. He rightly distinguished the picture from the reality, and had his mind on the heavenly promised land that he would receive forever.

### **BELIEVING GOD WHEN HE SAYS “FOREVER”**

We look again at that promise to Abraham, also taking note of the context before it: “And the LORD said unto

Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever” (Gen. 13:14, 15).

God said He would give Abraham all the land, not just part of it, but all of it. He also said that Abraham would receive the land *forever*.

Coxe says that “forever” means merely “for a long time:”

...here God promises to give this land to Abraham and to his seed “for ever” and in Genesis 17:8 “for an everlasting possession.” ...No more is intended than the continuance of these for a long time, that is, throughout the Old Testament economy until the days of the Messiah.<sup>2</sup>

Coxe here is not correct. When God spoke of Abraham having the land “as an everlasting possession,” He meant precisely that. Abraham and all those in Christ would receive the heavenly promised land and dwell with God there forever.

Christ died that all His sheep, including Abraham, might receive an incorruptible inheritance. The inheritance promised to Abraham and us is reserved in heaven: “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (1 Pet. 1:4).

The heavenly inheritance, that is what God has promised. That is what He promised to Abraham, and that is what He has promised also to us in Jesus Christ. In God’s Son we also will receive this heavenly inheritance in which we will dwell with God and praise Him forever!

To be continued...

*The fatherland Abraham was seeking was a better, heavenly fatherland. This was the land God had promised him. The promise, again, was not about an earthly land in this life. That land was but a picture. The promise was of a better, heavenly land. Abraham saw that, and believed what God said.*

2 Coxe, “A Discourse of the Covenants,” 110.





## THE PRODIGAL SON (2): ABOUNDING MERCY

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Previous article in this series: August 2025, p. 412

No doubt, the prodigal son desired fresh clothes and a warm meal. This was, in fact, at least in part, what had contributed to his desire to return home, even as he himself expressed this. Surely, though, his great desire was to once again feel and experience the love of his father. However, for the experience of that love, it was necessary for him to know that his father had forgiven him. As we have seen, in the end it was the knowledge of his sin by the work of the Holy Spirit in his heart that had driven him to his senses and turned his eyes toward home in repentance and the desire for forgiveness and reconciliation.

And yet, repentant though he was, in his desire that his father forgive him, this young man still had an especially important lesson to learn, and we with him. The forgiveness for which he so longed and desired, and which his father would in time grant him, would not, could not, be gained by anything he did or said. His father's forgiveness was not dependent on how humbly he presented himself to him, nor was it dependent on the eloquence of his words or the number of tears that he shed. The forgiveness for which he so longed was a complete and absolute act of undeserved mercy on the part of his father. The man who now embraced him and wept for joy at his return knew his sin. Not only did he know the sin of the young man in taking his portion and leaving his home and family to flee the rule of his father, but he knew too the vile sins he had committed in the squandering of that portion. One look at the son and his wretched condition would have told all.

But his father does not recoil in disgust or even keep him at arm's length to look down his nose at him. He embraces him. And still more, he does not even let the young man finish his carefully thought-out words of confession and repentance before interrupting him to

give commands to his servants. Take note of the words of the son and those of his father in verses 21-24 of Luke 15: "And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry." Surely, the father heard the words that the young man spoke, but you see, beloved, before the young man had finished speaking he had already forgiven him. The father knew him to be repentant, not simply from his words, but especially from his desire to return home in humility. And remember, the father in the parable is a picture of God Himself, who certainly knows the heart, and the heart of the young man is what really mattered. True repentance is never simply a matter of the outward, but it is always a matter of the heart, and without true repentance of the heart, the young man would not, for all his desire, be able to experience the love and forgiveness of his father. On the contrary, his would be the experience of David, who expresses his wretched state, likely as he lived in unrepentance after his sin with Bathsheba and before God sent Nathan the prophet to confront him with his sin. What was that wretched state? David describes it in Psalm 32:3-5, "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

Not only then was the father's embrace of his son

one of love, but in that love, it was also an embrace of forgiveness. Yes, the son knew that his father loved him. No doubt, anguished words expressing that love had likely been the very last words uttered by the father as this son turned his back on him in rebellion. The father's love was also evidenced in his constant watching, in his running to meet his son, and certainly in his embrace. And yet, knowledge of love is not the same as the experience of that love. It was only after having truly repented of his sin that this wayward son could now truly experience the love that he knew his father had for him. Although words of love and forgiveness were surely uttered by the father, it was the feeling of his father's arms around him holding him tight and the warm tears that no doubt fell onto his face as his father kissed him that really gave the young man the assurance that he had been forgiven and received once again. It is only through that forgiveness of his father that he will be able to truly experience his love and to find any kind of reconciliation. It was only in love that he was truly forgiven, and it was only in that forgiveness that he knew true love.

Having forgiven his wayward son, the father now restores him to his former place in his house. Notice the distinct difference between the reaction of the man to whom the young man had joined himself in the far away country and that of his father. His father welcomed him with open arms and tears of joy. He clothed him, not with rags but with the best clothes. And he does not simply command the servants to bring his son a bowl of soup or a piece of bread, but he instructs them to bring the fatted calf, something that was only done for special occasions, which surely this was.

Let us suppose for a moment though that a son or daughter of our own congregation, rather than heeding the command of the gospel, hears and heeds instead the siren song of the world. Let us further suppose that the young man or woman, despite the pleadings of father, mother and family, and despite the diligent and faithful work of the pastor and elders, leaves the church and turns their back on family and friends. Over the ensuing years the congregation becomes aware through various means, of the vile and sinful life that the man or woman lives, including but not limited to, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, sexual sins of every sort, and even time in prison as the result of some of these sins.

But then one day, by the grace of God having been brought to his senses, even as the prodigal son in the parable, that man or woman returns to their family and to the church having hit bottom and seen and confessed their sins. How, beloved, would we receive them? Would our reaction be that of the father of the prodigal son? Would we run to them as we saw them approaching the church building, take them in our arms, and with tears, rejoice that God had turned their heart? Would we, as the friends and household of the man did, gather in rejoicing and feasting in celebration of the wonder working of God's grace and mercy in the heart and life of that man or woman? Or, and let us be brutally honest with one another, is it more likely the case that ours would be the reaction of the elder brother in the parable?

He had missed all the initial excitement of the return of his younger brother because, as was the case every day, he had been busy in the field, laboring for his father, much unlike his younger brother. Imagine his surprise when, upon his return at the end of the day, he found a great celebration. Immediately he is set on edge because, although he was the eldest son and therefore held a prominent place in this household, he had not been informed of the celebration, nor had he even been invited. Rather than seeking it out for himself, he asks a servant what the meaning of it all was and upon hearing the reason for the excitement and celebration, the true colors of the elder son shown through. Rather than being filled with joy, he was filled with jealousy, pride, and disgust.

The words of the elder son to his father in verses 29 and 30 of Luke 15 are telling: "Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf." All these years I have done everything right. I have served you faithfully and done all that you have asked me to do, and I have done it well. Never have I wandered off and done the horrible things that this sinner has done. Where is my reward? What do I get for all my faithful service and dedication? Never mind my motivation or the true condition of my heart.

Let us make this more personal. When we see that

man or woman who has been reconciled to the church, what do we say, if not out loud, then in our own hearts? After all that they have done, how can they expect to just waltz back into the fellowship of the family and of the church? Do they—and I know the horrific sins they have committed—think that just like that, they can have the salvation that I have? I have been a faithful member of the church all my life and have given myself over to serving the church, and yet no one has ever shown this joyful affection for me. I have never received the recognition for doing good works that this vile sinner is now enjoying. And the list can go on and on.

