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The Christian's reasonable service

Rev. Dennis Lee

The upcoming synod

Prof. Russell Dykstra

**A moral turning point:
Marijuana**

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works”**

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REFORMED
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Meditation

Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of Bethel Protestant Reformed Church in Roselle, Illinois

Saved to serve: The Christian's reasonable service

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

Romans 12:1

It is a fundamental tenet of the Christian religion that doctrine is inseparably connected to life. The two go together. Without one, there will not be the other. That tenet is perhaps nowhere more clearly set forth than in Romans 12, right after the holy apostle had spent the first eleven chapters of this epistle defending, defining, and explaining that precious gospel doctrine of justification by faith alone. For what does the apostle tell his audience as soon as he has completed the exposition of that doctrine? He goes on to set forth in the remainder of the epistle the life of religion that ought to, and even *must, flow out* of the hearts of all who truly embrace sound doctrine, which life may be summed by this one pithy phrase: “*Saved to Serve.*” In so doing, he calls the saved to live the life of service. We Christians are saved by God, and saved by Him completely apart from all works in order that we may give ourselves to Him and serve Him. Therefore, also, do we serve one another in the midst of His church, whereof we are and will remain forever living members.

This service graciously expected of us by our God is termed here as the Christian's “reasonable” service. In other words, it would be unreasonable and illogical for those truly saved not to serve. It would be an insincere religion that does not serve. This service is the Christian's fundamental duty, and underlying it is and must be a spiritual attitude. When that attitude is present and the life of service flows out of that attitude, there will be a beautiful, blessed, manifold display of it in the church.

It is a fundamental duty of the Christian to be active in serving in the church. That point arises out of the word “reasonable” used by the inspired apostle. A life of active service is a basic and essential trait of the sincere,

genuine believer. Just as phonics and spelling are basic to the English language; just as structured programming and algorithms class are basic to a computer science major in college; so also is service basic to him who is called Christian.

It is so for the Christian for many reasons. First, our Lord Himself calls us to serve. Second, He Himself was the perfect example of loving service. Both reasons are given by Jesus Himself in Matthew 20:25-28, where, calling attention to His ministry, He told His disciples that He gave His life “as a ransom for many.” If the Master Himself gave and served others, then His disciples also are to do the same.

Dear believer, do you not *want* to serve? Do you not want to serve the living and true God and His dear Son your Savior and Lord? He gave His life for *you*. He saved *you* when He did not have to show mercy to *you*. He would have been perfectly just to leave us in our sins. But He didn't. Father God gave His Son to us. And the Son showed Himself to be the outstanding servant by giving the extreme gift of His very own life for us. Do we not, therefore, *want* to serve Him as a token of our deep thanks for His salvation and service to us? As much as service is our fundamental duty, it is also our heart's desire to serve one another in the church. For in so doing, we are thanking God for His great, undeserved salvation of us.

This attitude of gratitude is what the apostle is getting at when he tells us that what underlies true Christian service, first of all, is personal consecration or devotion to God, a presenting of our bodies (that is, our very selves) as “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God.” He who would serve others does so because he first devotes himself to God and serves Him. Just as the Old Testament believer would give to God a sacrifice in devotion to and worship of Him, so also are we to give and devote ourselves to God as a token of thanks to Him for our salvation. And when we relate to God in such a way, we will relate to those who belong to Him in the way of service. That stands to reason. The law of God consists of two tables: one concerning how we

are to love God, and the other concerning how we are to love the neighbor. The two fit together, so that if one were to say that he loves God but does not actually love (and therefore serve) the neighbor, that person is a liar (cf. I John 2). Loving service in the church and to her members is part and parcel of the very same love with which believers love their God.

There is, however, a second spiritual attitude that underlies true service in the church. And it is the lovely Christian grace of humility. The apostle brings this up in verse 3: *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt every man the measure of faith.* In other words, the fruit of humility within us is evidenced by a sober recognition that all the good that we have in us, all the talents that we have (of teaching, preaching, hospitality, and so on) and the measure thereof, are not *our* own doing, but God's gift to us. They are given to us not for us to exalt ourselves and lift ourselves up in pride over and against our brothers and sisters in Christ, but to the glory of God and towards the service and benefit of our fellow saints. He who embraces this truth and is continually conscious of it will not be proud, but humble. And he will use his gifts not for his own glory, but for the glory of God and the edification of the church.

The underlying attitude of gratitude to God marked by devotion to God and humility is what characterizes true Christian service. Dear reader, how are you doing with this attitude? Does it live and thrive in your heart, your mind, and your soul?

If this attitude does live and thrive in us, and if it also does within the members of our church and denomination, it will manifest itself clearly, and in many ways. The apostle sets forth two main ways here.

First, it will manifest itself in a spirit of unity, for "we, being many, are *one* body in Christ," a truth that he states and reiterates in verses 4 and 5. But, on the flip side, there will only be disharmony, division and schism when pride rears its ugly head in the church! Would

to God that *every man....not...think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith!* Would to God that we think, speak, and act more and more out of the new man and the Spirit of Christ that indwells us, and less and less out of the old man of sin! Then the gifts that have been given us will not be used for selfish reasons but will be humbly pressed into loving service in the church among her members (cf. vv. 6-8), and her spiritual unity will flourish!

And where unity flourishes in the church, there will be many clear and unmistakable expressions of love among her members. Some of these expressions are set forth by the apostle in verses 9-13. Evil will be abhorred, and the lives of her members will be marked by holiness (v. 9). There will be the practice of "preferring one another" (v. 10). Members will be "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing instant in prayer," even as they serve the Lord under difficult circumstances (vv. 11 and 12). Benevolence will be diligently given to those in need, and hospitality exercised among her members (v. 13).

