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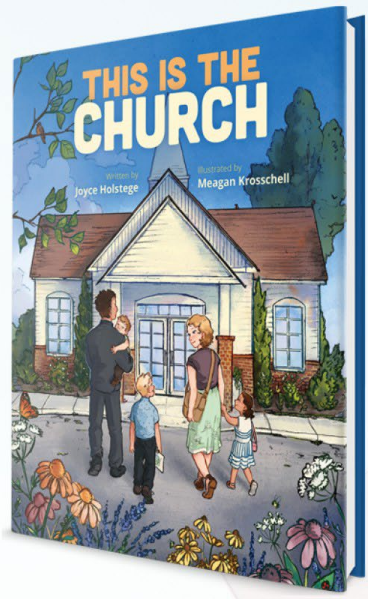
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I WILL LAY ME DOWN AND SLEEP

REV. STEPHAN REGNERUS
pastor of Hull PRC in Hull, Iowa

I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep: for thou LORD, only makest me dwell in safety–Psalm 4:8

One thing we may not think about very much is how our theology affects our sleep. We believe everything that we do as Christians must be done to God's glory. This certainly has implications for our waking hours. While we work and play, eat and converse, we do all for the glory of God's name. But have you ever considered how you are to glorify God in your sleep? Sleep, just like work and play, must be done for the glory of God's name. By our sleep we express our trust in the living God. We who are Christians are called to close our eyes at night with the confidence that God will cause us to dwell in safety.

THE PSALMIST'S RESOLVE

The psalmist David was committed to getting sleep. He stated: "I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep." David's resolve to sleep was godly and commendable. His commitment to sleep was not selfishness or laziness. Nor was David guilty—as so many today are guilty—of making an idol out of self-care. Instead, David demonstrated his faith in his resolve to sleep. He was a man after God's own heart, and he was thankful for God's gift of sleep. David's resolve serves as a convicting and compelling example for us who live in a culture that prides itself on getting by with little sleep.

Sleep is a God-given period of rest for His children. It is a time when we who are Christians are physically, mentally, and spiritually strengthened. When we sleep well, we generally have a greater capacity the day following to carry out our work for the glory of God's name.

Sleep is a good gift for us to receive. We are fearfully and wonderfully made, and God has shaped us in such a way that we need regular periods of rest and refreshment. We are not like machines that are reenergized by adding more gasoline or recharging the battery. Instead, we are complex, thinking, willing people, created both body and soul, and our "tanks are refueled" in a variety of ways, including sleep.

God is the One who provides the gift of sleep. The psalmist confessed in Psalm 127:2, "It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so he giveth his beloved sleep." God commands His people to have regular periods of rest. For six days of the week the Israelites were to labor and do all their work, but on the seventh day they were to rest from their labors. Not only were the Israelite people commanded to rest; additionally, one year out of seven was designated as the year of Jubilee, and the land was also to be given rest. The psalmist David understood the value of rest, and he was resolved to receive it.

What is the context in which David was resolved to sleep? It is noteworthy that David was committed to sleep, not only when all was well but also when there was adversity, and even when he was confronted by his enemies! In the previous chapter—which is closely related to chapter 4—David observed the many enemies that troubled him and rose up against him. The heading of the third Psalm indicates that the primary enemy was Absalom, who rose up against his father in rebellion. Here, David's life was at stake! The kingdom was at stake! The lineage of David—from which God had promised the Messiah of Israel—was at stake! And what did David do in the face of such adversity? "I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me" (Ps. 3:5). It is vain to sit up late and eat the bread of sorrows, for God gives His beloved sleep.

Dear reader, is it your resolve to sleep even in the context of trouble and adversity?

Sometimes, people choose to remain awake. That is, they choose wakefulness for the wrong reasons. They

choose to stay awake when they ought to be following David's example of sleeping. To be sure, they have their list of excuses to defend their late hours. "There is so much work to complete! God has given me many important obligations that I must fulfill. The day has such few hours, so I must work both day and night."

Others wrongly choose wakefulness, not because they feel overworked, but because they are overstimulated. Today, such stimulation typically comes from our cell phones. How many people do not deprive themselves of sleep because they choose to take the cell phone into the bedroom? And then they mindlessly scroll through social media or dream about their next Facebook Marketplace purchase.

David was resolved: "I will lay me down in peace and sleep." Is that your resolve?

While some choose not to sleep, others have a different struggle. Some cannot sleep well, even though they desire to sleep. Sleep is evasive to this person. This might describe young parents who are kept awake by the midnight cries of their children. Or this may describe a person whose mind remains active in the nighttime hours. This godly saint understands the importance of rest, and he even prays to God for the gift of sleep. But it seems the harder this person pursues sleep, the more his mind races with anxious thoughts. This is a lonely place to be, for it seems the Devil works the hardest in the hours of the night.

In seeking a remedy, we must acknowledge that there can be a physical aspect to one's struggle with sleep. The one who consistently does not sleep well may be advised to visit a doctor and seek medical help.

But there also is frequently a spiritual and emotional component to one's struggle for sleep. Yes, there is the help of the doctor, but there also is the help of the Physician of the soul, Jesus Christ. Let us not underestimate the help that He alone is capable of giving. He teaches we must have peace to sleep, and He provides the gift of peace.

THE PEACE HE HAD

The psalmist was able to sleep because he had peace in his soul. He confessed he would "lay down in peace and sleep," for the Lord made him to dwell in safety. The Scriptures connect *peace* and *sleep*. We read in Leviticus 26:6, "And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid…." And again in Ezekiel 34:25, "And I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Peace is essential for a good night's rest. Without peace from God, there is no sleep. Lacking peace one will toss and turn, assuming a midnight watch as the hours tick by. When our minds are filled with anxious concerns or anxious questions—when we feel guilt over words spoken earlier in the day and now our mind cannot stop replaying the regrettable scenario, or when we dwell on all the uncompleted tasks of the day and wonder how we will ever finish the work tomorrow—then sleep will be far, far from us. Lacking peace, it matters not how comfortable our bed is. Then there is no sleep.

How precious is peace!

Peace is a quiet and secure confidence in God through Jesus Christ. It is the confidence that the God who in the past has supplied your every need will continue to do so in the future. Peace is not based on external circumstances; it is not the removal of hardships and weighty responsibilities. When David's many enemies troubled him and rose up against him, then he laid himself down and slept. And when the wicked troublemakers prospered while the psalmist's place was made very small, David still confessed: "Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased" (v. 7).

The peace that we need for sleep is a peace given us because of and through Jesus Christ. Peace is *because of* Jesus Christ, for His saving work on the cross is the only basis of our peace with God. And our peace is *through* Jesus Christ, for He does not leave us comfortless, but He gives His Holy Spirit who spreads God's love abroad in our hearts.

THE HOPE OF THE SOUL

The text also points us forward to Christ's return. We join the psalmist in anticipating a day when God will give us perfect and everlasting rest. This will happen when Jesus takes us from this earth to be with Him in heavenly glory. Jesus declares to all weary pilgrims, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

Falling asleep at nighttime is a picture of what

happens at the moment of the believer's death. The Scriptures describe death in terms of sleep. We read in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." The same faith by which we close our eyes and sleep at night in peace is the faith that allows us to end our earthly journey in peace. Then we will dwell in the safety that the Lord only can provide.

When we lie down and sleep in peace, we expect to wake up refreshed in the morning.

When we have fought the good fight and our bodies "sleep" in the grave, we expect that Jesus will awaken our bodies in the final resurrection.

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed…for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible…" (1 Cor. 15:51, 52). We look forward to Christ's coming when we will enjoy eternal, heavenly rest.



A TRIBUTE TO THE REFORMED AMILLENNIALIST HERMAN HOEKSEMA

PROF. BRIAN HUIZINGA

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Rev. Herman Hoeksema (1886-1965), one of the founding fathers of the Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC), has been used by God to exert a tremendous positive theological influence upon these churches. Much of our Reformed heritage that we know and love—the sweet and never-failing grace of God rooted in eternal predestination, made manifest in Christ, communicated by the Spirit, and experienced in an everlasting covenant of friendship with us and our children—is a treasure that God bestowed upon us largely through the heart and mind, pulpit and pen of H. Hoeksema.

But the influence of Hoeksema extends far beyond the PRC. Even over a half century since his passing into glory, he remains a widely known and read theologian in broader Reformed and Presbyterian circles. In fact, in the striking providence of God, as I was sketching an outline of this article during the first week of March, I received a phone call from a minister of a conservative Presbyterian denomination in the southern part of the U.S. He was seeking advice in connection with his affinity for the theology of Hoeksema, and during our conversation he noted that while the PRC is not generally well known among Presbyterians in the south, every minister he knows has read Hoeksema. Over the years and throughout the country, I have repeatedly heard similar comments in conversing with brethren outside of the PRC. However, as well known, read, and discussed (with appreciation) as Hoeksema is, seldom is he *publicly* acknowledged and commended outside the PRC.

I want to acknowledge Hoeksema publicly, and this tribute is an expression of gratitude to the God of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things, to whom be glory forever. I remember growing up in the PRC we heard warnings not to idolize Hoeksema. Fair enough, idolatry is wicked. Today, the greater threat, particularly among younger generations, is ignorance and ingratitude, which are also wicked before God. I want to acknowledge Hoeksema, and now particularly for his Reformed amillennialism as it comes to expression in his commentary on Revelation, *Behold He Cometh*.[1] What a masterful eschatological work of biblical exposition and a gift from on High as relevant today as when it was first received!

1 *Behold He Cometh: An Exposition of the Book of Revelation.* Grandville, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969; 2nd edition, 2000.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MILLENNIUM

The doctrine of eschatology (the last things), and specifically the millennium, is one of the hottest, most debated, and controversial topics in theology, and has been for some time now. Ongoing warfare in the Middle East, fascination with the White House's position on Israel, the rise of Christian nationalism, talk of an imminent rapture, intense focus on apocalyptic images from Daniel and Revelation, a flood of books, radio messages, and podcasts on pop eschatology, fear of AI with its "god-tier" level of intelligence and capabilities for a potentially sinister surveillance of mankind, concern over the growing westward expansion of Islam, fears of a biological rogue virus sparking an international pandemic, and worldwide civil unrest are among many factors contributing to an increasing interest in eschatology, specifically the millennium. It is not difficult to find Christians talking about the millennium.

One's view of the millennium is so important because it amounts to much more than a literal or symbolic interpretation of the expression "a thousand years" as it is repeated several times in Revelation 20. One's view of the millennium amounts to a complex eschatological system that shapes his understanding of nearly everything in eschatology, including the precursory signs, the nature of Christ's kingdom, the second coming of Christ, and the final resurrection. Most Christians know that if you are curious about another's view of eschatology, all you have to do is ask one simple question: "What is your view of the millennium? Are you A-mil, Post-mil, or Pre-mil?" The answer says a lot.

At bottom, what makes the millennium so important is that your view of it governs your *expectation* for the future. Your expectation then determines your outlook on life, your present behavior, and your hope.

Some expect that this present age will gradually merge into the millennial reign of Christ on earth as a golden age for the church, a time of unprecedented earthly peace and prosperity. The witness of Christ will increasingly prevail through all nations so that most people on earth, including Jews, will be converted. Soon, in traveling the world from sea to sea, it will be difficult to find someone who does *not* confess that Jesus is Lord. Society will be Christianized, whether by gospel preaching or Christian political influence, or both, so that Christian principles shape social and political structures and determine the moral environment of the culture. Formerly antagonistic nations, like Israel and Iran, or Russia and Ukraine, will dwell together in peace. Sin will not be totally eradicated but the effects of the curse will be largely overcome. The future is bright, things will keep getting better, and according to many, the church will not face great tribulation under the Antichrist because that all happened back around AD 70. Except for a little season at the very end of history when Satan is loosed and through a fearful reign of terror violently assaults believers, history will close with the complete victory of the Messianic kingdom on earth. Then Christ will return to raise the dead and conduct the final judgment, although that coming is at least 1,000 years from now.