Sadly, as it was with the elder brother, so often it is with us. We so quickly fall into the sin of pridefully looking at our own works and attributing our standing to those works rather than the amazing and merciful grace of God. With our mouths we confess that our works merit us nothing when it comes to salvation, but in our hearts, we want to hold on to the lie that in some way, those works must be good for something. Surely, I am a better person than that sinner and therefore, more deserving of salvation.

The answer of the father to his eldest son in Luke 15:31-32 is exactly what you and I need to hear too: “And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.” He was dead! The prodigal son had been unable to do anything to merit the forgiveness of his father. In fact, everything he had done made it impossible for him to be forgiven. This was the case for the eldest son, and it is the case for every believer as well. Apart from Christ and His meritorious work on the cross that was erected atop

Calvary, all that we do merits only the wrath of God. It is only by the grace of God manifest in His love for us in His Son Jesus Christ that we are made alive again.

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast (Eph. 2:4-9).

*The prodigal son had been unable to do anything to merit the forgiveness of his father. ...This was the case for the eldest son, and it is the case for every believer as well. Apart from Christ and His meritorious work on the cross...all that we do merits only the wrath of God. It is only by the grace of God manifest in His love for us in His Son Jesus Christ that we are made alive again.*

There are many things that the parable of the prodigal son and the two preceding parables in Luke 15 have in common, but one that stands out is joy. Yes, there is joy with friends and family in the finding of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the return of the prodigal son. But there is also joy in heaven. Stop and take a moment to consider and ponder the wonder of that! In the repentance of one sinner, the angels rejoice (Luke 15:10).

Is this your reaction and is it my reaction when one who was lost is found once again? Do we, with gracious joy, mercifully receive those who we know have shown true repentance over their sin? Do we embrace them, in unconditional love and joy, knowing the vile and despicable nature of their sin, which is no different from our own inclinations? Or—and may God graciously forbid it—is our response that of the elder brother of the prodigal son? Beloved saints, if the angels rejoice, certainly we should too! May God make it so.



## PROPER CHRISTIAN MONEY MANAGEMENT (3): CLOSING PRINCIPLES

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Previous article in this series: May 1, 2025, p. 287

For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required; and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more—Luke 12:48

In the previous two articles we have been considering managing money in a wise and stewardly way. The Lord has given unto us many earthly goods and with the earthly goods we have the responsibility to use them wisely and to press them all into the service of God's name and His covenant in the midst of this world. We noted in the previous articles that the motive for proper money management is not to escape physical poverty and get rich, but rather our motive is faithfulness to our Father in heaven with the little or plenty He has given. Further, debt is something we abhor and detest. We never needlessly and recklessly plunge ourselves into debt, and we repay what we borrow.

Proper Christian money management does not come naturally to any of us. By nature we are selfish and greedy and covetous. By nature we only think of ourselves and our own comfort of living. And therefore money management to the glory of God is a skill that is acquired and learned. We as parents especially ought to seek out those opportunities to teach our children from the Word of God the proper view of money and how to manage it in the right way.

I remind you that as we seek to manage money properly, it is not with the goal simply to be able to balance our checkbook at the end of the month, to avoid debt, and to set aside money for retirement. Those are good things and we ought to be doing those things. But you recognize that the unregenerate man can do those things, and sometimes do those things very well. Those things all by themselves do not mark a Christian man in relation to his money. What marks a Christian man is that he is God-centered and God-focused in all his

life, especially how he approaches and manages money.

To help us remain God-centered in managing money, let's take heed to the following principles from God's Word.

### PRINCIPLE #1: GOD OWNS EVERYTHING

Scripture is clear that our possessions come from Jehovah God. He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth and all that they contain. As Creator, He lays claim to absolutely everything. "For every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills" (Ps. 50:10). About anything and everything that you own, God says, "It's mine. Everything belongs to me."

Further, God never gives up His ownership of anything, even when He gives good gifts to men. Those gifts comes from God, but He never says "And now it doesn't belong to me anymore, now it belongs to that person." Even when God gives us possessions, He never gives up ownership. Think of your house and your vehicles and all the clothes in your closet, together with the tools in the garage. It is all yours in a limited sense in that it does not belong to your neighbor. God gave it to you and not to them. But it is yours only in that limited sense. Ultimately it all belongs to God.

This is the first and main principle—everything belongs to God. If we do not understand this truth, if we minimize this truth, if we brush it aside as not all that relevant, then we will never be able to manage our money in a wise Christian way, namely, to the glory of God to whom it all belongs.

If we do understand this truth, in all of our managing and getting of money we will work hard and we will seek all our sustenance from God. "But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ" (Phil. 4:19).



Seeing that all things belong to God leads us to the second principle.

### **PRINCIPLE #2: GOD MAKES US STEWARDS**

A steward is one who manages the property and finances of another. Joseph was a steward in the house of Potiphar. Nothing belonged to Joseph, but he was in charge of managing everything in Potiphar's house. In Luke 16 Jesus speaks of the parable that we have come to know as the parable of the unjust steward. That steward was in charge of all his master's possessions. His responsibility was to manage things wisely and justly, but he behaved himself unjustly and did not manage things in a good way in service of his master.

So also with us. God has made us stewards of all that belongs to Him. Generally, that responsibility is the dominion God gives man over all creation: "...and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth" (Gen. 1:28). Specifically, that dominion and stewardship extends to the material possessions it pleases God to give us. And not only possessions, but God gives us good minds so that we can think and reason and figure out very complex problems. And God says, "You are stewards of Mine. I give you all these good gifts. Your calling is to use them to My glory."

That is so wonderful and amazing that God would make us stewards and give us the calling to press all things into the service of His name. Amazing, because we do not deserve it. Imagine that you own a business. You give a particular employee a good position and pay him top dollar. But in the course of time that employee steals from you and abuses his position. What would you or I do? We would fire that man and proceed to prosecute him to the fullest extent of the law. But what does God do for us? In Adam we had a good position and good responsibility. Yet in Adam we sinned and tried to steal the glory of God. What did God do? Did He punish Adam to the fullest extent? Not at all. God forgave that sin, restored the image of God, and spoke the word of forgiveness and the promise of the seed of the woman. And in the fullness of time He sent Jesus into the world, who died for all our sins and transgressions. What does God do for us? This is what is so amazing—He restores to us the position of being stewards in His covenant and in His kingdom.

### **PRINCIPLE #3: LIVING IN CONTENTMENT**

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee—Hebrews 13:5

The man who is discontent always wants more. His judgment is that he has too little, he deserves more, and he wants it now. That discontent is going to lead him to make foolish money management decisions. He will rack up credit card debt as he purchases those things he believes he deserves. He will purchase a vehicle knowing full well he cannot afford it. He will invest what little he has in the most highly speculative stocks in the hopes of striking it rich. And the end of the man is worse than the first. How did this all this misery come about? Discontentment.

Our calling is contentment. Contentment is looking at all that God has given me and saying "It's enough. I don't need more. What I have is sufficient." What does contentment look like as we manage money and handle our finances? We will be wise. We will not be reckless. Our motive will never be "I need more, I deserve more." If it pleases God to give us more, then we pray, "God, give me to be thankful in this prosperity." If God sees to take away, then we pray, "God, give me to be patient in adversity." That man, with the grace of contentment, will manage his finances in the spirit stated in 2 Corinthians 6:10 "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things."

### **PRINCIPLE #4: GIVING GENEROUSLY**

Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again—Luke 6:38

The greedy man will distort the above passage and say, "I will give to others, and just perhaps in the future they will return the favor to a greater degree!" That is not at all what the passage means. For our purposes now, it simply means that the blessing of God rests upon that man who is gracious and generous in his giving. And when God blesses, He does so abundantly.