He who embraces this truth and is continually conscious of it will not be proud, but humble. And he will use his gifts not for his own glory, but for the glory of God and the edification of the church.

How is all this possible? How do we lay hold of this spirit of Christian service and grow in this fundamental duty of the Christian life?

By continually receiving the good and gracious instructions, commands, and admonitions that are found in the Word of God. For we

are told in verse 2, *And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.* The mind is the gateway to our soul. We are to fill it not with the world and its thoughts, priorities, and pleasures but with the Word of God: its doctrine, its reproof, its correction, its instruction in righteousness.

Dear reader, will you not dedicate yourself to true service in the church? A service characterized by consecration to God and Christian humility? I beseech you by the mercies of God that you do so.



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra, professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

The upcoming synod

As is the case every year since 1940, the annual synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches will convene in June. Last year's synod appointed First PRC in Grand Rapids as the calling church for the Synod of 2019. The last time that First hosted the meetings of synod was 2001. (In 2010, Southeast PRC hosted synod in First's church building.) At the Synod in 2001, a certain Mr. Angus Stewart, student of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland, was examined. His examination was a kind of hybrid—synodical and classical combined. Two elders from the Covenant PRCNI were present. After the exam, synod voted that Mr. Stewart had successfully sustained the examination, and informed the sister congregation in Northern Ireland “that he is, in our judgment, fully qualified for the gospel ministry and therefore is worthy to be declared eligible for a call.” Prof. Decker spoke at the graduation ceremony that week. Subsequently, Covenant PRCNI did call the brother and he was ordained into the ministry.

Staying with the Synod of 2001 for a bit longer, we note that this Synod rescinded a 1956 prohibition of administering the Lord's Supper on a mission field, and granted that right, under certain conditions. The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) reported (quite favorably) on the mission work in Ghana, and brought a request to declare the Philippines a mission field, which the synod approved, with Doon as the calling church. On the other hand, the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) reported on its labors in Northern Ireland (its mission field, until Covenant was organized). The DMC also reported in 2001 on the work of its missionary in the eastern part of the USA, and its missionary in the west.

That contrasts with the current work of the DMC as reported to the Synod of 2019. We have a missionary and a mission committee, and they are working, but the Lord is not opening a “great door and effectual.” I do not write this to criticize the missionary or the DMC. I write this, first, to remind the churches that eighteen years ago the PRC was considerably more involved with domestic mission work than we are today. Second,

I write this to urge the readers, all who love the truth that the PRC preaches and teaches, to *pray* the Lord of the harvest to open doors and to supply laborers. Jesus commanded His church to pray for laborers (Matt. 9:34; Luke 10:2). One such laborer, Paul by name, understood that when he did have opportunity to preach in a given city, and many believed, that this was due to the fact that a “door...*was opened*” for him—by God (I Cor. 16:9). Accordingly, he asked the church of Colosse, “Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ...” (Col. 4:3). He sent a similar request to the saints in Thessalonica (II Thess. 3:1). That prayer for “open doors” is not only appropriate, it is much needed today.

With the FMC in 2019, on the other hand, the prayers needed are for *laborers*. The FMC reports on the extensive labors of the three missionaries in the Philippines. Here the Lord continues to give a tremendous amount of work, not only to these men, but also to the three ministers of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines (PRCP). When the *Acts of Synod 2019* come out, do take the time to read the reports of the three missionaries. From all the reports it becomes plain that there is an urgent need for more laborers, particularly Filipino pastors and missionaries. The FMC reports that the seminary supervised by the PRCP is to begin instruction in August of this year with one student, and more in the pipeline. This will increase the workload of the three missionaries. It makes one wonder whether the FMC might be recommending calling a fourth missionary in the future. There are still many labors to which the men there cannot devote themselves adequately, such as the monthly meeting in the Southern Negros Occidental island where some pastors have expressed a desire to join the PRCP, and some have expressed a desire for seminary training, for themselves, or for their young men. Pray the Lord of the harvest....

The Theological School Committee (TSC) reports that the Lord has given two men (Matthew Kortus and Jacob Maatman) to be examined at this synod with a view to candidacy for ministry in the Word. We rejoice in this and pray God's blessing on these men as

they prepare for their examination. Recall that their examination includes preaching a sermon and submitting written exegesis on one passage from the Old Testament and one from the New. What follows is an oral exam before synod—over seven hours of examination—with an emphasis on Reformed doctrine (over four hours). The men will be examined also in church history, Old and New Testament history, church polity, and have a final section on practical matters. These examinations are grueling, but when the students prepare well, the audience can enjoy and profit from it. These are open to the public. The sermons will be delivered on Tuesday morning, and most of the oral examination will be on Wednesday and Thursday mornings. I hope many readers will make a point of coming. And, all are cordially invited to join the seminary, the graduates, and their friends and family, the Lord willing, for the graduation ceremony on Thursday evening. That is Thursday, June 13 at 7:30 in First PRC.

The TSC also seeks synod's approval for admission of four men to begin seminary training for the coming school year. More information on that after synod.

Another significant submission of the TSC is the aggregate list of ministers as nominees to replace Prof. R. Cammenga. Professor Cammenga will reach the age of 65 this year, and synod will vote on his replacement for the areas of Reformed Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies. The TSC brings to synod the following ministers: Revs. J. Engelsma, C. Griess, B. Huizinga, and R. Kleyn. The synod will narrow this list to a trio, and from that a *primus* and *secundus* are to be selected. In this way, the churches seek the Lord's will to be done in appointing a man for the seminary.