Is this *your* expectation? I pray not. This is the unbiblical, carnal, and empty dream of postmillennialism (Christ returns *after* an earthly millennium). It has many variations, but every form is but a dream.

Others have different expectations. Some expect that at any moment, perhaps before you finish reading this paragraph, Christ will suddenly and unexpectantly return in a secret rapture and take the church of New Testament believers into the air with Him. They will never have to face a great tribulation under the Antichrist. After that rapture, the Antichrist will appear on earth and make a covenant with the Jews in Palestine for three and a half years. Then Antichrist will break his covenant and persecute the Jews for another three and a half years. After those seven years, Christ will return to the earth in the second phase (the public phase) of His second coming. He will destroy the Antichrist and set up an earthly, millennial kingdom in Jerusalem with the Jews, who (if not killed) were converted in the tribulation. Many other Jews will turn to Him in faith. Christ will then sit on David's restored throne in Jerusalem and the Jews will rule the nations. There will be peace and prosperity among men and even among animals like wolves and lambs. After 1,000 years, Satan will be loosed for a little season and wage war against the restored Jewish kingdom by means of enemies who had not bowed to Christ. Then Christ will put down the assault, raise the dead, and conduct the final judgment.

Is this *your* expectation? I pray not. This is the unbiblical, carnal, and empty dream of dispensational premillennialism—the eschatological view that prevails among many evangelical Christians. Premillennialism (Christ returns *before* the earthly millennium) has many variations, but every form is but a dream.

There is another expectation, the *amillennial* hope, and only it is biblical. Amillennialists expect *no* earthly kingdom of Jesus. Scripture teaches that we should expect increasing opposition to the name of Christ with abounding lawlessness in society, deceivers waxing worse and worse, a growing apostasy from the faith, and the appearance of the Antichrist as the man of sin whose kingdom will persecute Christians as never before. Nevertheless, we rejoice because Christ reigns triumphantly. While Satan is bound through most of this new dispensation and prevented from joining the nations together to take counsel against the instituted church of Christ and persecute her out of existence, the gospel runs its victorious course to the ends of the earth in established congregations and mission fields for the salvation of the elect. While some saints are reigning in their disembodied spirits in heaven, the rest of us triumph by faith on earth. Christ's kingdom of glory, peace, and righteousness is already here as Christ rules by His Word and Spirit in the hearts of regenerated believers who fight valiantly for His cause in this godless world and look for the perfection of His kingdom in glory. If we must give our head to the chopping block for the name of Christ, as soon many of us will, such courageous martyrdom is not defeat but one of the most powerful manifestations of the glory of Christ's kingdom.

There are other expectations. In the realm of Christianity today there is a smattering of eschatological views, and many people pick and choose what they want from various systems or from the pop eschatology they most recently heard from their new favorite podcaster, blogger, or radio Bible teacher. Many are quick to unmoor themselves from their theological heritage and embrace whatever satisfies their itching ears at the moment.

PUBLISHED AMILLENNIALISTS

Riding in the wake of this rising interest in eschatology, the widespread confusion over the millennium, and the obvious fact that our Lord's return is drawing near, many authors in the last couple decades have published theological works or commentaries that are amillennial. These amillennialists include G.K. Beale (OPC), Joel Beeke (HRC), David Engelsma (PRC), Dennis Johnson (PCA), Rick Phillips (PCA), Kim Riddelbarger (URC), Sam Storms (Calvinistic Baptist and former premillennialist), Cornelis Venema (URC), and Sam Waldron (Calvinistic Baptist). They are preceded by Anthony Hoekema (CRC), whose book on eschatology (1979) was for years the standard amillennial textbook in Reformed seminaries and other Bible colleges, and William Hendriksen (CRC) whose commentary on Revelation was published in 1940.

What is striking about all these books, Engelsma's being an exception, is that though they cite pages of sources, most of them make no reference to Herman Hoeksema. Beale, Johnson, and Beeke all cite Hoeksema once in a brief footnote, but the rest say nothing.

What is also striking is that they all refer to Hendriksen's commentary, *More Than Conquerors,* and most laud it for its brilliance as an amillennial interpretation of Revelation. For example, Sam Waldron, whose book on amillennialism just came off the press last year, writes, "William Hendriksen's profound but popular exposition in *More Than Conquerors* should be and can be read by any student of the Word."[2] But before the renowned amillennialist Hendriksen, there was Herman Hoeksema. And what follows is some interesting history. Although Hoeksema's commentary was published posthumously in 1969, nearly thirty years after Hendriksen's, Hoeksema's goes back much earlier. Before being published in book form, Hoeksema's exposition of Revelation was published serially in this magazine, the *Standard Bearer*, and before that, he preached more than one series through Revelation. In fact, he first preached through Revelation right after World War I when he was the pastor of Eastern Avenue CRC (1920-1924).[3] And guess who sat under his preaching as a member of his congregation at that time? The Calvin

2 Sam Waldron, *The Doctrine of the Last Things: An Optimistic Amillennial View* (Greenbrier, AR: Free Grace Press, 2025), 153.

3 See the editor's preface in Hoeksema's *Behold He Cometh*, xvi.

Seminary student William Hendriksen, who is quoted as saying about Hoeksema's preaching, that "it was forceful, well-organized, thematic, exegetical, generally inspiring. Here was a man who never rambled."[4] To what degree Hoeksema influenced Hendriksen in his understanding of Revelation we can only speculate, but because Hendriksen's commentary on Revelation mirrors Hoeksema's on many important hermeneutical and exegetical points, it is not unreasonable to say that anyone who credits Hendriksen ought to credit Hoeksema also.

THE IMPORTANCE OF *BEHOLD HE COMETH*

Hoeksema's commentary, while not above criticism, is superb from many points of view. First, like all his writings, it is *accessible*, and this is especially valuable for such a difficult book as Revelation with all its highly symbolic, complex visionary prophecies. Jeff Crippen recently said it best, with his kind, *public* remarks about Hoeksema. Crippen (probably most well known for his book on domestic abuse, *Unholy Charades*), posted a YouTube video of him reading from *Behold He Cometh* to the people of his congregation, and he said about Hoeksema, "He is like J.C. Ryle and Martyn Lloyd Jones. He is easy reading, but he is not shallow."[5] Anyone can read Hoeksema, and many have in preparing for a Bible study or in making a sermon.

Second, *Behold He Cometh* is valuable in providing the reader with interpretive keys for unlocking the seemingly impenetrable prophecies of the book. For one, Hoeksema emphasizes that Revelation contains *symbolism* and must be interpreted that way. Then he does a masterful job using the rest of Scripture to interpret all the symbols. An obvious point is that no one should read "a thousand years" in Revelation 20 and think of an *earthly* kingdom of a *literal* 1,000 years. Also, Hoeksema points out that Revelation does not proceed in a strictly linear chronological order, as if the events of one chapter immediately follow the events of the preceding chapter in time. Rather, Revelation uses recapitulation, or what Hendriksen called "progressive parallelism," so that all the visionary sections of Revelation are *parallel* and take us through the new dispensation; but each successive section also *progresses* and brings the reader deeper into the realities of this age and the eternal state. This is fundamental to a right understanding of the book, including the transition from Christ's return to destroy the Antichrist in Revelation 19 to the millennium in chapter 20 (the latter does not follow the former chronologically!).

Third, Hoeksema's commentary is distinctively Reformed. The outstanding historical reality of the new dispensation and the most important sign of Christ's return is the preaching of the gospel. While so many view the preaching as a well-meant but ineffectual offer of salvation, Hoeksema makes preaching what it really is. It is the unstoppable power of God unto salvation for every single person God intends to save, so that the world-wide spread of the gospel truly is like a white horse that goes forth conquering and to conquer. Additionally, *Behold He Cometh* is in full harmony with the Three Forms of Unity and it has woven through it the comfort of the precious Reformed doctrine of God's covenant with believers and their spiritual seed, a bond of love that not even the final manifestation of the gates of hell can sever.

Fourth, through Hoeksema's meticulous and lively exegesis, God will fix your gaze upon Himself as He sits sovereignly and majestically on His throne above all the unrest below. He will stir your affection for the worthy Lamb who was slain and now controls history for us. He will give you the unshakable confidence that no matter how terrifying the future appears, the church will triumph by the same gracious Spirit that operated in the apostle John. You will walk away from this book with a clearer view of the end and greater hope to get there.

CLOSING TRIBUTE

Only God knows how many people have benefited from Hoeksema. Some are kind and honest enough to acknowledge his excellent work. Over the years, many reviewers *have* praised and heartily recommended Hoeksema's work for its clarity, simplicity, and penetrating insights, including Hendriksen himself

4 Gertrude Hoeksema, *Therefore Have I Spoken: A Biography of Herman Hoeksema* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1969), 143. Thanks to Gary VanDerSchaaf for helping me locate this reference.

5 Jeff Crippen, "The Church With an Open Door (Herman Hoeksema)," posted June 01, 2025, by Light for Dark Times, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oySRslqJR84.

who warmly recommended it. However, the greatest commendation I have ever read is found in the book *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* by Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson. The back of the book contains a lengthy annotated bibliography compiled by Beeke. In the last section of it the reader is given a list of over fifty of the most notable and helpful eschatological works by the great Reformed orthodox systematicians and commentators from the 1600s to today. The impressive list concludes with these words, "Where should you begin? Read the book of Revelation again. While doing so, consult Herman Hoeksema's *Behold He Cometh.* Then read…."[6] I could not think of better advice! In fact, I will borrow those words as my tribute to Hoeksema. If you have any desire to learn eschatology, read. First the Bible, then Hoeksema.

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power…" (Rev. 4:11) for giving to Thy church the Reformed amillennialist Herman Hoeksema.

6 Joel R. Beeke and Sinclair B. Ferguson, eds. *Reformed Confessions Harmonized* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 271.



THE REFLECTIONS OF JOHN

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And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth—John 1:14

An old, weathered man has just marked his ninety-fourth year. It does not feel like much of a celebration but more like solitary confinement.

He sits on the sun-bleached rocks of an island, staring out at the surf. His hands tremble—not with fear, but with the effects of old age and sheer exhaustion. He lets out a deep sigh, contemplating his seemingly dim purpose.

His name is John, but also "beloved." He is an ordinary man who once touched the extraordinary. Having lived through the most significant century in human history, he sits now as the last living bridge between two worlds. There are no photographs to prove what he saw—only the crystal-clear gallery of his mind, vivid and sure, as if it were yesterday. But he knows that the testimony of Scripture will *always be the bridge*, the fullest revelation of the person and work of Jesus Christ (2 Pet. 1:18-20).

As John watches the crashing waves, his eyes sparkle as he reflects on his most memorable day of fishing. Not memorable because of the catch, but because of the call. As an ordinary man during an ordinary day of work, Jesus had suddenly "called them [James and John]. And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matt. 4:21, 22).

He reflects on seeing the glory of Jesus at the Transfiguration, when Jesus brought them "up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light" (Matt. 17:1, 2). He reflects on what God has spoken of Jesus, that He was His "beloved Son," and how Jesus had spoken that so often of him too.

He reflects on all the miracles. So many miracles. He remembers what he had written, that there were "many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (John 21:25). He shakes his head in

amazement. He marvels not only at the sheer physical defiance of those wonders, but at the greater wonder that after ninety-four years, the most miraculous thing he ever witnessed was not a dead man walking (John 11:43), but the mercy that rescued a common fisherman like him.