We will be generous in our giving to the causes of



the kingdom. What was the reason after all that God gave wealth to the Israelites in the Old Testament? The answer is so that the Israelites could serve and worship Jehovah God. Consider all the sacrifices in the Old Testament. Thousands upon thousands upon millions of sheep and oxen and bullocks down through the years. The Israelites needed a certain measure of wealth for the right and proper worship of Jehovah. That wealth was to be directed back to God.

So also with us. God gives us wealth. Not for us to hoard. Not for us to lavish ourselves with those things we think we deserve. Rather, we will give for the causes of the kingdom. We will give for the relief of the needy brother or sister. And we will do so thankfully, knowing what God has freely given us in Jesus Christ—full and free salvation. “Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase” (Prov. 3:9).

CONTINUED FROM SPECIAL ISSUE (OCTOBER 15, 2025)



## WILLIAM TYNDALE'S HIGH REGARD FOR SCRIPTURE (2)\*

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### INTRODUCTION

William Tyndale's work of translating the New Testament and parts of the Old Testament into English was foundational to all future work of making the Bible available to English readers. It is estimated that as much as ninety percent of the Bible as translated by Tyndale is part of the King James or Authorized Version, and that one-third of the King James text is word-for-word Tyndale. His translation had the same enormous impact on the English language as Luther's translation had on the German language. Tyndale's first concern, however, was making the Word of God available to English-speaking believers and he had little thought for anything else. He wanted them to be delivered from the darkness of superstition and human fables. He wrote,

For as long as they [the Romanists] may keep that [Scripture] pressed down, they will so darken the right way with the mist of their sophistry, and so tangle them that either rebuke or despise their abominations, with arguments of philosophy, and with worldly similitudes and apparent reasons of natural wisdom, and with wresting the scripture

unto their own purpose, clean contrary unto the process, order, and meaning of the text; and so delude them in descanting upon it with allegories, and amaze them, expounding it in many senses before the unlearned lay-people, (when it hath but one simple literal sense, whose light the owls cannot abide,) that, though thou feel in thine heart, and art sure, how that all is false that they say, yet couldst thou not solve their subtle riddles.<sup>1</sup>

The Roman Catholic Church that condemned Tyndale and remains responsible for his murder, claims that he was condemned not for translating Scripture, but for teachings that undermined the authority of the church, such teachings as justification by faith without works. This is nothing but a smoke screen. The truth is that Tyndale found these teaching in the Scriptures and wanted God's people to understand them for their own salvation. He wrote,

I do marvel greatly, dearly beloved in Christ, that ever any man should repugn or speak against the scripture to be had in every language, and that of every man. For I thought that no man had been so blind to ask why light should be shewed to them that

\* This article finishes Rev. Hanko's first article submitted for the October 15 special issue on "Luther's Book and Tyndale's Bible."

1 William Tyndale, "Preface to the Five Books of Moses," in *Works of William Tyndale* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2010), 393-4.

walk in darkness, where they cannot but stumble, and where to stumble is the danger of eternal damnation....”<sup>2</sup>

For this he was put to death.

Tyndale’s desire to put the Bible in the hands of the common people was motivated by his high regard for the Scriptures and for their “usefulness.” Thus, though Tyndale had no systematic doctrine of Scripture and did not use many of the words we use to defend the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture, certain important truths about Scripture become evident in his writings. Some of these we have noted, but there were others.

### THE SUFFICIENCY OF SCRIPTURE

Tyndale believed that the Scriptures were everything the believer needs for faith and life, the doctrine of Scripture’s sufficiency, though that word is not found in his writings. He said in his “Prologue to the Book of Genesis,”

So now the scripture is a light, and sheweth us the true way, both what to do and what to hope for; and a defence from all error, and a comfort in adversity that we despair not, and feareth us in prosperity that we sin not.<sup>3</sup>

He believed that even the “stories” of Scripture were given for faith and life:

And thirdly, that thou take the stories and lives which are contained in the bible for sure and undoubted ensamples that God so will deal with us unto the world’s end.<sup>4</sup>

### CHRIST IN SCRIPTURE

Tyndale’s conviction that the Scriptures are sufficient for faith and life had to do with his belief that the Scriptures are full of Christ, as Christ Himself said: “Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). In Tyndale’s own words:

The scripture is that wherewith God draweth us unto him, and not wherewith we should be led from him. The scriptures spring out of God, and flow unto Christ, and were given to lead us to Christ. Thou must therefore go along by the scripture as by

a line, until thou come at Christ, which is the way’s end and resting-place.<sup>5</sup>

This, according to Tyndale was true even of the levitical laws:

Even so with the ceremonies of this book thou canst prove nothing, save describe and declare only the putting away of our sins through the death of Christ. For Christ is Aaron and Aaron’s sons, and all that offer the sacrifice to purge sin. And Christ is all manner offering that is offered: he is the ox, the sheep, the goat, the kid, and lamb; he is the ox that is burnt without the host, and the scape-goat that carried all the sin of the people away into the wilderness: for as they purged the people from their worldly uncleanness through blood of the sacrifices, even so doth Christ purge us from the uncleanness of everlasting death with his own blood; and as their worldly sins could no otherwise be purged, than by blood of sacrifices, even so can our sins be no otherwise forgiven than through the blood of Christ.<sup>6</sup>

In another place he called Christ “the right David” and said of Him,

...that he hath fought with sin, with death, and the devil, and overcome them: whereby all men that were in bondage to sin, wounded with death, overcome of the devil, are, without their own merits or deservings, loosed, justified, restored to life and saved, brought to liberty and reconciled unto the favour of God, and set at one with him again: which tidings as many as believe laud, praise, and thank God; are glad, sing and dance for joy.<sup>7</sup>

### LAW AND GOSPEL

Tyndale seems sometimes to make an overly sharp distinction between the Old and New Testaments, calling the Old Testament “law” and the New “the gospel”:

The Old Testament is a book, wherein is written the law of God, and the deeds of them which fulfil them, and of them also which fulfil them not.

The New Testament is a book, wherein are contained the promises of God; and the deeds of them which believe them, or believe them not.<sup>8</sup>

He did not deny, however, that the Old Testament

2 Tyndale, “A Pathway into the Holy Scripture,” in *Works*, 7.

3 Tyndale, *Works*, 399.

4 Tyndale, “Prologue to the Prophet Jonas,” in *Works*, 464.

5 Tyndale, “The Obedience of a Christian Man,” in *Works*, 317.

6 Tyndale, “Prologue to the Book of Leviticus,” in *Works*, 427.

7 Tyndale, “A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures,” in *Works*, 9.

8 Tyndale, “A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures,” 8.

was full of Christ, nor that the New Testament as gospel was contrary to the Old. He explained the relation between them thus:

In the Old Testament are many promises, which are nothing else but the Evangelion or gospel, to save those that believed them from the vengeance of the law. And in the New Testament is oft made mention of the law, to condemn them which believe not the promises. Moreover, the law and the gospel may never be separate: for the gospel and promises serve but for troubled consciences, which are brought to desperation, and feel the pains of hell and death under the law, and are in captivity and bondage under the law. In all my deeds I must have the law before me, to condemn mine unperfectness. For all that I do (be I never so perfect) is yet damnable sin, when it is compared to the law, which requireth the ground and bottom of mine heart. I must therefore have always the law in my sight, that I be meek in the spirit, and give God all the laud and and praise, ascribing to him all righteousness, and to myself all unrighteousness and sin. I must also have the promises before mine eyes, that I despair not; in which promises I see the mercy, favour, and goodwill of God upon me in the blood of his Son Christ, which hath made satisfaction for mine unperfectness, and fulfilled for me that which I could not do.<sup>9</sup>