In the matter of professor replacement, two years ago Prof. D. Kuiper was selected to replace Prof. Dykstra. Prof. Kuiper has completed the requirements of the ThM degree and will begin giving instruction this coming school year, teaching Greek, Hermeneutics, and Research Methodology. The plan is that over the next three years he will take over all the courses in his area. This is a good system, allowing the new man to obtain a higher degree and gradually take on the courses he must teach.

The TSC reports that the construction on the addition to the seminary library for a new archives room for the churches is on schedule.

And finally, this important information from the TSC. After 30 years of service, Judi Doezema has retired as the secretary of the seminary. This selfless service was noted in the *Standard Bearer* (Dec. 15, 2018) and even that only begins to capture what Judi's service has meant to the seminary, not to mention the denomination. The Lord provided a very good replacement, but no one who was

interested in being at the front desk from 6 A.M. to 5 P.M. Monday through Friday. For the Doezemas' many years of *faithful service*, the churches give God heartfelt thanks.

The Contact Committee's (CC) report is packed full of interesting news from our closest friends and many other contacts that the Lord is giving the PRC. Our sister congregation in Singapore, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, continues to enjoy growth, both from new members joining as well as babies born in the congregation. CERC has been vacant about a year and a half. Grandville continues to call for a minister on loan. Eight different ministers have willingly trekked to Singapore to assist Covenant with preaching and teaching, and our sister expresses deep appreciation for this. Most notable is the service of Rev. and Mrs. A. den Hartog, who have spent many months in CERC. It is hoped that many other of our ministers will be released by their consistories to help. Covenant plans to send deacon Lee Meng Hsien as a fraternal delegate to the 2019 Synod.

The CC reports that our sister in Northern Ireland, Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, is experiencing spiritual unity and peace in the congregation. The mission work in Limerick (Republic of Ireland) is also active and experiencing modest growth. Rev. M. McGeown plans to represent CPRCNI at the synod this year, D.V.

The CC is enjoying the first official year of the sister-church relation with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines. The three congregations are active and growing. Another congregation is making request to their classis in June for entrance to the denomination. The missionaries have been actively involved in preaching and teaching in this group, and it is expected that the request will be granted. Lord willing, the PRCP will send Rev. J. Flores at their representative.

In the last year, the PRC in the Philippines and Covenant ERC in Singapore worked to establish a sister-church relationship, and in accordance with their respective Contact Committee's constitutions, come to the synod of the PRCA to be sure that our churches have no objection. The CC brings a recommendation that includes an expression of thanksgiving to God and great joy at this new development. Covenant ERCS and Covenant PRCNI have already established a relationship.

The PRC have a corresponding relationship with the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches in Australia (EPCA). A conference is planned with the EPCA in Brisbane in July on the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordrecht. Especially exciting for the EPCA is the fact a student will be enrolling in the Protestant Reformed Seminary this fall, D.V. Mr. Isaac Peters, his wife Rebecca, and their four children are planning to come in July, and the Grace PRC is already making plans to help them settle in.

The CC reports on the ongoing and developing relationship with the Bekennede Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde (BERG) in Giessen, Germany. A delegation is planning a visit to Germany this fall, D.V. Also, the CC keeps in contact with the Reformed Churches in Namibia and South Africa. Unofficial contact is maintained with some individuals in South Korea and in Mexico, primarily through two local PR congregations. The CC reports that NAPARC continues to invite the PRC to send observers to their annual meeting, even though the PRC has indicated why it cannot join NAPARC.

The CC also brings to synod material from the Psalter revision committee for approval of the work finished thus far. The CC asks synod to make preparation for the treatment of the final product and a special committee to examine all the work in order to bring recommendations to a future synod.

This report on the agenda is getting a bit long. There is more to be found in the agenda. Two protests concerning the Psalter revision, and three protests on matters treated at last year's synod. Reports from many other committees and individuals who faithfully serve the churches will be acted upon at synod. There is much for which to pray. May God give the delegates wisdom and courage in dealing with the matters of the agenda, the work to which Christ has appointed them and for which He is equipping them.

If you are able, do join the twenty synodical delegates and four advisors in asking God's blessing on Synod 2019 by attending the pre-synodical service in First PRC, Monday, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. Van Overloop, president of last year's synod, will lead the service, D.V.

I hope to see you there.

Letters

Dordt 400 conference

By the grace of God, my wife, daughter and I, as well as two friends from Ohio, were able to attend the recent conference celebrating the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt, with its focus on the Canons of Dordt. We cannot begin to express our deep thankfulness to all parties that were involved in this event.

I cannot say enough as to how well the conference was done, how hard the host church worked for the conference, how excellent the presentations were and how much work went into those talks. I was even impressed by the youth orchestra!

Two items are of special note: first, it was an excellent idea to invite the foreign pastors. Our family has prayed for many of these men for years. But it was truly edifying for us (and for those who attended!!) to be able to speak with these men, to hear from them of their concerns and prayer requests, and to put a face to a name. It also gave us opportunity to tell them in person that we are *praying for them*, and that they have (and will have) the support of the church.

Second, this conference gave us the opportunity to link arms, as it were, with those Reformed men of the Synod, who stood for truth 400 years ago. I must confess that I cannot remember which PRC Seminary professor made the following statement to me Thursday night: "*This is probably the most important conference we have done.*" At the time, I didn't realize how important this conference was. But upon reflection over the next few days, I came to see that he was absolutely correct. This is not to say that the earlier conferences

were not important or appreciated. Not at all. But this conference was important, not only for what it was celebrating, but because in our remembrance, we, like our spiritual fathers so many years ago, are standing up against heresy today, just as they did 400 years ago. This conference provided the opportunity for us, in the twenty-first century, to declare to the world, "Here we stand. As they stood 400 years ago, may we also stand by the grace of God."