He knows of the extent of that mercy to him as he remembers his unmerciful desire to incinerate a Samaritan village with fire from heaven (Luke 9:54). The Lord's admonishment gripped his heart and led him to later pray for these same Samaritans, "that they might receive the Holy Ghost" (Acts 8:15).

John reflects on how Jesus, though truly the Son of God, repeatedly called himself the Son of Man. Jesus was "of the Father" and yet became a man like him. John could talk with Him, laugh with Him, and cry with Him. They could have deep, intimate discussions with each other, sometimes late into the night. Yet he also remembers Jesus' gift to preach a beautiful sermon to a great multitude, and still speak so personally that John felt he was the only one there (Matt. 5-7).

As his mental timeline moves forward, he thinks about all the meals they had shared together. His eyes narrow as he reflects on the last supper with his Lord. While he had wrestled with confusion about the future, he now understands clearly that the "Last Supper" would *not* be the last, for he had written: "Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:9). And he will be at that table—a beloved disciple, chosen and called to the eternal supper with Jesus.

But then the picture in his memory becomes very painful as he reflects on the image, seared into his mind, of his dear Lord hanging from the cross. A tear rolls down his cheek as he remembers the anguish on Jesus' face. He had watched them nail His hands and feet, and so many had ignorantly mocked and jeered. And he, John, had put Him there. *He* was responsible. Overcoming the truth of that reality, he knew, with confidence, his Lord's obedience and how that ultimate act of love had covered all his sins.

He reflects on the moment when Jesus had commanded him to "Behold" Mary, and how John had "from that hour" done exactly that (John 19:27). In compassion, in his ultimate moment of suffering, Jesus recognized Mary's need—and John's too—of spiritual support as they transitioned to life without Jesus in their midst. Witnessing Jesus' final breath was more than he could bear.

But then there was the empty tomb. He remembers his first-hand account: "Then went in also that other disciple, which came first to the sepulchre, and he saw, and believed" (John 20:8). To him—a "son of thunder" (Mark 3:17)—the silence of the empty tomb spoke volumes more than anything he had ever preached as an apostle. It was the definitive proof that every word the Son of Man had spoken was true.

He reflects on anxious waiting being replaced by startled joy when, several days later, he recognized Jesus on the shore. After coming to his senses, he remembers calling out to Peter, "It is the Lord" (John 21:7). It is He! My Lord and Savior! John chuckles as he recalls Peter's dive into the water. He sees the full circle of this day of fishing with that "first" day of fishing.

But he breathes in deeply as he recalls Jesus' final moment and his own ignorance. After all those discussions with Jesus, he and the disciples had asked if He would "at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6) What folly! Jesus' patient response was to promise "power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). He remembers the very moment when a "cloud received him out of their sight" (1:9). Like a photograph, his mind recalled all the detail. Sixty years ago, but like yesterday.

And just like that, they were on their own. He remembers the anxious chatter in those early days when they had so many questions about what would happen next. Yet, the Holy Spirit came soon, not just to give power, but to assure them they were not alone (Acts 2).

He reflects on that truth being confirmed when he took part in their first miracle. He remembers that look in Peter's eyes—oh, that look!—when he, "fastening his eyes upon him [the lame man] with John, said, Look on us" (Acts 3:4). He remembers the joy on the man's face as he "leaping up stood, and walked…leaping, and praising God" (3:8).

But John moves from the memory of the lame man's joy to his experience of loss, specifically when his dear brother James was executed at the hands of Herod

Agrippa (Acts 12:2). The loss of James strengthened his resolve to confess, unashamedly, the name of Christ before men. He further remembers when each one of his fellow apostles, as well as many friends, now passed into glory. Only he remains. And as John looks out at the horizon, he utters, barely audible, "How long, Lord?"

No answer is given, but John remembers what work the Lord had recently given him to do, and his mind shifts to his writings. A gospel narrative, three epistles, and revelations from Christ Himself. He offers a prayer of gratitude for the strength given him to carry out that work. John reminds himself that the answer to his purpose at age 94 lies on the very pages of those writings, namely, to "love one another" (1 John 4:7).

Now, as John rests, a weary old man, he reflects again on that last day of fishing with Jesus some six decades ago (John 21). Jesus had revealed to Peter that he would die the martyr's death (21:18), and he remembers with grief the day he heard of its fulfillment. But now he remembers the question that Peter had asked Jesus about John himself:

> Peter seeing him [John—"the disciple whom Jesus loved"—v. 20] saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me (John 21:21, 22).

He had wondered what those words had meant, "if I will that he tarry till I come." But now, he wonders no more. Forming the faintest smile, he now understands that he was meant to outlive them all. But now he is ready to join them all, and to once again see his dear friend Jesus.

In the many years prior to that day of reflection on the sun-bleached rocks of Patmos, John had relocated to Asia before the First Jewish-Roman War of AD 66 and immediately became involved in the church at Ephesus.[1] Several years after his arrival there, Emperor Domitian (AD 81-96) exiled John to Patmos, due to his worship of Jesus as Lord. However, once Domitian was assassinated, Emperor Nerva (AD 96-98) authorized John's release and return to Ephesus.

From fishermen to disciple to apostle, John lived out his final days as a member of the church of Ephesus. Christian tradition says that in his final days, well into his 90s, John was so frail that he had to be carried into the church to worship. The church father Jerome wrote that "one phrase was constantly on his lips: 'My little children, love one another.' Asked why he always said this, he replied, 'It is the Lord's command, and if this alone be done, it is enough.'"[2]



The apostle John was given a few more wearisome years after that day of reflection. His firm trust in Jesus Christ became an eternal reality when he passed into glory at an advanced age, approaching, if not reaching, 100.[3] All the reflections, all the remembrances, all the pictures in his mind, now gone, for the former things have passed away, and he lives, once again, face to face

1 R. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude* (Wartberg Press: Columbus, OH), 363. Interestingly, John's influence in Ephesus was more impactful than Paul, who labored for 2-3 years in Ephesus on his third missionary journey (Acts 19). John's influence in Ephesus dominated the last 30 years of the apostolic age. See F.F. Bruce, *Peter, Stephen, James, and John: Studies in Non-Pauline Christianity* (Wm. B. Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, MI), 120, 121.

2 St. Jerome, cited in John MacArthur, *Twelve Ordinary Men* (Thomas Nelson: Nashville, TN), 117.

3 Lenski, *Interpretation of the Epistles of St. Peter, St. John and St. Jude*. According to the church father Irenaeus of Lyons (c. A.D. 130-202), John died during the reign of Emperor Trajan, who ruled from AD 98-117. See Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Epistle of James and the Epistles of John* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1986), 200. It is difficult to determine John's exact birth year; therefore, it is most probable that John died between the ages of 95 and 100.

with his Savior whom he loves. From sight, to faith, and at last—sight forever.

Do you, like John, have much to remember? Do the memories flood—sometimes in joy, and sometimes in sorrow? John reflected on his own regrets—do you carry yours as well? Do you, too, feel alone and confined? Are you perhaps an aged saint—a weary worshiper, or a weary pilgrim? Take comfort from the reflections of John. Know, with certainty, that you, too, are Jesus' *beloved*.

Know this love despite all your regrets, all your sorrows, all your sins.

Reflect on a life filled with expressions of His love.

Jesus loves you, and through John, has told you:

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (1 John 4:9, 10).

To be the "disciple whom Jesus loves" was not a title of pride for John, but a confession of his own faith in Jesus Christ. It was his ultimate identity. He knew with certainty that he was loved.

Dear Christian, you, too, are the "disciple whom Jesus loves." Like John, you have received the revelations of Jesus Christ through His Word. As the ascended King, Jesus gives you reminders of His eternal love and promises you an eternal glory to come. And He continually shows you, as He did to John, that He will never leave you or forsake you.

In times of reflection, remember, you are His beloved.



THE WONDERFUL OPERATION OF GOD IN US (1)

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Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure—Philippians 2:12-13

INTRODUCTION: GOD'S WORKS

In John 5:17 Jesus declares, "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." Jesus, like His Father, *works*. God's work is that which He does, everything that He does. God's works can be distinguished as God's works *ad intra*, that is, His works within Himself (His internal works) or His works within His eternal, unchangeable being; and God's works *ad extra*, that is, His works outside of Himself (His external works) or His works outside of His being, His works in or upon the creature.

God's works *ad intra* include the Father's begetting the Son, the Father's and Son's breathing forth the Spirit, and the triune God's eternal counsel including His decree of election and reprobation. God's works *ad extra* include works that can roughly be divided into four main categories: *creation* (God's work of giving existence and reality to something outside of Himself); *providence* (God's work of upholding, governing, and directing His creation); *salvation* (God's work of delivering His elect people from sin, death, and destruction); and *judgment* (God's work of punishing and destroying the wicked).

The relationship between these works is that God's works *ad extra* are the outworking or the realization of God's works *ad intra*. The Father begets the Son (*ad intra*); the triune God sends the Son in the incarnation (*ad extra*). The Father and the Son breathe forth the Spirit (*ad intra*); the Father and the Son send the Spirit upon the church and into our hearts (*ad extra*). The triune God decrees all things (*ad intra*); the triune God executes His counsel in time and history (*ad extra*).

In eternity God decreed (*ad intra*) to create and He

created the universe (*ad extra*) some 6,000 years ago as recorded in Genesis 1. Creation is not eternal; only God is eternal. God's plan to create is eternal; creation itself is not. In eternity God decreed (*ad intra*) to send Jesus Christ; and He sent Him (*ad extra*) into the world some 2,000 years ago at the incarnation (Gal. 4:4). The incarnation is not an eternal event; God's decree to send His Son is eternal, but the incarnation itself is not. In eternity God decreed (*ad intra*) that Jesus Christ would be crucified and Christ was crucified (*ad extra*) some 2,000 years ago just outside of Jerusalem. The cross is an eternally planned event, which took place in time and history. Thus creation, the incarnation, and the cross are not eternal realities: they are eternally planned events (*ad intra*) that are executed in time (*ad extra*).

Because God is eternal, He sees His works *before* He does them; in fact, all of His works are always before His eternal mind. But we who are finite, timebound creatures cannot know them unless God reveals them to us, and we know them in sequence. "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world" (Acts 15:18). As eternal, God sees all His works fulfilled already, although they are not yet fulfilled in reality. God sees the whole church glorified, although our glorification has not yet happened in reality. In eternity God saw Christ crucified and the elect justified, although those events had not yet taken place in reality. We must not confuse what God has decreed in eternity with what God realizes and will yet realize in time and history.

We love to reflect upon God's works. "O give thanks unto the LORD; call upon his name: make known his deeds among the people. Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him: talk ye of all his wondrous works" (Ps. 105:1-2). "The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein" (Ps. 111:2).

In Philippians 2:12-13 the apostle exhorts us to "work out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling;" and does so for a very interesting, a very striking, reason. "For [because] it is God which worketh." Work out (v. 12) for (because) it is God who works (v.13).

...it is an aspect of our salvation in which we are—or become—active. If we are called to "work out" our own salvation, then clearly we are active.

Here, then, is a work of God for us to consider: Make known *this* deed of God among the people; and talk ye of *this* wondrous work. Seek out and have pleasure in this *work* of God.

GOD WORKING IN US

In Philippians 2:13 the apostle identifies a work of God: "it is God which worketh." The verb "worketh" means "to put forth power, to be active, to be operative." We read in Ephesians 1:11 that it is God "who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"; and in Ephesians 1:19 we read that we "believe according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead."

The work of God in view here is God's work of salvation. We know this from the context: "Work out *your own salvation* with fear and trembling, for [because] it is God which worketh in you" (v. 12). We might paraphrase, "For [because] it is God who works your salvation in you."