### THE PERSPICUITY OF SCRIPTURE

Driving his efforts to make Scripture available to every Christian, was his belief in the perspicuity of Scripture, though he does not use that word. It was a denial of Scripture's clarity that led the Roman Catholic Church to condemn Tyndale's writings, including his translations, and to insist that it was dangerous for the common people to have them. Scripture, Tyndale said, is able to be understood by ordinary believers who do not need prelates and popes to explain the Word to them:

These things, I say, to know, is to have all the scripture unlocked and opened before thee; so that if thou wilt go in, and read, thou canst not but understand. And in these things to be ignorant, is to have all the scripture locked up; so that the more thou redest it, the blinder thou art, and the more contrariety thou findest in it, and the more tangled art thou therein, and canst nowhere through: for if thou had a gloss in one place, in another it will not serve.<sup>10</sup>

This, of course, was not to deny that the work of the Spirit of God and the presence of faith were necessary to understand Scripture:

The Spirit of God accompanieth faith, and bringeth with her light, wherewith a man beholdeth himself in the law of God, and seeth his miserable bondage and captivity, and humbleth himself, and abhorreth himself: she bringeth God's promises of all good things in Christ. God worketh with his word, and in his word: and when his word is preached, faith rooteth herself in the hearts of the elect; and as faith entereth, and the word of God is believed, the power of God looseth the heart from the captivity and bondage under sin, and knitteth and coupleth him to God and to the will of God; altereth him, changeth him clean, fashioneth, and forgeth him anew; giveth him power to love, and to do that which before was impossible for him either to love or do; and turneth him unto a new nature, so that he loveth that which he before hated, and hateth that which he before loved; and is clean altered, and changed, and contrary disposed; and is knit and coupled fast to God's will, and naturally bringeth forth good works, that is to say, that which God commandeth to do, and not things of his own imagination.<sup>11</sup>

Without faith Scripture only serves to blind men:

And remember that the sun was given us to guide us in our way and works bodily. Now if thou leave the natural use of the sun, and will look directly on him to see how bright he is, and suchlike curiosity, then will the sun blind thee. So was the scripture given us to guide us in our way and works ghostly. The way is Christ; and the promises in him are our salvation, if we long for them. Now if we shall leave that right use and turn ourselves unto vain questions, and to search the unsearchable secrets of God; then no doubt shall the scripture blind us, as it hath done our schoolmen and our subtle disputers.<sup>12</sup>

### CONCLUSION

These are some of the highlights of Tyndale's writings about Scripture. The high regard they show for Scripture as the Word of God led him to dedicate his short adult life to the translation of Scripture into English and led in the end to martyrdom and its glories. Would God we had today such regard for the Scriptures! It is said that Tyndale's dying words were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." Perhaps today it would be, "Lord,

9 Tyndale, "A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures," in *Works*, 11-12.

10 Tyndale, "A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures," 27.

11 Tyndale, "The Parable of the Wicked Mammon," in *Works*, 54-55.

12 Tyndale, "The Obedience of a Christian Man," in *Works*, 317.

open the eyes of God's people that they see once again the importance of the Holy Scriptures." Tyndale is also reputed to have said to a Romish priest that when he was finished with the work of translating the Scriptures the boy that drives a plow would know more of the Word of God than priest or pope. Sadly and for various reasons, that is no longer true. Neglected, misinterpreted, badly translated, published in so many translations and paraphrases that the Scriptures are not even recognized, the plough boy today, as in the days before Tyndale's work, knows almost nothing of the Word of God.

A regard for the Scriptures, however, must translate into living by the light of God's Word. Tyndale said this also:

Those also are deceived which, without all fear of God, give themselves unto all manner of vices with full consent and full delectation, having no respect to the law of God (under whose vengeance they are locked up in captivity); but say, God is merciful, and Christ died for us; supposing that such dreaming and imagination is that faith which is so greatly commended in holy scripture. Nay, that is not faith, but rather a foolish blind opinion, springing of their own [corrupt] nature, and is not given them of the Spirit of God, [but rather of the spirit of the devil, whose faith now-a-days the popish compare and make equal unto the best trust, confidence, and belief, that a repenting soul can have in the blood of our Saviour Jesus, unto their own confusion, shame, and uttering what they are within. But] true faith

is (as saith the apostle Paul) the gift of God; and is given to sinners, after the law hath passed upon them, and hath brought their consciences unto the brim of desperation and sorrows of hell.

They that have this right faith, consent to the law, that it is righteous and good; and justify God which made the law; and have delectation in the law (notwithstanding that they cannot fulfil it [as they would,] for their weakness); and they abhor whatsoever the law forbiddeth, though they cannot [always] avoid it. And their great sorrow is, because they cannot fulfil the will of God in the law; and the Spirit, that is in them, crieth to God night and day for strength and help, with tears (as saith Paul) that cannot be expressed with tongue. Of which things the belief of our popish (or of their) father, whom they so magnify for his strong faith, hath none experience at all.<sup>13</sup>

Condemned and martyred for putting his firm belief that Scripture is the Word of God into practice, his legacy remains in the early English versions of the Bible as well as in the King James or Authorized Version, a version that not only includes much of his work in translating the Pentateuch and the New Testament, but is based on the sound principles that were part of his high regard for the Scriptures. For this he is sometimes called the Apostle of England.

13 Tyndale, "A Pathway into the Holy Scriptures," in *Works*, 12-13.

## PR SEMINARY CONVOCATION ADDRESS



# THE GOSPEL AND AI: WHY GOD WILL NEVER BE PLEASED WITH AN AI-GENERATED SERMON (NOR WITH THE MINISTER WHO TRIES)\*

## PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

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When ChatGPT3 made its appearance three years ago in November 2022, a friend of mine (not a minister) quickly and eagerly tested its ability to make a sermon. "For kicks and giggles," he said.

\* Speech by Prof. B. Gritters for the PR Seminary Convocation held on September 3, 2025 in Zion PRC.

ChatGPT, if you do not know, is the internet-based "software" that is called "Artificial Intelligence" or AI. Within 12 months of ChatGPT's release, there were over 100 million users, making it the fastest growing computer application in history. And even that is old news, because on August 8, 2025 (less than one month



ago), ChatGPT released version 5, described as light-years ahead of version 3, and much closer to AGI (Artificial GENERAL Intelligence)—the alleged ability to reason like humans, and even “far beyond human capability.” Within two weeks there were more than 200,000,000 users of ChatGPT every *day*. And that is only one form of AI.

Back to my story. Already three years ago, my friend instructed ChatGPT to make a sermon, with all the requirements most Reformed preachers would want a sermon to meet. It must be: 1) based on the Bible; 2) explicitly consistent with the Reformed confessions; 3) include explanation and personal applications; 4) have an introduction, a theme, three points, and a conclusion; and 5) of four- or five-pages length.

In less than a minute it produced a paper (I will not call it a sermon, although it looked a lot like a sermon) that my friend showed me. The results were stunning. I was shocked to see what it was able to produce, with apparently no effort except for the movement of electrons that produced some heat. There was accurate explanation of the text. It was in harmony, explicitly so, with the Reformed creeds. There was an introduction, theme, three points, and conclusion. There were personal applications.

Of course, as a professor of homiletics I had criticisms. Aside from being somewhat wooden and thus impersonal (and I will come back to that later), I said, it was Christless and therefore unacceptable as a God-honoring sermon. A fatal and irremediable flaw, I concluded.