The speakers did an excellent job of reminding us of the issues with which the Canons were concerned. But they also reminded us that this conflict is still alive and well, even within the present-day Reformed community as a whole. There needs to be a vibrant witness to the Canons today. And that is why it was important to be at this conference at this time. By the grace of God, we were a testimony to all, to present-day Arminians, to those who are nominally Reformed, to those Reformed who still hold to common grace. And if I may be so bold, we were a testimony even to the heavens, that we, like our fathers before us, value these doctrines, that we stand for the these doctrines, and that we, if need be, will die for these doctrines—doctrines which are nothing more than "the explanation of some points" of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

I cannot put into words how special the PRC is to me and my family. God has greatly blessed the PRC. I genuinely hope that the people of the PRC understand that. The blessings that God has bestowed on the PRC have gone far beyond its initial influence. Again, I am deeply grateful that we were able to attend.

May the Lord continue to prosper the godly work of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Respectfully, in Christ,
Lee Carl Finley
East Sparta, Ohio

Agreement and objections re faith and works

Thank you for publishing my letter and revised letter in the March 1 and March 15, 2019 issues of the *Standard Bearer*, even though the letter exceeded the length allowed by *SB* policy. (As for your apology for publishing the wrong letter originally, apology accepted—no harm done and no hard feelings.) Thank you as well for your thorough response to my letter in two installments in those same issues. We are agreed that these matters are of greatest importance and are worthy of the space devoted to them in the pages of the *SB*. I ask for your indulgence in allowing me to respond once more, since this letter again goes beyond policy.

I have read your responses repeatedly and carefully, and I believe that I understand what you are saying. I am in complete agreement with much of what you write, and I think it would be beneficial in this discussion to highlight precisely where we are of one mind.

First, you contend that faith is an *activity*. To which I say a hearty, Amen. Faith is believing in Jesus (John 6:35), following Jesus (John 8:12), entering by Jesus (John 10:9), knowing Jesus (John 10:14), coming to Jesus (John 14:6), abiding in Jesus (John 15:5), trusting confidently in Jesus (Lord's Day 7), and embracing Jesus (Belgic Confession, Art. 22)—activities all. You further contend that faith, because it is an activity, is a *doing*. Here, my Amen is much less hearty, because I do not think that calling faith a 'doing' distinguishes it clearly enough from 'working.' For that reason, I would not describe faith as a 'doing.' Nevertheless, I can go along with you here, as long as calling faith a 'doing' only means that faith is an activity, but in no way, shape, or form means that faith is a work.

Second, you contend that the regenerated child of God is *able* to believe. To which I say a hearty, Amen. Father Abraham believed God (Rom. 4:3). We spiritual children of Abraham believe God (Rom. 4:11). The Spirit of Christ, who regenerates a man, confers, breathes, and infuses into that man the gift of faith. Further, the Spirit of Christ in a man's heart produces that man's will to believe, and the Spirit of Christ produces that man's very act of believing also (Canons III/IV, 14). By the Spirit's work in him, man is able to believe. By the Spirit's work in him, man actually does believe.

Third, you contend that faith is the *necessary means* of salvation. To which I say a hearty, Amen. Without faith, there is no salvation. This is because without *Christ*, there is no salvation. Jesus is the bread of life

(John 6:35), the light of life (John 8:12), the door of the sheep (John 10:7), the good shepherd (John 10:11), the resurrection and the life (John 11:25), the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6), and the life-giving vine (John 15:1). Jesus is our life and our salvation, and the only way to have Jesus is by faith. The very reason that Christ purchased faith for us by His death (Canons II, 8), that God gives faith to us as a free gift (Canons III/IV, 14), and that the Spirit works faith by the gospel in our hearts (Lord's Day 7) is that through this faith we have Christ, and therefore have salvation and the knowledge of salvation (Belgic Confession, Art. 22).

On all of this we are fully and enthusiastically agreed.

However, I still object to the teaching in your original editorial of October 1, 2018—teaching which you defended and repeated in your articles of March 1 and March 15, 2019. I object to this teaching: "If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do." I object to this teaching: "If a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom, placing himself with his family under the rule of Christ as his Lord and Savior, he was called, he was required, to respond obediently to the call and command of the gospel—'Repent and believe, that thou mightest be saved with thy house.' Covenantal salvation is to be found in no other way." I object to this teaching: For salvation, "there was something they were called to do. And they did it."

I object to this teaching because I believe that it changes the *message of the gospel*. That is really what we are dealing with in this whole discussion: What is the message of the gospel? Our discussion is not merely a quibble about words or language, but about the message of the gospel. Not merely this: What words may we say or not say when we talk about the gospel? But this: What is the gospel? What is the gospel's message? What does the gospel say? By the way, I greatly appreciated in your responses that you did not dismiss this discussion as mere semantics, but addressed my line of thinking. That is what I am trying to do as well; not quibble over words, but address a line of thinking.

And so the question is, What is the message of the gospel? What does the gospel say to the man shaken by the earthquake, and what does the gospel say to the men pricked in their hearts? Does the gospel say this: If you want to be saved, here is the obedience you must render (by the Spirit's power, of course)? Or perhaps this: If you want to be saved, here is the activity required of you? Or maybe this: If you want to be saved, here is a list of do's and don'ts you must perform? Is the gospel message: "If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do?" I maintain that this is not the gospel. It is not the good news of salvation in Christ. It is

the miserable news of me and my doing and my obeying for salvation. It is the miserable news that my salvation comes by my doing, so that I had better get busy with my doing if I want to be saved, but always plagued by the terror that I have not yet done enough and hounded by the realization that I cannot ever do enough. This line of thinking that “if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do” is miserable news.