Salvation, though, is a very broad concept in the Bible. Therefore, we must identify that aspect of salvation which the apostle has in mind. The Bible identifies three parts to our salvation. First, there is God's eternal purpose in ordaining our salvation: eternal election. Second, there is God's purchase of our salvation through Jesus Christ: redemption at the cross. Third, there is God's application of our salvation by the Holy Spirit. In the text we are commanded "to work out our own salvation" and the apostle speaks of God working that salvation "in us."

We can, then, easily identify the aspect of our salvation that the apostle has in mind. First, it is an internal aspect of our salvation: "God worketh in you." That rules out certain things. God does not work election "in us"—election has nothing to do with our willing and doing, and we were elected before the foundation of the world. God does not work redemption "in us"—redemption has nothing to do with our willing and doing, and we were redeemed at the cross some 2,000 before we

even existed. God does not work justification in us—justification has nothing to do with our willing and doing; it is God's declaration that we are righteous.

Second, it is an aspect of our salvation in which we are—or become—active. If we are called to "work out" our own salvation, then clearly we are active. We are not active in election; we are not active in redemption; and we are not active in regeneration or justification. But we are especially active in sanctification. We do not sanctify ourselves, of course—God does—but we do become active in sanctification. It is perfectly proper to say, "Work out *your own sanctification*." "Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, *let us cleanse ourselves* from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Cor. 7:1). "And every man that hath this hope in him *purifieth himself*, even as he is pure" (1 John 3:3).

Third, it is an aspect of salvation that is ongoing. The apostle writes, "It is God which worketh—present tense—in you." He does not write, "It is God which worked or has finished working," but "it is God *which worketh*." Certain aspects of our salvation are finished: election is finished; redemption is finished; regeneration, calling, and justification are finished. God does not continue to work those things; he continues to apply them, but not to work them. Thus Paul writes in Philippians 1:6: "Being confident of this very thing that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

Therefore, putting it all together we make the following conclusion: the work of God to which the apostle draws our attention is God's work of sanctification. We could paraphrase it: "Work out your own sanctification because God works your sanctification in you." Let us obey the exhortation of Psalm 105:2, "Talk ye of all his wondrous works," by considering God's wonderful work of sanctification. "Talk ye of his wondrous work of sanctification." Let us seek out and take pleasure in God's work of sanctification (Ps. 111:2).

Sanctification is a wide subject: it is God's work of making us holy. The text explains God's work of sanctification by calling attention to two things that God works in us. He works in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (v. 13).

GOD WORKING IN US TO WILL

There is, says the apostle, in you—in the believer—a will (a desire) of God's good pleasure. That is, there is in you—in the believer—a will (a desire) to please God. If you are a believer, you will find that will (that desire) in your heart. There is in you a will (or a desire) to believe in Jesus Christ. There is in you a will (or a desire) to repent. There is in you a true and sincere sorrow over, and hatred for, sin. There is in you a will (or a desire) to obey God by keeping His commandments. There is in you a will (or a desire) to love God and the neighbor.

Proof of this is found throughout Scripture. I cite only one text. "Pray for us, for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things *willing to live honestly*" (Heb. 13:18). The writer to the Hebrews willed (desired) to live honestly in all things.

The apostle is not speaking of the unbeliever or of the ungodly. *In them* God does *not* work both to will and to do of His good pleasure. The ungodly and the unbeliever do *not* have *within them* a will (a desire) to please God. God works in the hearts of the wicked, too: He hardens them and He accomplishes His purposes in them, but that is not the focus of verse 13: "For it is God which worketh *in you* both to will and to do of his good pleasure." About the wicked the apostle writes "Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Eph. 4:19). The unbeliever has no will or desire for anything good: he is a slave to his sins, to his lusts, and to his passions. "For we ourselves were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another" (Tit. 3:3). But in the believer there is a sincere will or desire to please God. The question comes to the believer: *where* do these holy desires, where does that holy will, *come from*? And the answer is, "*It is God* which worketh in you…to will of his good pleasure."

To be continued, God willing.



OF THE LAW OF GOD
(SECOND HELVETIC CONFESSION, CHAPTER 12c

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The Flesh Does Not Fulfill the Law.

For no flesh could or can satisfy the law of God and fulfill it, because of the weakness in our flesh which adheres and remains in us until our last breath. For the apostle says again: "God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do; sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for [our] sin" (Rom. 8:3). Therefore, Christ is the perfecting of the law and our fulfillment of it (Rom. 10:4), who, in order to take away the curse of the law, was made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13). Thus, He imparts to us through faith His fulfillment of the law, and His righteousness and obedience are imputed to us.

These last paragraphs of chapter 12 of the Second Helvetic Confession (SHC) conclude Heinrich Bullinger's treatment of the nature and purpose of the law of God. This is always a controversial subject in the church. It was in the days of the Reformation when the SHC was written, as it is today. Chapter 12 has both set forth the positive use of the law and exposed its scandalous abuse.

The focus of the present paragraph is on the impossibility of perfect obedience to God's law. The focus is not on the impossibility of perfect obedience on the part of the unregenerate person. Rather, the focus is on the impossibility of perfect obedience on the part of the elect, regenerated, Spirit-filled believer. The "us" and the "our" in this section refer to the people of God. Christians cannot keep the law of God perfectly.

The fact that Bullinger is referring to God's people is implied throughout the article. This is made explicit in the last sentence of the paragraph: "Thus He imparts to us through faith His fulfillment of the law, and His righteousness and obedience are imputed to us." He is speaking of those to whom God has imparted faith—believers. He has in mind those to whom Christ's righteousness and obedience are imputed—again, believers.

Because of the "weakness in our flesh" we cannot perfectly fulfill the law's demand. This is true of the child of God to the end of his life. The weakness of our flesh "adheres and remains in us until our last breath." The SHC mirrors the teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in Q&A 114: "But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments? No, but even the holiest men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience."

"Flesh" in this paragraph of the SHC refers to the sinful nature that remains in the child of God throughout his lifetime. The flesh of the child of God is his depravity, his indwelling sin, his "old man," and his Adam nature. Flesh is opposed to spirit, to the "new man" in Christ, to the new and heavenly life of regeneration.

That the child of God does not and cannot keep God's law perfectly implies that he, nevertheless, strives to keep God's law and does keep God's law, though imperfectly. He regards the law as the expression of God's will for his life. He understands the "must" of God's commandments, the "thou shalt" and "thou shalt not." He takes seriously his calling to do the will of God as set forth in His law. He regards God's law as binding upon him. And although he does not perfectly keep the law, he is sorry for his disobedience, repents of his transgressions against God's law, and beseeches God's forgiveness.

Another implication of the truth that so long as he lives the child of God cannot perfectly keep God's law is that the unbeliever cannot even begin to keep God's

law. The believer does not perfectly fulfill God's law, but the unbeliever does not even recognize the authority of God's law in his life. He does not strive to obey God's law, but he lives as he pleases. He is never sorry for his transgressions of God's law, although at times he may grieve over the consequences God visits on him because of his disobedience. Although the child of God falls far short of the obedience required of him, the unregenerate do not even make a beginning at the obedience that is required of them. They cannot perform good works of obedience to God's law.

How Far the Law Is Abrogated.

The law of God is therefore abrogated to the extent that it no longer condemns us, nor works wrath in us. For we are under grace and not under the law. Moreover, Christ has fulfilled all the figures of the law. Hence, with the coming of the body, the shadows ceased, so that in Christ we now have the truth and all fullness. But yet we do not on that account contemptuously reject the law. For we remember the words of the Lord when He said: "I have not come to abolish the law and the prophets but to fulfill them" (Matt. 5:17). We know that in the law is delivered to us the patterns of virtues and vices. We know that the written law when explained by the Gospel is useful to the Church, and that therefore its reading is not to be banished from the Church. For although Moses' face was covered with a veil, yet the apostle says that the veil has been taken away and abolished by Christ.

The title of this paragraph indicates that the law of God has been abrogated for the New Testament believer. At the same time, it indicates that the law has not been entirely abrogated. It has been abrogated but it has been abrogated only so far. How far?

The law has been abrogated in two important respects, according to the SHC.

First, the curse of the law has been abrogated. "The law of God is therefore abrogated to the extent that it no longer condemns us, nor works wrath in us." The curse of the law has been removed from us because our Head and representative has borne the curse in our place. "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13). The consequence that we deserve on account of our disobedience to the law has been endured by our Savior who stood in our place. The wrath of God that we deserve on account of our sins He endured all His lifetime but especially on the cross.

Secondly, the Old Testament civil and ceremonial laws, along with all the "figures," that is, types, and "shadows" have ceased. That which was peculiar to the sanctified life and worship of the Old Testament saints has been abolished. All that pertained to the worship of God in the temple, through the priesthood, and by means of sacrifices is done away with. We do not and may not worship God by means of a priesthood, as is the case in the Roman Catholic Church. We do not and may not worship God by slaying and offering up animal sacrifices. We do not and may not insist on the rites and rituals of the Old Testament, like circumcision. Parents may certainly have their baby boys circumcised for health reasons, but not for religious reasons as an ordinance required by God.

This abrogation extends to the civil laws of the Old Testament. The civil laws governed Israel's life as a nation. These laws also have "ceased, so that in Christ we now have the truth and all fullness." That means that if a New Testament farmer wants to plow with an ox and a donkey yoked together, he may do so. But the abiding truth of the law found in Deuteronomy 22:10 applies as much today as ever. That truth is that God's people must not be yoked together with unbelievers but must live antithetically, as Paul teaches in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. If a farmer wants to harvest the corners of his field or pick up fruit that has spilled on the ground, which was forbidden in the Old Testament (Lev. 19:9-10; Deut. 24:19-22), he may certainly do that. But he and all Christians must have a care for the poor who benefited from such civil laws.

The types and shadows are fulfilled in Christ: "Moreover, Christ has fulfilled all the figures of the law. Hence, with the coming of the body, the shadows ceased, so that we now have the truth and all fullness." All the rites and rituals of the temple, the priesthood and sacrifices, the holy days and festivals are fulfilled in Christ who is the Lamb of God (John 1:29) and our Passover who is sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). He is the high priest after the order of Melchisedec who entered the holiest with His own blood (Heb. 10:19-20). No

one would think to talk to a person's shadow when the person is standing near to you. As disrespectful as that would be, so offensive would observance of the types and shadows be after Christ the glorious reality has appeared.

Although the types and shadows have been abrogated, the moral law of God, the ten commandments, abide for all time. This is the burden of the last part of the paragraph, which begins "[b]ut yet we do not on that account contemptuously reject the law." Once again, the SHC takes aim at the antinomians who abused the gospel of grace proclaimed by the Reformation. After quoting the well-known words of Jesus in Matthew 5:17 and after asserting that in the law "is delivered to us the patterns of virtues and vices," Bullinger insists that "the written law when explained by the Gospel is useful to the Church, and therefore its reading is not to be banished from the Church." The antinomians reject the law of God and banish its reading and explanation from the church. The law is not to be read or preached authoritatively in the public worship services. The gospel of salvation by grace and through faith rules out the law and the necessity of works, they contend.

The error on the right that the Reformers opposed was the teaching that the place of works is that works merit. We are saved to one degree or another on account of our good works. This error was embraced by the Roman Catholic Church. But there is not only the error on the right. There are two ditches on either side of the narrow way into the kingdom of heaven. The error on the left is the rejection altogether of works, including works of obedience to God's law as the expression of gratitude. That error was embraced by more than one separatist group at the time of the Reformation, as we will see in the concluding section of chapter 12 of the SHC.

The Sects.

We condemn everything that heretics old and new have taught against the law.

The conclusion to chapter 12 is not even a section; it is only a single sentence. No specific heretics are cited, as is often the case in other concluding sections that cite heretics and sects.