“Not a problem,” said my friend. So he gave it a simple, additional prompt: “Make it Christ-centered.” Soon enough another version of the paper (I do not call it a sermon, although now it looked even more like one) came out in which Christ and His saving work seemed to bleed all over it.

That was 2023, a “for-kicks-and-giggles” test. This is 2025 and very real. Which raises a question for the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary and for all who are interested in gospel preaching: “Will AI become a tool that a Christian minister may or even should use to produce a *sermon* for God’s people?”

The temptations, of course, are great. What a mountain of time he could save! Instead of poring over the text in the original languages, wrestling with

meanings and implications of the words and phrases, pondering illustrations to make the truth clear and applications for a congregation in 2025, he can give AI some instructions, tailored of course to his desires, and within minutes have a ready-made sermon, which, after reading a few times to familiarize himself with it, he can deliver to God’s people.

In the meantime, he can be off to other important work that probably is not getting finished because of the time it takes to produce two substantial sermons each week. And there is a great deal of it. The minister’s task is monumental. If AI can produce such results on paper, why would he not use it?

It is my purpose to explain what my speech title unashamedly and, by intention, provocatively, says: God will never be pleased with an AI-generated sermon, nor with the minister who uses the tool to make one. And here is my explanation that I will develop:

A sermon is the personal speech of a personal God speaking from His heart, to personal human beings and their hearts, through a personal human being, from his heart—with all his faculties pressed into the service of that word: mind, heart, soul, will, and all his emotions. And no AI program—sophisticated as it ever will become—will ever be able to put a sermon into the heart of preacher. And if the preacher tries, he and the flock he is committed to care for are going to dry up and, God forbid, eventually die, spiritually.

### CAVEAT

As soon as I assert this, I must be clear what I do not mean. I do not mean that technology (even AI) cannot be a useful tool or is itself wrong. God in His providence allows creation of technology, which in itself cannot be labeled as wrong. Considered all by itself, technology is not sinful. AI is technology.

We are not Amish or Luddites, who reject technology.

Ministers of the gospel, for the sake of sermon-making and teaching, will not reject modern technology. In fact, they will thank God for many things, including the modern phenomenon called Artificial Intelligence.

“Hey Google, how tall is Mt. Sinai?” (At some risk to myself, so I figured, I took my smartphone to the podium to ask this question in front of the audience. With great relief, Google answered instantly, so that



everyone could hear through my microphone): “*Mt. Sinai is 7,497ft.*” No time spent finding and paging through a Bible Encyclopedia. On with the important work.

For thirty years I have used a powerful Bible study computer program that identifies all the forms of words in the original Hebrew and Greek, saving me the tedious labor of paging through heavy lexicons and Bible encyclopedias.

The internet can even be a tool for some quick research. What have others said about this text, or that doctrine? One of our ministers, who saw in advance my title of this lecture, said that he used AI to ask what Charles Wesley would say about a certain text, and immediately was given a full and helpful explanation.

Of course, there are dangers with technology. A minister using a computer program to do his language studies may become lazy, does not think, and maybe forgets the language altogether. Worse, a ministerial student never learns the languages because he imagines that the computer will do it all. Or the minister leaves the impression with his catechism students that it is ok for them to rely on “Google” for facts. I have seen more Google-generated answers for Heidelberg Catechism worksheets in the past years, some of which were incorrect. Or the technology, because it only scrapes from the internet everything that is there—opinions as well—may be wrong. I got equally good-sounding answers to both these questions: “Why is Arminianism heresy?” and “Why is Calvinism heresy?”

Nevertheless, it is not the technology itself that I am concerned with.

Rather, displeasing to God is the minister’s use of the tools that will *bypass* all the personal wrestling that is required (“I will not let You go until you bless me!”), all the spiritual meditation, all the heart reflection, all the pondering in love of the congregation’s present, personal and urgent needs (they are Christ’s sheep under your care!), all the blood, sweat, and tears that finally end in a preached sermon that is *inside* the preacher, and will reflect and express the mind and heart of God for this people, this week, from this text. AI-generated sermons bypass all that work. That, I contend, is displeasing to God.

Nor will God bless it. Sunday night when it is all over, that minister will not sleep well, in contrast to

the man of God who, utterly exhausted at the end of the Lord’s Day, is able to sleep because, spent as he is, his conscience is right and he himself has been richly blessed. He has been with God and been used by God to speak a good word to His people.

Now, I need to explain *why* this is true, spelling out both from Scripture’s explicit prescriptions and from Scripture’s example what a God-pleasing sermon is. But it is not one produced by AI scraping trillions of binary digits from the internet and assembling them in a neatly packaged form—no matter how orthodox it may sound and how sermonic it may appear.

### THE NATURE OF A SERMON AND PREACHING

A minister’s occupation is unlike any other occupation in the world; and making and delivering a sermon is unlike any other activity in the world. Which means that you ought not try to apply rules to *preaching* or give allowances to *preachers* that you might to any other activity or person. And unless you realize this, you will be utterly puzzled at my thesis: “God will never be pleased with an AI-generated sermon, nor the minister who tries.”

Let me explain, first, by asserting that a sermon is **more than information** with which a minister familiarizes himself.

Indeed, a sermon *is* information. Without information, a sermon is not a sermon. When God speaks, He speaks facts and truths to the minds of His people. God wants His people to love Him with their minds as well as with soul and strength. Peter exhorts: “grow in grace and in the *knowledge* of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet. 3:18). Thus, the prophet: “My people are destroyed for lack of *knowledge*” (Hos. 4:6).

God’s people must hear and learn essential facts: *God loves His elect people, and not every man in the world. Jesus’ death was substitutionary atonement, not a mere example. The Holy Spirit sanctifies us by the Word. The church is the bride of Christ. Jesus will return to judge the living and the dead.* These are all facts, which facts constitute an essential element of sermons.

Criticizing AI’s gathering of facts, we will never minimize the importance of facts in sermons.

And that is why, I must concede, when God is pleased to do so he can use an ass—like Balaam’s ass—

to speak a word that conveys bare information that will profit the hearers. But my exhortation to ministers is, if I may be crude: “Don’t be an ass!” And to elders: “Don’t let your minister be an ass!” Which exhortation is not intended to be cute, but to urge upon ministers, “Don’t be an unthinking, unfeeling, heartless *beast!*”

Nevertheless, although a sermon is information, it is far more than information, far deeper than a bare recitation of facts, as different from a bare recitation of facts as *embracing* my wife is different than holding a *picture* of her.

We are more than ‘brains on a stick,’ as they say. And if we were not, then AI might be just the ticket for sermon-making.

### PERSONAL FROM BEGINNING TO END

To say it positively once more: *Preaching is the act of a personal God speaking personally from His heart, to human beings and their hearts, through the person of a preacher, with all the faculties and dimensions of his personal being pressed into the service of that speech.* Why? Because a sermon is a message from God through a man who has met God personally, and no one who has met the living God in person will speak in any other way than with all the emotions, convictions, and affections that he has. “I met God face to face and lived to tell you!” (see Gen. 32:30; Jud. 13:22).

Phillips Brooks (1835-1893) was getting at this when he famously said: “A sermon is truth communicated through personality.” My point will be more than that, although that is a good start and goes in the right direction because it refers to *personality*.