But in reality, the gospel does not say those things. The message of the gospel is not what I must do, but what Jesus Christ has done! His obedience, not mine. His doing, not mine. Him, not me. The message of the gospel is not Me, but He! This is good news. The gospel is the good tidings of great joy that the Savior is born (Luke 2:10, 11), who was first promised in Paradise (Gen. 3:15), who was published by the prophets (Rom. 1:2), and who was sent forth by God when the fullness of the time was come (Gal. 4:4) to redeem them that were under the law (Gal. 4:5) by being made a curse for us (Gal. 3:13) that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him (II Cor. 5:21). The gospel is that He was wounded for our transgressions (Is. 53:5) because it pleased the LORD to bruise Him (Is. 53:10) that by His knowledge His righteous servant might justify many (Is. 53:11). The gospel is that He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (Phil. 2:8), that by the obedience of one many might be made righteous (Rom. 5:19). This is the gospel: the promise that whosoever believeth in Christ crucified shall not perish, but have everlasting life (Canons II, 5). This is the gospel: the Word or ministry of reconciliation, which is the glad tidings concerning the Messiah, by means whereof it hath pleased God to save such as believe (Canons III/IV, 6). This is what the gospel says to the man shaken by the earthquake: Jesus Christ, Savior! This is what the gospel says to men pricked in their hearts of their sin: Jesus Christ, Savior! This is what the apostolic gospel says wherever it is preached: Jesus Christ, and Him crucified (I Cor. 2:2). The message of the gospel is never me and my doing but always and exclusively Jesus Christ and His doing—His complete, wonderful, saving, redeeming doing. And, thanks be to God, this is what the gospel says to poor sinners such as you and me.

But now what about the fact that the gospel message includes the *call* to repent and believe? That call is an imperative verb. That is, that call of the gospel is a *command* to repent and believe (Canons II, 5). And what about the fact that faith as the response to that gospel command is *obedience* to the gospel (Rom. 10:16; Canons III/IV, 10)? The message of the gospel includes a command! And the response of faith to the gospel is obedience! Does this mean that the message of the gos-

pel really is, after all, “If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do”? Does this mean that part of the good news of salvation really is, after all, my obedience and my doing if I would be saved?

This cannot be.

One might even say about such a notion, Nonsense!

Fact is, the call of the gospel—repent and believe—is a command, but it is a command *unlike any other command*. It is an entirely unique command. The call of the gospel stands out from and stands apart from and is essentially different from every other command in the Bible. The call of the gospel is an entirely unique command because, although it is a command, it is not part of the law of God like the other commands are. We might say it this way: The call of the gospel is a *command*, but it is not a *commandment*. The command to believe in Jesus Christ is essentially different from the first commandment to have no other gods than Jehovah, or the third commandment not to take God’s name in vain, or the seventh commandment not to commit adultery, or the first great commandment to love the Lord thy God. The command of the gospel is essentially different from the commandments of the law because the law requires man’s obeying and man’s doing for salvation. The law says, “The man that *doeth* them shall live in them” (Gal. 3:12). The law says, “Cursed is every one that *continueth* not in all things which are written in the book of the law to *do* them” (Gal. 3:10). The law says, “This *do*, and thou shalt live” (Luke 10:28). The law is all about *man’s* doing in order to live: *Thou* shalt, and *thou* shalt not.

The call of the gospel, however, is far different. The call of the gospel does not suspend man’s salvation upon man’s doing and man’s obeying, as the law does. The call of the gospel does not even suspend man’s salvation upon his doing the activity of believing. Rather, the call of the gospel confronts man with Jesus Christ and suspends man’s salvation upon Jesus Christ alone. The gospel says, “Believe on the *Lord Jesus Christ*, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house” (Acts 16:31). The great message of the gospel call is not what I must do, but Jesus Christ and what He has done. So essentially different is the command of the law to obey from the command of the gospel to believe, that Scripture sets them over against each other as opposites when it comes to our salvation. We have not received the Spirit by the works of the law, but by the hearing of faith (Gal. 3:2), and the law is not of faith (Gal. 3:12). And if they which are of the law be heirs of salvation, then faith is made void, and the promise is made of none effect (Rom. 4:14). Therefore, what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh (Rom. 8:3).

For salvation, the law can only curse a man (Gal. 3:10), but the gospel is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth (Rom. 1:16).

So it is with faith. Faith is the *activity* of believing. Faith is even an *obedience* to the call of the gospel. But faith is an activity and an obedience that is entirely unique from all other human activities and obedience. The uniqueness of faith is found in faith's Object—Jesus Christ. Faith believes in Jesus Christ (Acts 16:31) and embraces Jesus Christ (Belgic Confession, Art. 22). The power of faith is not found in what faith *does*—believing, embracing, and all of its other activities—but in *Jesus Christ*, in whom faith believes and whom faith embraces. The power of faith is not found in itself, but in the Other to whom it looks. Therefore, the power of faith is not found in faith's *believing* in the bread of life, but in the *bread of life* (John 6:35). The power of faith is not found in faith's *knowing* the Good Shepherd, but in the *Good Shepherd* (John 10:14). It is for exactly this reason that the call of the gospel is what it is: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. By this call, God tells a broken sinner to put away all of his doing, his obeying, and his working for salvation and instead find his complete salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

This is why I object to the teaching, “If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.” It turns the call of the gospel into just another commandment of the law, and it turns faith into just another work of obedience. When the gospel is law and faith is work, there is no Christ and no salvation. You have made it clear in your articles that this is not at all what the editorial meant or intended. The editorial meant that the child of God is called to respond to the gospel by believing in Jesus, and that the Spirit in a man's heart enables him to do so. A hearty, Amen. But the line of thinking that the editorial actually taught—“If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do”—goes far beyond that.