Bullinger's concern is very narrow in the conclusion to chapter 12. He is not concerned with every erroneous teaching with regard to the law of God. He is not focused on the grievous error that makes obedience to the law meritorious. He will have much to say about that error in subsequent sections. But in this last sentence of chapter 12 he is concerned with those who teach "against the law," that is, those who reject the law and dismiss the law from the New Testament church. Bullinger is concerned with the threat of antinomianism.

Although the term "antinomian" did not come into vogue until the time of the Reformation when Martin Luther christened it, the error that the term labels has ever been a threat to the church. The apostle Paul opposed those who taught that we ought to sin that grace may abound (Rom. 6:1). And Jude warns against ungodly men who creep unawares into the church who "turn the grace of our God into lasciviousness" (Jude 4).

In the early history of the church there were several heretical groups, including the Gnostics, Manichaeans, Ebionites, and Marcionites who embraced the tenets of antinomianism. They denied the validity of the Old Testament law in the New Testament age. They proclaimed the dawning of a new day in which they were freed from the law.

The Reformers battled the antinomian error. The more radical Anabaptist groups taught that grace displaces works and that sins committed by Christians do not require repentance. Calvin battled the Libertines. Luther crossed swords with Johannes Agricola who taught that whereas non-Christians are held captive to the law, Christians are entirely freed from it. He quite famously said that the law belongs in the courthouse but not in the church. He denied that the preaching of the law works repentance and taught that it is the gospel alone that brings repentance.

Antinomianism remains a threat in the church today. It is a menace that must be exposed by faithful preaching, preaching that calls God's people to thankful obedience to God's law.

In a way, we are all practical antinomians who set aside the authority of God's law in our lives. We assert our independence from the law and the freedom to do what is right in our own eyes. Each of us has a sinful, antinomian nature against which we must fight daily.

Beyond practical antinomianism there is the threat

of *doctrinal* antinomianism. In the present day there are those, for example, who deny that "grace is conferred by means of admonitions" (Canons of Dordt, Heads 3/4, Art. 17). They only want to hear the comfort of the gospel, not the warnings and threatenings of God's Word. There are those who deny that believers must be called to repentance and faith. They do not want to hear the preacher say, "Repent or perish."

These all teach "against the law." These all are the tentacles of the many-headed monster that is antinomianism.



CHRISTIAN SOLDIER

MR. TOM CAMMENGA
elder in Faith PRC in Jenison, Michigan

Do you ever think of yourself as a soldier? Do you ever think of yourself as being involved in a war? Do you feel battle ready or maybe battle weary? No doubt, some who read this have in fact served their country in one of the armed forces, but most of us have never done so. For their sacrifice for our country, whether that is their service or the giving of their life, we are and should be incredibly grateful. This is, however, not the type of soldier to which I refer.

Likely your answer is the same as mine in that, very rarely do we see ourselves this way. Most often, I would say, we see ourselves as peaceful travelers, pilgrims, and even strangers in this life. This world, after all, is not our home. Each one of us hopes for and even longs for the time when our journey in this world will come to an end and we will be home at last in heaven. So often we focus on the end, and as important as that is, perhaps we tend sometimes to overlook, not only the journey itself, but especially the battle that takes place along the way.

The reality is that we *are* all soldiers, from the oldest members of the church all the way to the very youngest members. Each one of us is involved in a battle that begins at conception and ends only when we close our eyes in death. You, me, and every member of the universal church, are soldiers in the army of Jesus Christ. We are, together with the rest of the members of the church, brothers and sisters in arms. We are Christian soldiers.

But against whom do we fight? According to the Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 127 of Lord's Day 52, there are three main enemies that we face: "the devil, the world, and our own flesh." Verse 12 of Ephesians 6 tells us; "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." The battle that we fight then is not a physical battle. It is not a battle in which you and I take up physical weapons such as a sword or gun, and wage warfare against others, as did the Catholic church with her crusades and in her battle with the Reformers, or as do the Muslims. No, the battle for the Christian is a spiritual battle. Verses 13 through 18 of Ephesians 6, where we find a description of the whole armor of God, bring that out. All the pieces of this armor are spiritual and serve to protect and defend us in a spiritual way.

The battle, child of God, is very real. If you doubt that even in the least, you need only to look at the world around us and how antichristian it is. The fulfillment of the words of Isaiah 5:20 can be clearly seen: "Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" Is this not the world we live in? Marriage is no longer defined as only between a man and a woman but can be between men and between women. Any who oppose homosexuality—

biblically, by the way—are labeled as bigots, prejudiced, and intolerant. Sexual immorality runs rampant and is even encouraged by the philosophy of the world. We could go on and on. Satan is certainly at work.

For the child of God, the battle is not only real, but it is difficult. It would seem at first glance that this should not be. After all, we are Christians, and the things I have mentioned—and there are many more—are so against our beliefs and convictions, it should be rather easy to fight against these things and there should not really be a battle at all. Remember though, that we battle not only against Satan and the world, we battle too, and maybe most violently, against our own sinful nature. Do not forget that by nature, apart from the work of Jesus Christ on the cross, we are no different from the world. Our nature is the same as theirs, and if left to ourselves, we would gladly follow along with them, and grievously, we often do. This is our battle. It is difficult, bloody, and exhausting.

But take heart, Christian soldier. Although it is true that we are constantly involved in the battle, we do not fight in our own strength. In verse 10 of Ephesians 6 we read; "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might." The idea of the verse is not that Paul is simply encouraging the Ephesian believers to be strong in the Lord, as if this is up to them and something for them to do. Rather, the idea is that Paul encourages them *because* they are strong in the Lord and that strength has been worked in them by the Lord. They, and you and I along with them, have been endued with this strength by God Himself. It is as if the apostle is saying, you *are* strong in the Lord. And because that strength is in the Lord, it will only increase. Yes, we fight, but our fighting is only and ever in the power and might of Almighty God. Be encouraged, fellow soldier, and look to Him and His daily mercies as you face the enemy.

What then is necessary for us to be fit soldiers of Christ? Although most of us have never served in the armed forces of our country, common sense would tell us at least three things regarding being a good soldier. First, if we are going to fight, we need protection. Secondly, to fight we will need a weapon. And thirdly, we must be trained and ready for the battle when it comes.

If the battle that we fight is spiritual, as we have seen, what then should our protection be? Surely the most advanced body armor that is produced today could not protect us from the influences of Satan or the world. And if it cannot protect us from these, certainly it cannot protect us from ourselves. No, if the battle is spiritual, then our protection must also be spiritual. This is made plain in verse 13 of Ephesians 6 where the Holy Spirit tells us through the apostle, "Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God." God, as we know, is a spiritual Being and as such, His armor, and the armor He gives us is also spiritual. What is that armor made up of? This we have laid out for us in verses 14-17.

To begin with, we should note that all but one of the pieces of this suit of armor that are listed are primarily of a defensive nature. The text begins with those pieces of armor that are worn, so that the idea is that these are so much a part of being a soldier, and of such importance, that anyone fit to be called a soldier is found to be wearing these, not only when in the act of going into battle, but all the time. In a sense, we can think of these as part of the uniform of the soldier those things that in part identify him as such. These are some of the first items that the soldier would put on when rising in the morning, and some of the last they would take off when going to bed in the evening.

First, there is the truth. The text has the idea of putting on the truth as we would put on a belt or a girdle. The meaning is that the truth must surround and encircle us even as a belt encircles us and protects us, as does the truth of God to which we hold. Second is the "breastplate of righteousness." The breastplate in a suit of armor was typically a metal plate that covered and protected the vital organs of the soldier. In the same way, the righteousness of Christ covers and protects His soldiers. As a soldier without a breastplate is left open to certain fatal injury, so is the one who is without the righteousness of Christ. Third, the text speaks of having our feet shod with the "gospel of peace." In Bible times, soldiers would wear what were called greaves, which were a piece of armor that reached from the foot up to the knee. These would then allow the soldier protection from sharp sticks or nails that were often scattered by the enemy to forestall an assault. The mind of the text is that we, as soldiers, be prepared with and by the gospel, and that the gospel be our foundation and that

which provides us needed protection. To paraphrase one commentator, it matters little how strong you are as a soldier; if your feet are injured, you become an easy target for the enemy.

The next three pieces of this suit of armor that are referred to, are objects that the soldier would take with him into the actual battle, as is seen in verse 16 when it says, *"taking"* as opposed to the *"having"* that we see in verse 14. It is important too that we understand that the words "above all" in this verse do not necessarily indicate that these following pieces of armor are more important than those that precede them. Rather, the meaning seems likely to be that these are to be taken in addition to the others, as part of the whole suit of armor.

The first thing noted that the Christian soldier must take into battle is identified as "the shield of faith." The shield that Paul speaks of is not the smaller round shield that often comes to our mind, but is rather the large, oblong shield made of wood, behind which the soldier would advance, for protection from the flaming arrows that the enemy would launch at them. The very penetration of the arrow into the wood of the shield would extinguish the flame with which it had been tipped. This then is what our faith, given to us by God, does to the fiery arrows of fear, lies, and temptation that the wicked fling at us.

Then, there is the "helmet of salvation." A helmet, whether it was made of some type of metal or whether it was simply fashioned out of leather, was meant to give protection to the head. So, our salvation and the certain knowledge of that salvation in Jesus Christ, protects us from the temptations and torments that Satan and the wicked world may use against us.

Finally, then, we have the "sword of the Spirit," the only piece of this suit of armor that can be used effectively as an offensive weapon, which verse 17 goes on to describe as the Word of God. Having been issued the protection that we need in the battle, we now must be armed. Again, we stress that our armament is not physical; the weapon, as is the battle, is spiritual. It is, in fact, a most beautiful weapon and one that is more than adequate for the battle we wage. When we wield it, we find that it is perfectly balanced in our hands and that certainly it has been crafted by a master. Our weapon is the most powerful weapon there is, as God Himself tells us in Hebrews 4:12; "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." This we use, both defensively and offensively, in the battle that rages around us.

Having, then, this armor of God, our calling is to fight. Weary though we may be, and tired from the constant battle, the calling of Christ to His church is to fight. This we do, not in our own strength, but in the strength and power of Jesus Christ. And in doing so, may it be said of us, "that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:13).

We have examined what makes up the "whole armour of God" as we have it in verses 13-17 of Ephesians 6. But, what of our training? Is it possible for us to effectively utilize this armor and weapon without proper training? Consider for a moment what would happen if common people who had no military training were called upon to repel an invading force of professional, well-trained soldiers, and to do it right now, with no training or planning. The outcome would undoubtedly be that the enemy would have little trouble in defeating these defenders.

This too is the case in spiritual warfare. You and I can have the best and most advanced armor and weapon that has ever been made, but if we do not know how to use that armor and weapon and how to fight with it, they are virtually useless to us. We may, and do, have the Word of God, but if we are not acquainted with it, understand it, and believe it, what profit is it to us in our battle? We may claim to be righteous, and we may profess salvation in Jesus Christ, and we may say that we lay hold on the truth in faith, but if we do not understand what these mean and how we are to live with these in mind, how do they protect us in the battle?

So, the Christian soldier must be trained. But what makes up that training and how does one go about it? Certainly, it is faithful church attendance where we sit under the preaching of the gospel, and catechism for our children and young people. But there is so much more! There are the various Bible studies that we can be a part of. And certainly, we

have an incredible gift in our good Christian schools and teachers.