Let me put this in terms of God’s covenant. On this side of eternity, preaching is the highest expression of covenant fellowship between God and His people. To use the language of Psalm 25:14, God’s act of revealing His “secrets” to them that fear Him, His act of “showing them his covenant” takes place centrally *in the preaching!* Preaching is the intimate conversation of a husband with his bride. So important is this point that, if anyone asks you what is the relationship between preaching and the covenant (a fine question from a thinking Reformed believer!), you must not only tell them that preaching *explains* the *doctrine* of the covenant or *defends* the *truth* of the covenant, but that preaching itself *is* the highest *expression* of covenant

friendship this side of eternity. It is the *living* of covenant life: the personal God speaks to hearts of His beloved children, the Bridegroom to His beloved.

And no computer will ever be able to receive from God, and convey *properly* on behalf of God, such *personal* communication because no computer will ever have personality, will ever be more than a machine. Certainly, AI will feign emotions (sorrow and joy, pleasure and pain), will simulate personality (kindness, affection, even love), and appear to give expression to the will and affections, because the creators of AI want nothing more than to make AI a person. But AI will never be personal, with rationality, morality, and an ability to relate to God—in love or enmity.

Let me be positive again: God always speaks personally to His people. That is how friends relate to their friends. God is our friend.

His first human friends knew that. If you can picture Adam and Eve in their pre-fall marital bliss (Gen. 2:22, 3:8a), it would not be wrong to imagine them awaking on the morning after their wedding to God’s soft call. In response, they walked hand in hand to a moss-covered bolder, their backs against the smooth bark of a tree, God facing them, telling them of His love and designs for them (Gen 3:8). Friends. Person to person. Face to face. It was pure covenant fellowship.

He walked with His friends Enoch (Gen. 5:22) and Noah (Gen. 6:9). He appeared to Abraham to convey covenant promises of a son, and then in the form of men appeared again to share a meal (Gen. 17 and 18).

Later, when God would speak to *assemblies* of people, He always first met in person with His messenger. God met Moses personally at the burning bush with a message for Pharaoh (Ex. 4). Exodus 33 teaches that “the LORD spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend” (v. 11). Numbers 12:8 puts it, “mouth to mouth.”

So it was throughout the Old Testament, that God spoke to His people through prophets, who first communicated with God personally.

But “God, who...spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son” (Heb. 1:1). When God would “show His covenant” and speak His “secrets” in the richest possible way, He Himself came down to His covenant children to speak to them face to face in the face and

person of His Son in the flesh. God Himself lived among them, saw them personally, looked them in the eye, and from His own heart spoke to their hearts, with all the faculties of body and soul that every other man or woman has—mind and will, emotion and affections.

This explains why the requirement to be an apostle—officially to speak for Christ after He ascended into heaven—was to have seen Jesus personally. “Am I not an apostle?” Paul asked rhetorically, then explained that he indeed was: “have I not *seen* Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1). Speaking for Jesus required the appearance of Jesus so that a man saw Jesus! So Paul was able to say to the Corinthians: “For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, *in the sight of God* speak we in Christ (2 Cor. 2:17).

Men of God who speak for Him today must meet with and see Jesus. Which meeting will not consist in this: that he downloads into your brain the proper words to say and, in a monotonic presentation you give the facts to the people; but in this: that you hear from Jesus Himself Christ what He wills for His people to hear *from His heart to theirs*.

### PREACHING HAS PASSION

Now we can understand why the preaching recorded in Scripture has all the emotion and ‘personality’ that it does. Since the preachers had been with Jesus, these preachers exhibited boldness, shed tears, expressed righteous indignation and anger, praised God with exuberance, and were not able to suppress deepest compassion and love. The sight of God and Jesus gave life to words that would otherwise have been dead.

Study the sermons of the apostles to see these characteristics.

Peter and John, previously cowards, were **bold** in their preaching to the authorities who had just arrested them. Why? The rulers and elders marveled, but concluded that “they had been with Jesus” (Acts 4:13).

At times preachers express **anger**. Paul became indignant and righteously angry at times. At Athens his spirit was provoked when he observed the idolatry. With the Galatians he was incensed at their so-soon departure from the faith, and wrote a letter that breathed fire, if any letter can do that. When Moses came down from Sinai, his blood boiled when he heard and saw the

people dancing naked on the ground where the blood of the covenant had just been shed (Ex. 24:6-8; 32:1-6; with Heb. 10:29), bringing him to shatter the tables of the covenant. This was not Moses in his weakness but Moses who had just been with the righteous and holy God. Paul’s zeal was not the overzeal of youth, but the zeal of Jesus who with violence overthrew the tables of the moneychangers. Jesus surely had the meekness of a lamb, but he could draw a flaming sword with the majestic strength of a king. Preachers may be angry.

At other times, **doxology and praise** are in preachers’ mouths. “O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments...” (Rom. 11:33). Paul could not sufficiently exclaim his adoration of God. Jesus did: He “rejoiced in his spirit [overjoyed!] and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes...” (Luke 10:21). It would be a surprise to me if Jesus never expressed doxology in the three years he gave “seminary training” to Paul in Arabia. Preachers may rejoice.

Sometimes preachers weep **tears of sorrow**. Paul cried when he preached and was not ashamed to admit it. “You know how I served you with humility and tears” (Acts 20:19). To the church of Corinth: “Out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears...” (2 Cor. 2:4). And he wanted the Roman Christians to know of the “great heaviness and continual sorrow in [his] heart” (Rom. 9:2). It reminds you of Jeremiah, the “weeping prophet,” whose tears were not a weakness but a strength, were not simply a part of being human and communicating ‘naturally’ but being Christ-like. The Spirit of Christ was in both Paul and Jeremiah. Christ, who wept, who cried with Mary and Martha over Lazarus’ death (John 11:35), cried over Jerusalem’s destruction (Luke 19:41), and prayed with His disciples with “strong crying and tears” (Heb. 5:7). So preachers cry.

But never so beautiful are the **love and compassion** expressed in the preaching. It was Paul’s love for the Ephesians that brought him to tears. He said to the Thessalonians, “you were dear to us” (where “dear” is the strong Greek word for *love*). Love for his relatives brought him to say, “Brethren, my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved”

(Rom. 9:1; see also Rom. 10:1). Sympathy, compassion, love, a heart-felt desire for their well-being are expressed in sermons.

How beautiful is Jesus' love and pity. His compassion for a leper moved Jesus to heal him (Mark 1:41). His compassion for sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34) brought Jesus to teach them. He loved the rich young ruler (Mark 10:21). He loved Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:5). And when He said to the formerly insane demoniac, "Go, tell your friends and family," it was not to say, "Jesus *healed* me" but "He had *compassion* on me!" (Mark 5:19).

The preacher who has been with Jesus will feel and exhibit the love and pity of Jesus.

But if a minister imagines that these emotions have brought him to the *top* of the mountain peak, there is yet one steep incline to the peak. For preaching even expresses a **willingness to die** for the people under the preacher's care. To the Romans (9:1), Paul said about his unbelieving relatives, "I could wish to God that I were accursed from Christ if that would allow my kinsmen to be saved." Love for the Thessalonians made Paul willing to impart to them not only the gospel of God, "but also our own souls." This was Moses' attitude when he said to God: "If you cannot forgive them without payment, then write me out of your book of life for their sake. I would rather die than that these people perish" (see Ex. 32:32).

The only explanation for these strong emotions conveyed by preachers in both Testaments is that the Spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ was in them (1 Pet. 1:11). They felt what Jesus felt. They had been with Jesus.

### FABRICATED EMOTIONS

A minister who wants to preach like Moses and Paul, but does not meet Jesus, must counterfeit emotions like an actor. "Pound the pulpit here!" "At this point, cry!" Spurgeon's warning was wise: "Earnestness in the pulpit must be real. It is not to be mimicked.... Nothing but truth may appear in the house of the Lord; all affectation is strange fire, and excites the indignation of the God of truth. Be earnest, and you will seem to be earnest. A burning heart will soon find for itself a flaming tongue."