In light of my objection to that statement, you asked how I would finish it: If a man would be saved.... What? You suggest I might answer: “If a man desires to be saved, he must do nothing.” Or, “There is nothing he is called to do.” Well, I don't mind those answers. They remind me of an excellent sermon by Herman Hoeksema. But here is how I would answer. When we are talking about salvation, about obtaining salvation, then the message is not our obeying and doing, but the message is Christ. Not this: “If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.” But this: If a man would be saved, he must have Jesus Christ, the Savior.

Warmly in Christ,
Rev. Andy Lanning
Byron Center PRC

Response:

Rev. Lanning:

I am glad to read that you find between us areas of agreement. Especially important is that you can accept calling faith a ‘doing,’ though only “as long as calling faith a ‘doing’ only means that faith is an activity, but in no way, shape, or form means that faith is a work.”

You should have no fear of that. In no place have I called or labeled our faith a work. To do so, would create a confusion of categories. They are to be distinguished.

You write that we are in agreement that faith is an *activity*. I am happy to hear that.

You indicate that we can agree that the regenerated child of God is *able* to believe and that faith is the *necessary* means of salvation. That is encouraging.

You also indicate (in your third paragraph from the end) that faith is *obedience* to the gospel's call.

Thus, in sum, we may say that you teach that 1) faith is an activity, 2) faith is obedience to the gospel call, 3) faith is a ‘doing’ (carefully defined), and 4) man actually does believe. It means we have a common basis for discussion.

That said, it becomes apparent, however, that there are still areas where we disagree. You state, “However, I still object to the teaching in your original editorial of October 1, 2018,” and then you list various statements found in my editorial and my letters of response. For instance, my statements, “If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.” And again, “...there was something [the Jews and jailer under the conviction of their guilt before God] were called to do, and they did it.”

I found that somewhat surprising. Earlier you stated that you could accept calling faith a ‘doing’ as long as faith (our believing) was not viewed as a work; now you state that you find fault with the above statements. Evidently, you still basically object to calling faith (believing) a ‘doing’, something that one in response to the gospel call is called to do. And apparently that is especially so if the word *doing* is found preceded by an “if” clause—“*if* you would be saved, this is what you are to do (by which the apostle would have meant, are *called* to do), repent and believe.”

You state in the next paragraph that you object because you believe that my wording “changes the message of the gospel,” which, you are convinced is “really what we are dealing with in this whole discussion.”

This brings us to the heart of the issue. However, what we differ over is not the *gospel*, which is to say, the content of the gospel; rather, what we differ over is the *call of the gospel*.

To be sure, if what I present as the call of the gospel is not Reformed and confessional, which is to say biblical, then I am guilty of having corrupted the gospel—salvation

somehow depending on a man and his doing. But if what I have presented is biblical and confessional, one cannot say that I have tampered with the gospel message. But it can be said that what you are advocating is a deficient view of the call of the gospel, refusing to allow or countenance what has confessional and biblical approval.

That is the issue.

Let us see.

As you put it in your tenth paragraph, “Is the gospel message: ‘If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do?’ I maintain that this is not the gospel. It is not the good news of salvation in Christ.”

I agree with you. That is not the gospel. But it does have to do with the *call* of the gospel. If a man would be saved, there is that which he is called to do. The question is, “What is he called to do?” He is called to repent and believe. And believing is always shorthand for “putting one’s complete trust in Christ Jesus for salvation, for the forgiveness of sins, and the assurance of eternal life.” To refer to repenting and believing as that which the hearer is called to do, is not unreformed.

Such, I maintain, is in complete harmony with the Reformed and biblical truth and manner of preaching. As is clear from his sermons on the Acts 2 passage, Calvin himself had no trouble with that language and interpretation. And Calvin is not a man we would want too quickly to charge with teaching a work-righteousness.

To guard against any misunderstanding, first, we state once again the sense in which we are speaking of salvation. As stated in earlier articles, we are not speaking of salvation in the sense of believing in order to obtain the life of regeneration or the right to enter into Christ’s kingdom. Rather, we are speaking of salvation in the sense of laying hold on the blessings of salvation for one’s self, that this forgiveness that is to be found in Christ Jesus alone is for me, and of appropriating to oneself these blessings of salvation.

And second, we are speaking of believing as a ‘doing’ in the sense that one exercises Christ’s gift of faith as required. This is in accordance with Christ’s own words when He addressed the father of the demon-possessed lad, who asked Christ if He could do anything for his son. Christ in response makes plain that the issue was not whether He had the power to heal and save this son. The issue was, “If *thou canst* believe, all things are possible to him that believeth” (Mark 9:22, 23).

Could this father of *himself* believe? Of course not, contrary to all Arminian assertions. But could *this* father believe? Yes. Because he was a born-again child of God who had the seed of this faith in himself. Which faith we confess to be God’s work. What the text is surely underscoring as well, however, is the importance

of *actively* believing, God’s gift of faith being *exercised*, as he was confronted by Christ.

What this text places before us is language that is legitimate when it comes to the call of the gospel. Christ himself used it. Christ even uses the word ‘if’, indicating that the use of an ‘if’ clause in the gospel call does not make one, by that very fact, guilty of conditional theology.

What the text underscores is that the father himself believed, doing what Christ required of him. In preaching this text, if the vital importance of faith, of one’s believing, is not stressed (be it a weak and wavering faith), one has failed to do full justice to the text. The “must” of believing—of taking Christ at His word, of embracing Christ—and that being emphasized as we preach the gospel, even to believers, is vital to biblical gospel preaching.

And if it is biblical, it in no way detracts from God’s glory or that salvation is all of grace, contrary to what some seem to fear.