What about our devotional life? Do we have one? Fellow believers, we should not and even may not, as is unfortunately so often the case, view our personal devotional life as optional, or as something that we will do if time permits. We are so willing to spend hours involved in mindless activities such as watching television, playing video games, or being involved with social media. Mind you, none of these are necessarily wrong in and of themselves, but rather, it is the amount of time we are willing to spend on them. Make it very personal for yourself. How much time do you spend on things each day that have no positive influence on your Christian life and worship of God? Is it one hour, or two, or three, or even more? In contrast, how many minutes, yes, minutes, do you set aside each day for personal devotions? For many of us, the answer is not nearly enough. The point though, is not necessarily how much time we spend on our personal devotions each day, as if quantity trumps quality, but the real question is this, where is our heart? Remember the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:21; "For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Mothers, do you realize the incredibly important role you have been given by God in the training of Christian soldiers, especially but not limited to the early years of our children? Yes, fathers are responsible for this training and must take part in it as well, but often it is the godly mothers of the church who are most involved in it. This is the travesty of mothers, who shortly after the birth of their children, ship them off to daycare to pursue a career. The godly mother in a Christian home is invaluable and irreplaceable, even though they often feel inadequate for the work. Mothers, and especially young mothers, take that to heart! It is so easy to become discouraged in the work of raising children. Surely it is difficult work, filled often with hardship and struggle. But through those difficulties and struggles, remember that these children who so often wear on your nerves and seem to take all your energy are future soldiers in the army of Jesus Christ, and they must be trained. The little girl whose emotions seem to change from moment to moment will someday, God willing, be a godly young mother in her own right. How will she fight as a good Christian soldier and how will she train her children to fight? The little boy who constantly tests your patience, is, God willing, a future father. How will he fight as a Christian soldier and how will he train his children to be soldiers? These little ones are the future church, and these little ones must take their place in the church militant as we, in God's time, must take our place in the church triumphant. Your training of them is of utmost importance.

There is one other thing mentioned in verse 18 of Ephesians 6 that we must do in conjunction with wearing and utilizing this armor of God. We must pray. We must pray for ourselves in the battle that we fight personally. We must pray for our fellow saints in their battle. We must pray for the godly mothers and fathers. We must pray for our Christian schoolteachers. We must pray for the children and young people of the church. We must pray for our pastors. We must pray for the elders and the deacons. We must pray for the church as she is found over the whole earth. We must pray. And in those times of deep sorrow and distress, when the battle has left us bruised and battered, and when we find that we are unable to pray, we must ask others to pray for us. The Holy Spirit says this about prayer in James 5:16: "Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." It is through our prayers that God gives to us His grace and His Holy Spirit. These we certainly need as Christian soldiers!

Do you, fellow Christian soldiers, and do I, avail ourselves of these tools and do we do so often? Are you and am I battle ready? As the fierce battle rages around us, are we adequately prepared to fight the good fight of faith? May that be our fervent prayer for ourselves, for each other, and for the church universal.

Yes, we must fight, but we do so with the confidence and assurance that this battle in which we are involved every moment of our lives, has already been won by our Lord Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. "But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:57). Depend upon Him, put your trust in Him, and go on in the battle in His strength and in His mighty power!



VELLORE, INDIA

REV. DAVID NOORMAN
pastor of Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan

If you look on a map, you will find Vellore in the southern part of India—between the two larger cities of Bangalore and Chennai. Vellore is not a "major" Indian city, but it is not a small town either. The greater Vellore area has a population of approximately 4 million people (similar to the Detroit metropolitan area).

Georgetown PRC has been blessed with the opportunity to know and serve alongside some of God's people in Vellore for the past eighteen years. The relationship began through the ministry of the late Rev. Jason Kortering, who connected Georgetown with Pastor Paulraj. It has continued through the faithful labors of two subcommittees of Georgetown's Council. Now I have the privilege of participating in this work, reaping what others have sown and watered.

In early December, I visited Vellore for the first time as part of a delegation from Georgetown, along with Rev. Carl and Mary Haak and Rick and Ronda Wieringa. The Haaks and Wieringas (and many others at Georgetown) have been involved in this work for many years. Along with other members of Georgetown's India Mission Committee, they have developed a good understanding and deep personal relationships with our brothers and sisters in India.[1] I am still catching up, but I want to share some early impressions after visiting our brothers and sisters in India.

DARKNESS AND LIGHT

The spiritual darkness of the world is uniquely oppressive in India.

Hinduism is the prevailing religion, and that pagan influence is felt from the lowest levels of society to the highest levels of government. Hindu temples and shrines are around every corner. Terrible forms of earthly and spiritual violence abound. Family connections, economic influence, and societal structure all incentivize Indian people to keep the Hindu religion and to threaten those who do otherwise. To learn more about this, read *Grace House*, by Lee Kamminga[2]; the book is a moving story (based on real people and events) that conveys a sense of the darkness and dangers confronting the people of India and testifies to the power of God's saving grace in that context.

The current government of India has intertwined its rule with this false religion, making it difficult—at times humanly impossible—for a Christian to "lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty" (1 Tim. 2:2). Even when the government does not carry out explicit persecution of Christians, it has fostered a culture that allows (or even encourages) creating hardship and difficulty for Christians.

By the grace of God, the light of the gospel has broken through this darkness. Tradition holds that the apostle Thomas was the first to preach the gospel in India. William Carey (1761-1834) is another well-known Christian missionary to India. And in Vellore itself, the mission influence of multiple generations of the Scudder family is still felt today.

Rev. John and Harriet Scudder were members of the Reformed Church in America who served as medical missionaries to India. Their granddaughter, Ira Scudder, was born in South India but spent most of her childhood in America. She returned to India in 1900, and began a medical clinic that would become

1 Many thanks are due to Georgetown's India Mission Committee for their helpful feedback. Some portions of this article are taken from the committee's upcoming report to Synod 2026.

2 Lee Kamminga, *Grace House*. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2025.

the Christian Medical College (CMC). One hundred twenty-five years later, the CMC is a renowned hospital and college in South India and beyond. One of the congregations that Georgetown PRC works with consists primarily of English-speaking doctors and students at the CMC.

In South India, that rich history of Christian missions and the prominence of the CMC has allowed Christianity to gain a *very* small foothold in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. The darkness of Hinduism still dominates (from our earthly perspective), but the light is shining. Two small congregations in Vellore—one English-speaking, another speaking the native language of Tamil—are evidence of God's grace and Holy Spirit at work in India for the gathering, defense, and preservation of His people.

OBSTACLES AND OPENINGS

As Christians, it is our commission and Spirit-worked desire to spread the gospel to all nations, but there are immense obstacles to this work in places like India.

India's Hindu-nationalist government considers anything that hinders or departs from Hinduism to be a threat to the government's vision for India. Those who exercise a Christian influence on their neighbors (especially evangelistic activity) are vulnerable to violence and scorn from their neighbors, and any official Christian labors may be the target of government restrictions and penalties. At present, it would be nearly impossible for an American missionary to gain approval to labor in India.

Thankfully, God has preserved His church in Vellore and provided opportunities for growth. Pastor Paulraj has labored faithfully in Vellore for many years, preaching and teaching the gospel in the congregation and beyond.



Members of ARTS, including pastors from surrounding area

Pastor Paulraj regularly meets with and teaches the Reformed faith to a sizable group of interested persons. This group (ARTS—Asian Reformed Theological Studies) includes pastors from varying backgrounds, some of whom come from great distances. As these men return home to their families, friends, and churches, the seeds of the gospel are being scattered further still. Pray for this aspect of Pastor Paulraj's ministry, and pray for these other pastors as well, who sacrifice much for the sake of their new Reformed convictions.



Members of the "English Church" in Vellore at a conference in December 2025

The two congregations in Vellore are active in evangelism. Members regularly invite their friends and neighbors to worship services and church events. At a Christmas program in December, the thirty-member English congregation had about forty visitors in attendance, and the Tamil-speaking congregation has gained the respect and appreciation of some (though not all) in the community for their care and compassion to the vulnerable both inside and outside of the church.

Relative to other places in India, Vellore and the state of Tamil Nadu have been more tolerant of Christianity, but this is not the case elsewhere. Beginning in 2023, severe violence broke out in the northeastern Indian state of Manipur. More than 60,000 people were displaced, and more than 200 Christians were killed. Approximately 300 churches were destroyed. Thousands of Christian homes and institutions were demolished. Pastor Paulraj has made three trips to Manipur to distribute food, clothing, blankets, and necessities to these Christians using benevolence funds sent by many PR churches.

During these relief trips, Pastor Paulraj was able to encourage many Christians and preach the Word.

Many pastors expressed gratitude for hearing the Word preached from a distinctly Reformed perspective (most of the region is Baptist or evangelical). Some even photographed sermon notes, noting the clarity and depth of the preaching. Pastor Paulraj made many connections in Manipur. God willing, he plans to visit them again and organize Bible seminars for them to learn more about the Reformed faith.

GRACE FOSTER HOME

Children are among those most vulnerable to the dangers of India mentioned above. Kamminga summarizes the situation well in the "Cultural Notes" of *Grace House:*

> India has an estimated 20 million orphaned or foster children, in part due to the mistreatment of women. If a father leaves, the mother often must abandon her children to survive. Most government-run orphanages are overcrowded and underfunded, marked by abuse, poor hygiene, lack of nutrition, and emotional neglect. Because of this, many children run away, preferring life on the streets to the conditions inside.[3]

The Grace Foster Home (GFH) is a special children's care facility closely connected to the saints in Vellore. It was founded by Kasthuri, Paulraj's wife, and is staffed and served by many members of the congregation.

The foster home is a ministry that is near and dear to the hearts of the saints in Vellore. It is a very demanding work, not only because raising children in the fear of God is always demanding, but also on account of suspicion and hostility from rulers and neighbors—even against this good work. It is a work that requires much prayer, courage, and perseverance.

GFH has existed for nearly twenty years. Those years have been filled with great challenges and intense trials, but God has given much grace. The good fruits of the GFH are truly beautiful: Some children raised at GFH have married in the Lord and are beginning families of their own. Others work or volunteer at the foster home, and a few have begun to serve as officebearers in the church. Considering that these children came from poverty, abuse, abandonment, and spiritual darkness, each instance is a tremendous manifestation of God's tender mercies.

The two congregations and GFH share a location. They call it *Eden Campus*, and true to its name, it is a *delightful* place. It is not a paradise without sin, afflictions, and trials. Yet by God's grace, it is a refuge in the stormy chaos of India.

When you enter the Eden Campus, it feels like stepping into a different world. Outside, it is overwhelming—a constant buzz and churn of chaos, paganism, and general worldliness. Inside the gates and among the saints at Eden Campus, it is welcoming, safe, and peaceful. The place is not always quiet, but the noises have a different character. Instead of the noise of vanity, you hear the sweet sounds of glad hearts, songs of praise, and the echoes of God's truth. On Sundays, the gates open up and the congregations assemble for worship—including those children of GFH whom God has graciously given them.

God has done a marvelous work in Vellore, and Georgetown PRC is thankful to be used for His purposes there. On behalf of our fellow saints in India, the Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC would appreciate your prayers:



Worship service of the "Tamil Church" (Protestant Reformed Church of Vellore)

- For the spread of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the gathering of his people, and the maturation of these two young congregations in Vellore.
- For the preservation and growth of the saints in their knowledge of the truth and in lives of godliness, and for God to use and bless His officebearers to this end.

3 Kamminga, *Grace House*, 284.

- For faithfulness, boldness, and wisdom in the face of hostile neighbors and a hostile government.
- For the pastors (and others) who are learning the Reformed faith, and for God to raise up more men for the work of the ministry in India.
- For the many children of GFH, and for the labors of saints who care for them.
- For Georgetown PRC and her members as they strive to be faithful friends, counselors, witnesses, and stewards in this work.

Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you: And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith. But the Lord is faithful, who shall establish you, and keep you from evil (2 Thess. 3:1-3).