The minister who carries an AI-generated paper to the pulpit with feigned emotions draws near to God

with his lips when his heart is far from Him. It is hard to imagine a more damning indictment of a *people* than Isaiah's (29:13), which Jesus repeats in Matthew 15:8. "You hypocrites!" He said to the Pharisees (v. 7) whose hearts were as far from God as death is from life. And if this applies to the people in the pew, how much more so to the preacher who alleges to represent God! It must make God vomit in disgust.

Fellow preachers, we must come into the presence of God.

### A LONG HIKE

But coming into Jesus' presence takes the hardest emotional, mental, spiritual work a man can imagine. And the stamina of a man long-trained and well-conditioned.

"Hey Google, how tall, really, *is* Mt. Sinai? Seven thousand, four hundred, ninety-seven feet? Oh, God, I don't know if I have the energy to go all that way to meet you. Can you come down here, please?"

Now watch Moses. There he goes again, all the way up—not on trails groomed by the National Park Service with neat steps and sturdy handrails—trudging and agonizing, sweating and straining with all the energy the 80-year-old man still had, praying as he climbed: "Jehovah, God of Israel, give me a word for the people down below!" Reaching the summit, he met God face to face, spoke to Him mouth to mouth. And then he came down, maybe slipping and falling and bleeding, but certainly praying as he came down. And only then did he have a message to bring to the people of God, his face and soul beaming with the glory of Israel's God and his voice cracking with emotion.

Moses' long trek illustrates Paul's exhortation to Timothy, when Paul employed a word whose meaning is not expressed with sufficient strength in the KJV: "*Study* to show thyself approved unto God...rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). By "study" Paul means to say, "Pastor Timothy, be diligent! Take pains! Exert all your energy! Work! Work! Work!" It is another way of saying, "Endure hardships!" (2:3).

If God would answer a minister's 'prompt' for a sermon to be downloaded into his mind, an appropriate response would be what I get at times: "I do not understand your question." Or better, "Pull on your big-boy pants and your hiking boots and come on up."



**“TAKE AND EAT”**

This hard work is nothing less than spiritually *eating* and *digesting* the Word of God.

That is God’s own figure of speech. Jeremiah said: “Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16). The prophet of God did not *exegete* the word mechanically, he *ate* the word spiritually. He took it in his own mouth, chewed it, tasted all its flavors, felt its texture, and swallowed it so that it became part of him. And then, when he spoke, he did not speak “from the tip of his tongue, as the proverb is, but spoke from the bottom of his heart, while engaged in the work of his calling.”<sup>1</sup>

**EMOTIONS GENUINE AND NATURAL**

The minister who makes sermons in this way will find that Jesus’ Spirit produces in him very *naturally* all the emotions and convictions that make preaching an exhausting but thrilling service to the Lord.

As spontaneously as pain produces a cry, as automatically as a good joke brings forth laughter, and as naturally as the long-awaited return of a formerly wayward child produces in his parents a river of tears, so the Spirit of the Lord Jesus will bring forth a sermon that is clothed with the fervor befitting the gospel, exuding the fragrance of Christ’s sweetness, driven by a power that only love can generate—because it is driven by the man’s love for Christ that many waters cannot quench. It will give the preacher the kind of indescribable joy that Jeremiah (15:16) had after he ate: “The joy and rejoicing of my heart.”

No one is cold who has been with Jesus.

So, let us go to our studies and spend time with Jesus. Think of praying, not prompts.

“Study yourself to death, and pray yourself alive again.”

**THE MINISTER’S OWN EXPERIENCE**

I cannot deny that God may be pleased, at times, to use such a paper produced by AI, read by an unfeeling minister. He did speak by Balaam’s beast, conveyed truth through false prophets, and has used reading

sermons in vacant churches, read by untrained men with little expression. And since God used them, I suppose He may be pleased to use a sermon produced by AI to sprinkle a little grace on His people.

But making a sermon by AI is like a husband communicating with his wife through his secretary: “Tell her I love her....” Or parents saying goodnight to their children in the other room by text. We are not coming to this, are we?

At the end of the day, however, the argument against AI for us preachers will be that of our own experience.

Let us ascend the pulpit without spending our week with God, without wrestling with the Word of God, without crying over the Word of God, without begging God to bless us with an appropriate word for His people in this particular place at this specific time. No communion with God in sweet fellowship. Try that. And see how dry your soul will be.

I know that this speaks to you because we have all done it. We looked at that 7,497-foot mountain and gave up. Maybe we went up a couple hundred feet—enough to get out of the sight of the people—waited there for a few days and then came down as though we had been in God’s presence. But there was very little of God for them that week, certainly not much for us. It is like the sad experience of Samson who, after his sin, expected it all to be the same, but the Spirit was absent. Samson was weak and defeated and miserable; and he could not deliver the people any longer.

But the experience of every preacher who begs of God, “I will wrestle with You all week long, and not let You go until You bless me, even if it means You cripple me!” will be that, crippled though he feels, and humbled though he becomes, he will be a blessing to the people because there is nothing in all the world like standing in the presence of God Himself. His face and soul will radiate the glory of God as did Moses’, and it will be as unmistakable for you as it will be for the people under your care: “He’s been with God.”

Now you know why I believe that God will never be pleased with an AI-generated sermon, nor with the minister who tries. But, O, how He is pleased with the man who, having seen Him, cannot wait to return to the people and tell them the secrets of Jehovah’s covenant!

<sup>1</sup> J. Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations*, vol. II, J. Owen, transl. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 283.

# 100TH ANNIVERSARY SPEECHES IN SIOUX FALLS

REPORT BY REV. RYAN BARNHILL

Jehovah has been faithful to the Protestant Reformed Churches in the one hundred years of her existence. Through all the years, He has been so good and gracious to us, and we have not deserved it at all. We have much reason to celebrate His tender mercies through the generations. One such celebration took place at Calvin University this past June. What an event that was, full of gladness and joy as we looked back on one hundred years as a denomination! Many thanks to those who organized that edifying week. [For more on that, see the September 2025 issue.]

Another celebration took place in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on Friday, September 12, 2025. Considering the 100th anniversary of our denomination, Heritage PRC's Evangelism Committee thought it would be good to host some speeches for the benefit of its own people and for the neighboring congregations (Calvary, Doon, Edgerton, and Hull). It is imperative that we know and learn from history. Repeatedly, God called Israel to remember their past and teach it to their children. Knowing and learning from our denominational history is also profitable: to warn, instruct, and encourage us, and to shed light upon our future way.

Rev. M. De Boer spoke on the history leading up to and including the beginning of the PRC. The speech especially addressed the battle of our forefathers against common grace. Rev. D. Kleyn picked up the history at



*Speakers: Rev. R. Barnhill,  
Rev. M. DeBoer, Rev. D. Kleyn*

the mid-1920s, briefly highlighting certain features of the later 1920s, the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s. Rev. Kleyn also explained the factors that contributed to, and the issues involved in, the doctrinal controversy of the 1950s. Rev. R. Barnhill concluded the evening by giving five lessons drawn from the history that was covered in the other two speeches. Those five lessons were as follows: 1) The truth is worth fighting for; 2) We should continue insisting on distinctive preaching and teaching in our churches; 3) Doctrinal controversy is painful but beneficial; 4) Proper order in the church is important; 5) Our forefathers' concern for the antithesis in the 1920s should not be forgotten.