As you lay it out in your tenth paragraph, the gospel is what Christ has done for sinners. “The message of the gospel is never me and my doing, but always and exclusively Jesus Christ and His doing—His complete, wonderful, saving, redeeming doing. And thanks be to God, this is what the gospel says to poor sinners such as you and me.”

With that we are in full agreement. Unless, that is, by your phrase that the gospel is always “exclusively Jesus Christ and His doing,” you mean that it is Jesus who really does the believing for us or in us. You would insist you do not maintain that. We do not doubt that is true. But the question is this, in the end does not what you object to gospel preachers having the right to say, and all that you would dare have them say, essentially lead to that conclusion? It appears that all you would permit a preacher to say in gospel preaching is, “Jesus does it all.”

My point is, that to speak of our repenting and believing in terms of what we are called to do in response to the gospel call, namely believe, and then our doing that, does not contradict the fact that we confess that Christ has done it all when it comes to accomplishing and working out our salvation. Such does not deny that it is He who provides the one only basis for our salvation, is the One who has obtained the right to regenerate us, and then grants to His sheep the gift of faith.

But as well (and this is something that is not to be forgotten), it is He who is really calling forth the faith, though it is through the mouth and words of the gospel preacher.

This is in accordance with the Canons, with its emphasis upon ‘by grace and grace alone.’ As the Canons declare, “Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe and repent by virtue of the grace received.”

You ask rhetorically (in a list of parallel phrases), “Does

the gospel say this: If you want to be saved, here is the obedience you must render (by the Spirit's power, of course?) To which I reply, No, that is not the gospel. The gospel sets before sinners who Christ Jesus is and what He, through His atoning death, according to the will of a righteous and merciful God, has done for sinners.

But having set forth the gospel, namely, that the God whom we have so highly offended is yet a God of mercy, the preacher utters the *call* of the gospel. What is the proper response? This: "He who with heart-felt conviction desires to be (would be) saved, must repent and believe (in the name and work of this Lord Jesus)."

We have no reservations about the words "you *must*." In the present dispute troubling our churches it has become clear that there are those who have serious reservations about the word "*must*" when it comes to the gospel call. As though that somehow turns repentance and faith into a work, a work for which we take credit.

Not so. Why not? Because, as you point out, faith is of a unique character, different from all other forms of obedience, a word you also indicated could be properly used in connection with faith (third paragraph from the end). It is unique as to its *activity*, in that it turns away from self and one's own works and worth, and it is unique as to its *object*, casting one's self completely on the work, righteousness, and mercy of God found in Christ Jesus.

And because faith, the faith we are called to exercise and exhibit, is unique in its character, it does not fall in the category of a work, nor as something on which it can be said our salvation depends.

We call attention to that last phrase, "nor as something on which it can be said our salvation *depends*," because you continue to assert that my statements imply that the call of the gospel *suspends* man's salvation upon man's doing and activity of believing. You also asserted this in your first letter, only you used the words "depend upon" rather than "suspends."

My reply remains the same: it does not. Rather, the call of the gospel makes plain what God has most graciously joined together, namely, that the one (believing) has been made the means to the other (the *necessary* instrument, if you will), without which a man will not be saved. By this we mean, apart from faith one cannot know forgiveness and approving love, appropriating it for oneself. As long as Saul of Tarsus kicked against the pricks (the truth of the gospel and the stabbing call [command] to put away his work righteousness and cast himself completely on the mercy of God in Jesus as the Christ), he *was not saved*, which is to say, not in the sense of *conscious* union with Christ and enjoyment of all His benefits.

A parallel truth that reveals this connection is prayer.

We are commanded to pray and confess our sins. It is required of us. "If you do not pray to God, confessing that sin, you will not be forgiven!" Elders in discipline must state it that way. Does it now follow that one is teaching that God is granting us what we need *depends* (or is suspended) on one's praying? No, but only that the one—prayer—is the *necessary means* to obtaining the other: the spiritual benefits we have sought. Why? Simply because God has graciously determined that that is how He will work. Prayer does not make us worthy, and it is not something about which a spiritual man can or will boast. But pray we do. And all one can do is marvel that God is so gracious as to work that way.

So it is with faith, the faith we exercise in response to the call of the gospel, as Christ through the preacher speaks powerfully, drawing His own.

Now comes the question: What are we preachers allowed and even called to declare when we call men and women to believe in the Lord Jesus as their Savior and Lord? Is this the sum and substance of it: "*Sirs, if you would be saved, you must have Jesus Christ, the Savior*"? That, of course, is how you conclude your letter.

Is that all the missionary dares to say to an inquiring hearer?

We realize you would also be willing to say "repent and believe." But to phrase it this way? Is that the most orthodox and acceptable manner in which to describe the gospel *call*? Does that describe the repentance and faith to which a convicted sinner is *called*?

Such is inadequate. Faith as the act of believing is an embracing, a renouncing of, a turning unto, a casting of oneself upon Christ.... And the list could be added to.

Let me put it this way, brother Lanning: If you are willing to answer the jailer's question by using your own earlier definitions of faith, you would be lining up with Scripture's explanation of gospel preaching. Your answer to the jailer would be: "You must believe in Jesus; that is, you must embrace Him, come to Him, cast yourself upon Him, know Him." If you advocate hesitancy against saying such, you would leave us with a severely truncated gospel call, limiting and muzzling the urgency of the gospel call as it confronts sinners. It is not the language of apostolic and Reformed preaching through the New Testament age, to say nothing of the Old Testament prophets. They were bold and challenging. The prophets, having presented to their hearers the goodness, mercy, and righteousness of God, confronted Israel with their defilement and sins, and then in decisive terms set before the hearers what their calling was. Yes, what they were to do if they were to be spared the wrath of God. One thinks of Joel, who in the context of warning of the coming of that great and terrible day of

the LORD (“Who can abide it” [2:11]), proceeds to say “Therefore also now, saith the LORD, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping.... And rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the LORD your God: For he is gracious and merciful...” (2:12, 13).