THAILAND DELEGATION REPORT

DAVID KALSBEEK, FOR HOPE PRC MYANMAR COMMITTEE

February 4-11, 2026
Hope PRC Delegation Members: Deacon David Kalsbeek, Elder Eugene Kamps, Rev. Nathan Decker
Hope PRCM Delegation Members: Certe, Josiah, Rev. Titus

In mid-summer 2025, during one of our Myanmar committee video conferences with Rev. Titus, Elder Nah Taung, and Deacon Lar Jah, it was suggested that Hope PRC send a delegation for a visit. Our last in-person contact had been December 4-11, 2024. The delegation we sent then ended a four-year gap between visits. This gap was the result of a civil war breaking out in Myanmar making travel into the country dangerous and unwise for both parties. The urgency and present danger HPRCM felt from the war at that time led us to the solution of meeting in Thailand to help locate a safe destination for a potential move. So far God's hand has guided the war and unrest to ease slightly, allowing them to stay in their homes. Interestingly enough, neither one of our countries gives the other's citizens easy access for a visit. Myanmar has a civil war and the United States has blocked any travel from Myanmar over illegal immigration concerns. We sadly found this out when Rev. Titus and his family were kept from attending the PRC 100th anniversary celebration last June.

Before the Myanmar civil war began, we had been sending a delegation every year, so we decided to send a delegation to meet with Rev. Titus and family in Bangkok, Thailand. The Council of Hope sent us with a few objectives: encourage Rev. Titus and his family, conduct a form of church visitation, provide requested instruction on the congregational meeting, discuss the Synod 2025 financial guidelines for aid in foreign lands, preach for them over livestream, discuss the future plans of Hope PRCM, and come to a better understanding of the regular life the church lives during the war. Thankfully, for both groups, the work load on this trip was lighter, both in seriousness and urgency. We are thankful for the measure of safety God has provided for our brothers and sisters in Myanmar as well as for giving us a means to meet in person.

The day arrived and we three men left from Grand Rapids for the other side of the world. Landing only in Detroit and Seoul, South Korea, God carried us through the sky safe in His hands to Bangkok. Rev. Decker timed our travel both ways, 30 hours to Bangkok and 27 hours back. Rev. Titus and his wife Certe, accompanied by their son Josiah, flew into Bangkok a day earlier than we did. They, being good hosts, made sure everything was set up at the hotel and met us at the airport, even though it was midnight. Meeting them was a joyful occasion; we

were glad to meet the man we see over video so often and his family!

Our days fell into a routine quite quickly. We Americans would rise first. The continental breakfast at the hotel was a treat and international in scope: Indian, Arabic, Thai, American, and Chinese. Not all of the delegation members branched out at breakfast, but I did! We spent the mornings writing daily reports, reading, conversing, or calling back home. A couple of hours after us Rev. Titus, Certe and Josiah would come down for breakfast. Rev. Titus made sure to get some bacon! Closely following their breakfast, we would hold our daily meetings. When the work was accomplished, we used the rest of the days for sightseeing, walking the city, enjoying each other's company, and finding dinner.

The meetings were very enjoyable, brotherly in spirit, and instructional to both parties. We took turns leading devotions and encouraging each other from Scripture. Holding church visitation without the whole Council is not the real thing, yet it was useful and worthwhile. It helped with accountability as well as gave us an opportunity to assist and encourage them in their labor. This led into the next day's meeting: instruction in the proper use and place of the congregational meeting, including how it applies to the election of officebearers. Monday we discussed the Synod 2025 financial guidelines. Rev. Titus was fully behind the ideas presented by the guidelines and expressed his agreement. He then recounted his own experiences with those who joined the church for improper motives, leading to turmoil and a split in the churches in Myanmar years ago. And in our final meeting we discussed the future of Hope PRCM along two lines: the language barrier and the pastor. As for the study of English, deacon Lar Jah is learning and several young people in college are taking classes (it is not taught in grade school), and Rev. Titus's children all speak it. They would love for someone to attend their foreign language school in Yangon for two years and learn Burmese! Their mindset for their next pastor is to wait upon the Lord and not force His hand. They have one prospect in mind, but they are not pushing hard; he attends regularly and is affiliated with a Presbyterian church nearby. They also showed interest in us sending a pastor or missionary. Let us pray that God supplies Rev. Titus with many more years of service in Myanmar and grants the church another local man to take up the work.

Sunday was the highlight. Worshiping God together with saints we did not know and who speak and sing in a different language was delightful. The union we have in Christ is amazing; it plainly crosses languages and cultures! The entire congregation could not make it to church because of the unrest, so some, along with others from hundreds of miles away, joined by video to worship. They joined the livestream Josiah started, appeared on screen and participated in all aspects of worship. Technology is an amazing gift from God. A group connected for a short time from the Rakhine state, however, they lasted only minutes before their connection dropped. Rev. Titus explained later that in the Rakhine state the unrest is higher and the internet is shut down far more often. Rev. Decker preached on Psalm 103:11 "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy towards them that fear him." A beautiful message of our Savior's heart of compassion and action to save us His people. The two undershepherds stood side by side and preached the gospel. Their shared love for Jesus and His flock was evident in the gospel message they delivered and the care they took working together to translate so well. After the service Eugene and I went up to wave to the congregation and Eugene expressed our desire to visit with them all in Myanmar. When we walked away from the livestream, we witnessed the love of the church for Certe. When they saw her standing in front of the screen, they all brightened up, smiled, waved, and burst into conversation with her! Rev. Titus said that Certe is mother to the church as well.

The people of Hope PRCM have vastly different lives than we do in the United States. They live under an oppressive military government during a time of civil war. The war front is around 150 to 200 miles from them, but at times it has been only 50 miles! And the unrest comes right into their lives through home invasions in the middle of the night, freedom fighters bombing buildings that have military government officials in them, curfews, intermittent electricity and internet, and conscription of the young adults. Thankfully the church has been kept safe from most of these things lately. I think it is important to realize that the civil war in Myanmar is different than some of

us may imagine. It is unlike our own civil war, which had pitched battles fought head-to-head and clear lines separating warring groups. Instead, rebel groups and freedom fighters pop up to start conflicts at random locations and, at times, all across the country. This means the danger and fear levels vary wildly as well.

The war brings emotional stress upon the whole church and especially the young. But to the praise of our God we heard of the wonderful fruit that has been worked through this terrible trial. The church members, old and young, pray and walk by faith much more directly. Even leaving the house can be risky at times, so they rely consciously on their Saviour and God for everyday things that we rarely think to pray about. We can learn from them in this. We need God just as much as they do for our next breath and step. Thankfully God has calmed the war unrest slightly in Yangon, even using the "election" and the government's desire for a safe and good election for the good of His church.

We spent the afternoons together as a full group of six. Josiah was our capable leader and organizer and although we doubted him once, he never led us wrong. Shopping malls are failing in America but are a very important and prestigious mark of status in many eastern countries, Thailand included. We walked through a few malls while in Bangkok. The top floors are typically massive food courts where we ate strange but delicious foods! We also toured the Grand Palace. This was a gaudy and beautiful temple with gold paint, colored glass chips, and idols everywhere. We even saw the Emerald Buddha housed there. It is made of Jade and sits on a golden dais with golden angels guarding it. Also, we went to see the sunset over the Bay of Bangkok one afternoon. And the last day we went to an authentic Burmese restaurant! Josiah, Rev. Titus, and Certe treated us to a meal that they would eat regularly at home. We are thankful to God for a productive week of fellowship, encouragement, and rest together; what a gift!

We departed Bangkok disappointed to leave Rev. Titus, Certe, and Josiah, but also very grateful we had the privilege to get to know them and spend a week with them. They were very thankful for our visit and expressed their desire that we visit them again, hopefully in Myanmar next time! Let us remember to pray for our fellow saints in Myanmar, that they be strong in the faith, spread the gospel to the salvation of many, and that they are kept safe and even delivered from oppression.



READMITTING OF THE EXCOMMUNICATED

FROM A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF THE CHURCH ORDER BY JOHANNES JANSEN*

REV. JOSHUA ENGELSMA, translator
pastor of Crete PRC in Crete, Illinois

Previous article in this series: April 2026, p. 250.

Article 78: "When an excommunicated person wishes to be reconciled with the congregation by way of repentance, it shall be announced to the congregation before the celebration of the Lord's Supper or otherwise according to circumstances earlier, to the end that at the next Lord's Supper (insofar as anyone knows of anything to bring forth to the contrary) he may be reinstated publicly with profession of his conversion, according to the form for this purpose."[1]

* The following is a translation of Johannes Jansen, *Korte Verklaring van de Kerkenordening* [A Brief Explanation of the Church Order] (Amsterdam: J. H. Kok, 1923).

1 The article in the church order used by Jansen differs very slightly from the wording of the article in our present church order. The translation of this article comes from Richard De Ridder, ed., *The Church Orders of the Sixteenth Century Reformed Churches of the Netherlands Together with Their Social, Political, and Ecclesiastical Context* (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1987), 360.

The cutting off with the ban does not mean to expel the sinner from the congregation forever, but is a last remedy to bring him to repentance. God takes the repentant sinner back in grace; likewise the church. Solomon already taught: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy" (Prov. 28:13). Already at the Synod of Dordrecht (1578, Art. 97) the churches also declared that the cutting off should be done for the purpose "that the excommunicated one, stricken by shame, may earnestly consider repentance."[2] Initially, however, there was no fixed provision for the readmission. The consistories and classes established the manner in each case. Yet it soon became apparent that uniformity was necessary. Therefore, the Synod of The Hague (1586) placed in Article 71[3] the above-printed article concerning readmission into the Church Order, which has remained so until now. The article defines the main principles that will be discussed with readmission.

1. *On what condition it takes place*: "When an excommunicated person wishes to be reconciled with the congregation by way of repentance." Thus on two conditions. The first is that reconciliation with and readmission by the church is desired by the excommunicated one himself. The desire for reconciliation must come from himself. The church also desires and admonishes him to repent, but he must also reveal the desire to be reinstated. The second is that the sincerity of that desire must be evident in his "repentance." It could be that someone came back with secondary intentions, for instance in order not to miss diaconal care in old age. So the consistory must be convinced that he is motivated by genuine repentance. Not sin itself, but impenitence was the ground for his cutting off. And that "impenitence" can only be removed by "penitence." If the consistory is not convinced of this, they can set a probationary period to give him the opportunity to show his penitence in word and deed.

2. *That it must be done with the concurrence of the congregation*: "it shall be announced to the congregation before the celebration of the Lord's Supper or otherwise according to circumstances earlier." The intention is not merely to make a formal statement to the congregation, but to obtain its approbation, that is, its tacit consent, and, "insofar as anyone knows of anything to bring forth to the contrary," to investigate and remove these objections. This "announcement" or communication to the congregation is included at the beginning of the Form and must therefore be read at least three Sundays in advance.

Which congregation is meant here? The congregation where he was excommunicated, or the congregation where he now lives after a possible relocation? Answer: the congregation where he now lives. He can only become a member of the congregation where he now lives, because each local congregation is an independent church and has its own boundaries, and the consistory there too can only judge his course of life. However, the consistory at this place will correspond with the consistory that excommunicated him, according to the demands of the denominational federation; and in some cases they may require him to reconcile himself with his previous consistory and congregation; but the formal act of readmission must be done by the consistory where he now lives. This [consistory] has to decide. If the previous consistory does not agree, he can appeal to the classis under which the church that wants to receive him falls. Pending the appeal, the readmission must wait.