It was a good night of reflecting on our history. The evening gave us another opportunity to thank our covenant-keeping God. If you would like to access these three speeches, you are able to do so on Heritage PRC's YouTube page: [heritageprcec2113](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC6t113).



# REPORTS OF CLASSIS EAST AND CLASSIS WEST

SEPTEMBER 2025

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## CLASSIS EAST REPORT

Meeting September 10, 2025

Classis East met September 10 in the sanctuary of First Protestant Reformed Church of Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Bill Langerak chaired the long meeting that adjourned around 11:30 P.M. Classis began with the routine matters of approving the credentials of the delegates, signing the Formula of Subscription by first-time delegates to classis, asking the questions of Church Order Article 41, receiving reports from the stated clerk and the Classical Committee, and appointing five committees of pre-advice.

The Classical Committee, which acts on behalf of Classis East between its meetings, proposed an examination schedule for Pastor-elect Aaron VanDyke. Classis adopted the schedule. Before the examination, classis welcomed three synodical deputies from Classis West, Revs. A. Brummel, J. Engelsma, and D. Kleyn. These deputies represent synod. The approval of a classical examination requires that the synodical deputies concur with the decision of classis.

The examination began with hearing brother VanDyke's specimen sermon on Luke 10:2. Classis approved his sermon and conducted a ten-section oral examination of the brother. Classis approved the examination and advised Cornerstone PRC to proceed to install Mr. VanDyke as their pastor. The synodical deputies concurred with the decision of classis. We thank God for another laborer for the spiritual harvest and pray God's blessing on him and his wife and family in their new church home.

Classis treated two appeals in closed session. Classis decided to declare the appeals not legal. In both cases classis determined that the appellants had not finished working with the consistory with whom they had a disagreement. In connection with one of

the cases, classis provided advice to the appellant and consistory with what steps they should take to treat the case properly.

Classis, in closed session, dealt with reports from two special committees that serve classis. Classis mandated that the Classical Committee bring a recommendation to the next meeting of classis in January about potentially publishing one of these reports.

Classis received on its agenda a letter requesting clarification of the status of a former special committee of Classis East. The committee was appointed in 2022 to investigate the sexual abuse case of a former pastor. The committee was not previously officially disbanded by Classis East. Classis decided to declare that it considers the committee "to be disbanded." The ground given states that the mandate of the committee was assumed by a synodical committee appointed in 2023, which effectively disbanded the committee of classis.

The stated clerk sought the advice of Classis East on



*Pastor-elect A. VanDyke and Rev. W. Langerak  
with the classical diploma*



what to do when an appellant submits their case for the agenda of classis and requests that their case be shared with only delegates and alternates to classis, excluding the rest of the council members in Classis East. Classis approved a recommendation declaring, “though the stated clerk may forward requests from appellants to restrict material, he has no authority to restrict material from the agenda to delegates only.”

Classis ended its session treating other routine matters including the adoption of a pulpit supply schedule for five vacant churches (soon to be four after Mr. VanDyke’s installation), the approval of the reimbursement of expenses totaling \$4,283.06, and the appointment of Hudsonville PRC to host classis on January 14, 2026. After the delegates voted to adjourn, Rev. Langerak closed the meeting with prayer.

Rev. Spronk

Stated Clerk, Classis East

## CLASSIS WEST REPORT

Meeting September 24-25, 2025

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met on September 24-25, 2025, in Crete (IL) PRC. The Crete congregation did a fine job of hosting the delegates.

The day before the meeting, Crete’s Council hosted an officebearers’ conference on the subject of “Justification and Forgiveness.” A nice-sized crowd was present, including the professors and students from our seminary. Rev. J. Engelsma spoke on “The Relationship between Once-for-All Justification and Daily Forgiveness;” Rev. R. Smit spoke on “Repentance and Remission of Sins through Faith in Jesus Christ;” and Rev. D. Kleyn spoke on “The Necessity of Admonitions in the Work of Officebearers.” A question-and-answer session concluded the conference. The conference speeches are available on Crete PRC’s YouTube channel.

Delegated to classis were 26 men (11 ministers, 14 elders, and 1 deacon) from the 13 consistories. By alphabetical rotation, Rev. H. Bleyenbergh chaired the meeting. Seminarian Bruce Feenstra, currently doing his internship at Doon PRC, was given permission to be present during all the deliberations of classis.

Four men signed the Formula of Subscription as

first-time delegates to classis; the minutes of the previous meeting of classis were approved; the four questions of Article 41 of the Church Order were asked of the consistories and satisfactorily answered by all; routine reports were heard from the stated clerk, Classical Committee, and Reading Sermon Library Committee; and the chairman appointed six committees of pre-advice.

After recessing for part of the morning to allow the committees of pre-advice time to prepare advice, classis gave approval to Prof. D. Kuiper to publish some material from the Classis West archives in an upcoming article in the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* on the history of Classis West.

After recessing again for most of Wednesday afternoon, classis dealt in closed session with the appeal of an individual against the discipline work of his consistory. Classis did not sustain the appeal, and thus upheld the discipline work of the consistory.

Wednesday evening classis began to treat in closed session two protests against decisions made by the previous classis with respect to the work of a special committee tasked with helping a consistory. Classis sustained the protests. On Thursday morning, classis gave additional, detailed advice to the consistory involved. Classis also treated the report of the special committee regarding its labors over the last six months and approved its work.

Classis made a schedule of pulpit supply through April of 2026 for the vacant congregations of Hope PRC (Redlands, CA) and Lynden (WA) PRC.

The expenses of the meeting were approved in the amount of \$11,459.95.

Classis finished its work a little before noon on Thursday.

Classis West will meet next in Heritage PRC (Sioux Falls, SD) on March 4, 2026, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Stated Clerk, Classis West



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### ANNOUNCEMENTS

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#### WEDDING ANNIVERSARY

With joyful hearts and thanksgiving to God we celebrate the 50th wedding anniversary of our parents, grandparents and great grandparents, **Bruce and Deb Lubbers**, on November 7, 2025. We are thankful for the godly instruction and care that they have and continue to give to our family. The love that they have for each other, for their family, and for the body of Christ is a beautiful example for us to follow. Our prayer is that the Lord will continue to bless them in the years to come. "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22, 23).

Jon and Melissa Lubbers

Travis, Braden, Connor, Mekenzie

Josh and Sara Lubbers

Tony and Kelly Kooiker

Oliver, Benjamin

Jacob, Nicholas, Alayna, Lucas, Michael, David

Joe and Stacey Lubbers

Maggie, Lily, Jase, Blake

Rick and Carmen Mingerink

Hailey, Jack, Noah, Willem, Caleb, Clara,

Anna, Theodore (in glory), Mabel

Josh and Carrie Meulenberg

Sadie, Casen, Nella, Emelyn

Byron Center, Michigan

#### CLASSIS EAST

Classis East of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Hudsonville PRC on Wednesday, January 14, 2026, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 15 (30 days before classis convenes).

Rev. Clayton Spronk, Stated Clerk

#### SB FOR BINDING

The September issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 101. If you would like your own issues of volume 101 bound, please send/bring them to the RFPA office before the December 1, 2025. For additional orders, call the RFPA at (616) 457-5970.

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**REFORMED  
WITNESS HOUR**

FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED

**REV. CARL HAAK**

11/2 Enduring in a Lawless Age, Matt. 24:12, 13

11/9 Enduring by Searching the Scriptures, John 5:39

11/16 Enduring from One Generation to the Next, Ps. 145:4

11/23 Thanksgiving Through Contentment, Phil 4:11-13

11/30 The Coming of the Son of Man, Mark 13:24-27