3. *The manner in which it must be done*: "to the end that at the next Lord's Supper (insofar as anyone knows of anything to bring forth to the contrary) he may be reinstated publicly with profession of his conversion, according to the form for this purpose." The readmission is here directly associated with the Lord's Supper. This is in the nature of the matter. In the Lord's Supper lies the highest expression of ecclesiastical and spiritual communion. The excommunication was an exclusion from the Lord's Supper in the first place and also from the whole congregation. "Just as it now makes the most impression if one usually imposes the ban at the Lord's Supper, so it will also be most solemn if the readmittance takes place in the service itself when the Lord's Supper is being prepared. Immediately after his readmission, the once excommunicated person can

2 Quoted in De Ridder, *Church Orders*, 222.

3 Cf. De Ridder, *Church Orders*, 360.

then commune with the church" (Dr. A. Kuyper).[4] Only when there are urgent reasons, such as when a baptism, a marriage, or a relocation would have to be delayed and it would take too long, can it also take place on an ordinary day of rest.

The readmission itself must be "with profession of his conversion…publicly…following the form for this purpose." This Form is divided into two parts:

I. A form of declaration, which must be read to the congregation at least three Sundays in advance and means a. that the sinner is repentant; b. that the consistory asks for the approbation of the congregation; and c. the encouragement to gratitude for the initial conversion.

II. The actual form, which is broken into two parts:

A doctrinal portion, which a. includes the statement that no legal objections have been filed and the readmission is now taking place; and b. contains the grounds on which the readmittance rests, namely, on the key power (Matt. 18:18).

A liturgical part, in which are set forth a. the confession of guilt of the excommunicated person; b. the act of reinstatement; c. the admonition to the readmitted and to the congregation; and d. the prayer of thanks.

4 Jansen does not indicate the source of this quotation from Abraham Kuyper.



The following book is reviewed by Prof. Douglas Kuiper, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, and member of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan.

The Inner Story of the New International Version: Reflections of an Original NIV Translator, by Murray J. Harris. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2023. 90 pages, softcover. $16.00. ISBN 9781666787849.

The King James Version (KJV-1611) was virtually unchallenged as an English Bible translation until 1885, when the complete translation of the Revised Version (RV) was published. But only when the New International Version (NIV) appeared in 1978 did the KJV lose its status as the most widely used English version.

Most men involved in producing the NIV are now dead. This prompted Murray Harris, one of the translators who is now in his eighties, to tell his story of the creation of the NIV. Harris' book is both a history of the translation of the NIV and his personal reflections on the NIV. The book is short and easy to read.

Chapter one explains the project's origin. The impetus for the NIV came from within the Christian Reformed Church. Harris notes that "at every stage all the major Protestant denominations were represented in the committees. This ensured that the translation was free of sectarian bias and paved the way for its acceptance by a wide range of churches" (11). Chapter two regards Harris' personal involvement in the work, chapter three explains the principles that the translators used, and the next two chapters relate how the Committee on Bible Translation did its work.

The first five chapters demonstrate that translation work is difficult and time-consuming. The NIV translators worked in teams of two, three, or four, translating an average of three verses per hour. Their work involved asking many questions about word meanings and idioms in both the original and receptor language. Harris illustrates the difficulty of translation work by referring to different ways English versions translate John 1:1 (20-24).

Harris includes several case studies to illustrate

what kinds of decisions the translators had to make (38-60). One case study regards the translation of the Greek *monogenes* (John 1:14 and elsewhere), which the NIV translates as "one and only" (the KJV has "only-begotten"). Harris explains that the committee understood the verses that contain the word to refer to Jesus' divine *person*, in which sense He is indeed the "one and only son." Yet, in the mind of this reviewer, the translation "one and only" is seriously deficient. It fails to convey the idea of being *begotten*, which the Greek *monogenes* specifically conveys. The NIV translators were content to translate the general idea of the verse, sometimes at the expense of the specific meaning of individual words.

In the second part of the book Harris evaluates the NIV. In chapter six he evaluates the NIV in four areas: the 2011 revision of the NIV regarding its use of gender-inclusive language; the NIV generally in relation to the KJV; and the NIV in two places in which he disagrees with the NIV's translation (Heb. 12:2a and 2 Cor. 5:19a). In chapter seven he addresses the word most difficult to translate: the Greek *doulos*, often translated "servant," but more properly "slave." Harris is convinced that the word "servant" does not do justice to the Holy Spirit's meaning in Romans 1:1, Philippians 2:7, and other verses; only "slave" can suffice. Chapter eight is brief, consisting of "concluding observations."

While promoting the NIV, Harris evaluates the KJV. He acknowledges that the KJV sets a high bar in its "sheer literary beauty," "memorable cadences," purity of English, and influence on the English language (67). But Harris attacks the KJV regards its textual basis (68), and makes unwarranted and untrue statements about the KJV.

First, Harris chides scholars who say that the KJV New Testament "was based on the *textus receptus* (received text)" (68), because the term *textus receptus* refers to a *1633* Greek edition, while the KJV was published already in *1611*. But these scholars are not abusing historical facts; rather, they are recognizing that the 1633 *Textus Receptus* is *essentially*, even though *not identically,* the same text as that which underlies the KJV New Testament. Harris would help the reader, if he wants to pursue his challenge to the KJV on this point, to show what significant differences exist between the 1633 *Textus Receptus* and the KJV's Greek textual basis.[1]

Second, Harris alleges with a broad brush that "where there are substantial (and not merely stylistic) differences between the KJV and the NKJV and modern English versions of the NT, it is not a case of modern translations *omitting* verses or passages but of the KJV *adding* these sections from certain late manuscripts" (55). This assertion is bold, aggressive, and wrong.

Harris' only support for his assertion is 1 John 5:7b-8. Many are of the view that the Reformation-era textual critic Desiderus Erasmus was going to leave these verses out of his Greek text because he could not find them in any Greek manuscript. When he was shown that they were in a Latin manuscript, he "back-translated" them from Latin into Greek. But even if one grants Harris' point in the instance of 1 John 5:7b-8, this does not warrant such a broad and sweeping statement. It is like finding one bruised apple on a tree and using it to convince others that every apple on the tree is bruised.

This attack on the KJV is dangerous: laymen assume that scholars are right when scholars speak to matters that laymen do not understand. But when the scholars are wrong, the laymen have been deceived. And Harris is wrong. Textual critical observations, based on sound premises, can demonstrate that the KJV have not *added* anything. Again, the "late" manuscripts on which the KJV New Testament is based are consistent with the *vast majority of* manuscripts available today. And his statement ignores one more point that many textual critics ignore: at bottom, the date of the manuscript is less important than the date of the reading to which that manuscript bears witness. Many readings not found in Aleph and B, and therefore not in the "earliest and best manuscripts," nonetheless have witness in the church fathers and in other Bible versions that predates Aleph and B.

A weakness of the NIV is that its translators adopted the flawed premises of the Westcott-Hort theory of textual criticism. The implicit acknowledgment of this point by one who was involved in the translation work is appreciated: candor is good.

1 See Paul D. Wegener, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1999), 270.



The following book is reviewed by Mrs. Sarah Mowery, wife, mother, and member of Loveland PRC in Loveland, Colorado

The Story of Corrie ten Boom: The Watchmaker Who Forgave Her Enemies by Jennifer T. Kelley. Crossway, 2025. 160 pages.

The Story of Corrie ten Boom: The Watchmaker Who Forgave Her Enemies is a recent installment in Crossway's new series of children's biographies, "Lives of Faith and Grace," edited by Champ Thornton. To date, the series includes biographies of Katie Luther, Martin Luther, Corrie ten Boom, John Bunyan, Harriet Tubman, and Eric Liddell (to be released August 2026). This series serves as a faith-based counterpart to the popular and burgeoning "Who Was…?" series published by Penguin Books. The target audience of this series are children ages 8–13. Each title averages 150 pages in length, and nearly every page spread includes a black and white illustration or informative insert.

The Story of Corrie ten Boom begins in post-World War 2 Germany. Fifty-five-year-old Corrie has survived the horrors of Nazi concentration camps and now tramps all over Europe spreading "the message of God's love and forgiveness" (2). Her message is tested in the basement of a small German church when a former Ravensbrück guard, now converted and repentant, approaches Corrie and requests her forgiveness.

Then, following a similar timeline to Corrie's bestselling memoir *The Hiding Place*, this book zooms back in time to recount Corrie's happy childhood in her family's Dutch home, nicknamed "the Beje." As an adult, Corrie followed the example of her parents, living an active, fruitful Christian life and organizing and hosting many clubs and Bible studies. After years working alongside her father in his watch shop, at age 32 she became the first female licensed watchmaker in the Netherlands. Corrie found "real adventure" in "following Jesus and serving those in need" (28). But her adventures broaden in scope when the Nazis invade and occupy Holland in 1940. Corrie joins the Dutch resistance and endures life in multiple concentration camps—and all this while well into middle age. These later adventures comprise the majority of the book.

This book is an excellent introduction to Corrie's story. While I find its format attractive and understand that the many inserts are intended to further engage the reader, I am never sure myself when to read those supplements, especially when reading aloud to others. Does one interrupt the narrative right where the additional information is located? Or is it better to turn back once one has reached the end of a chapter—if he remembers to turn back?

The book's subtitle and first and last chapters highlight forgiveness as the theme of Corrie's life. It provides an occasion to make a distinction that the author does not address. Corrie spreads "the grand story of forgiveness" throughout war-devastated Europe, but when she is approached by a man who has sinned against her, she finds hatred—not mercy—filling her heart (132). In that moment she cries out to God from the heart for the grace to forgive, and He gives it. What is the distinction that can be made? To quote the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 51, a "firm resolution from the heart to forgive our neighbor" is evidence of God's grace in us, and that resolve must characterize all who have been forgiven by God for the sake of Christ's blood. However, even though many use the term "forgiveness" to refer both to that resolve and to its carrying out, the determination to forgive and the act of forgiving are two separate things. They are closely related, of course. They are also both fruit of God's grace in us. But distinguishing between them recognizes the costliness of forgiveness. It also honors the work of God in the hearts of repentant sinners.

I have known and loved Corrie's story for many years. Already as a child, I appreciated the honesty with which she recounted her experiences and found her to be the most relatable "old lady" I had ever encountered in a book. For children who are unfamiliar with her story, this book is a good place to begin. After reading it, perhaps they can move on to the more comprehensive young reader's edition of *The Hiding Place*, and later, to *The Hiding Place* itself. Corrie's story is one that should not be missed.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express our Christian sympathies to Mr. Larry Nelson in the death of his wife, and Mr. Steve Nelson in the passing of his mother, **Mrs. Tilma Nelson** on February 11, 2026. "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:55, 57).

Rev. Arend Haveman, President
Jordan Kamps, Clerk

CALL TO SYNOD 2026

Synod 2025 appointed Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI the calling church for the 2026 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2026 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 9, 2026 at 8:00 A.M., in the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, MI.

The pre-synodical service will be held on Monday evening, June 8, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. G. Eriks, president of the 2025 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Jeff Kalsbeek, clerk.hopeprc@gmail.com. Phone: (616) 291-1234.

Consistory of Hope PRC

REFORMED FREE PUBLISHING ASSOCIATION

The Spring 2026 issue of the Protestant Reformed Theological Journal is now available in print and digital formats!

This new issue contains the printed form of speeches given at the PRCA Classis West Officebearers' Conference in Crete PRC (IL) last September (2025). The articles relate to some practical aspects of justification by faith. Also, Prof. D. Engelsma responds to Dr. J. Bolt's (Calvin Theological Seminary) articles on H. Hoeksema and the PRC's rejection of common grace. Special articles may also be found on the confession of faith and the church order of a new Reformed confederation in Germany (BBERG). In addition, there are reviews of six new books, which reviews are always informative and edifying.


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The *PRTJ* is free of charge to all who are interested. Digital versions may be downloaded at www.prcts.org/journal. Print copies may be ordered by calling the seminary office at 616-531-1490, or by emailing the secretary at seminarysecretary@prca.org.

REFORMED WITNESS HOUR
FOR BY GRACE ARE YE SAVED

REV. CARL HAAK/AUDRED SPRIENSMA

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