That is language of activity and what God’s Israel, with great urgency, was called to do. “While it is today!” And those who refused? Expect to perish.

Again, we return to your statement, “If a man would be saved, he must have Jesus Christ, the Savior.” To be sure, to be saved one must *have* the Lord Jesus. But the question is, *how* am I saved (consciously)? Only by

responding in faith to the call of the gospel that has declared Jesus to be the one only Savior and Lord.

What distinguishes the elect from the reprobate, the spiritual from the carnal, is that they alone are able to do such—having been made willing in the day of Christ’s power. And the saved, believing sinner is moved to give all the glory and credit to his Savior Lord.

That salvation is by grace and grace alone, and by Christ and Christ alone has not been compromised. And the urgency of hearkening to the call of the gospel has been underscored.

In interest of the fullness of gospel preaching,
Rev. K. Koole

Guest article **Prof. Herman Hanko, professor emeritus of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary**

Salvation and good works: All of grace

It has come as a surprise to me that the current controversy in our churches has been over the question of the place of good works in God’s work of salvation. Most of us were taught the truth of this question in our covenant homes, our catechism classes, the preaching we heard every Lord’s Day and it is, as far as I am concerned, what I was taught in the Seminary. It was part of our heritage with its glorious emphasis on sovereign grace. That we face controversy over the question is puzzling to me.

Let me briefly spell out what I (and most others) were taught and to which I have held for nearly ninety years.

We were taught, and I still believe, that all our salvation as it is given to us begins with God’s work of faith in our hearts by which we are united to Christ. All the blessings we now receive and will receive into all eternity come to us from Christ, who earned them for us by His perfect sacrifice on the cross and powerful resurrection from the dead. All is of grace alone. None is by works. He earned for us not only forgiveness of sins, but all the glory of our salvation as it will be given us in heaven.

Paul is emphatic about this in what was almost the theme text of our Protestant Reformed Churches: Ephesians 2:8-10. Most of us can quote it from memory. Paul teaches that the source and fountain of salvation is grace—unmerited favor, for as he says in verse one, we are *dead* in trespasses and sins. The means is faith.

Paul wants it very clear that being saved by grace through faith means that salvation in all its parts is a gift of God, a gift so great that it is not only not based on anything we do, but is given *in spite of* what we do.

Paul anticipates, however, that some in Ephesus (and throughout history) are going to object and insist that

works play a major role. Paul says, with emphasis, NO! Not of works.

Well, then, the objector says, What about works? Are we not to do them? Isn’t it true that we must do good works? Do not all the admonitions of Scripture imply that we can and must do good works?

Paul says, “I’ll tell you about our good works.”

First of all, remember, we are God’s masterpiece; God’s glorious work; the greatest and most beautiful work ever performed; rivaling Rembrandt’s *Watchman*, or any painting of the world’s most gifted artists. We are that masterpiece from the viewpoint of what God makes us: saints that have a glory that is not their own, but radiates the glory of our Creator and Redeemer.

Of course, we do good works, Paul insists, but they are what makes us God’s masterpiece. They are God’s masterpiece because they are the purpose of our salvation: “...created in Christ Jesus for the purpose of good works....” As the *Watchman* shows the skill of the artist, so our good works show the skill of our divine Creator. He makes a humble praying saint out of a murderer!

So what is the source of good works?

The source is God’s counsel. They are all ordained to be done in God’s eternal counsel. Further, they are earned for us in the cross of Christ. And if that were not enough, God sovereignly determines that we should walk in them.

But if you say, “Yes, but we do them,” the answer is given in Philippians 2: God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). He gives us our desire to do them. But He also Himself works in us the doing of them. They are our works because they are His works.

When the minister preaches admonitions, the response in the heart of the believer is: “I can’t do that. I have tried

all week and failed.” God works that too—as He did in the Old Testament when the old covenant demanded that Israel keep the law. The believers knew this and God used the demand to keep the law and man’s conscious inability to do it to bring the gospel of Christ. The law was the schoolmaster to bring believers to Christ. That is why every sermon must be centered in Christ. Paul says that the topic of every sermon he ever preached was “Christ crucified.” “We preach not ourselves,” Paul claims, “but Christ crucified” (I Cor. 1:23; II Cor. 4:5).

We must hear, every Lord’s Day, what Christ has done. Then we are able to hear what we are called to do. We are able to hear the “must” of the law, because hearing what Christ has done means, as Herman Hoeksema said again and again from the pulpit, “Grace makes the “must” of the law the “can” and the “will” of the law. Scripture says not, “You must do this” and “you must do that,” but Scripture says, “You must do this and you must do that because I have made the “must” in you the “can” and the “will.” Work out your own salvation *because it is God who worketh in you....*”

The preaching calls to faith in Christ. Of course, Christ is the source and fountain of all good. But we must not forget that faith is *not* obedience. Thank God, for if it is, we are lost. Obedience is a work and we are saved by grace through faith and not by works. Faith is the very opposite of works, even the works of obedience. “Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. And if by grace, then is it no more of works. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work” (Rom. 11:5-6).

But let us also remember Canons III/IV, 14: “Faith is therefore to be considered as the gift of God, not on account of its being offered by God to man, to be accepted or rejected at his pleasure, but because it is in reality conferred, breathed, and infused into him; or even because God bestows the power or ability to believe, and then expects that man should by the exercise of his own free will consent to the terms of salvation and actually believe in Christ, but because He who works in man both to will and to do, and indeed all things in all, produces both the will to believe and the act of believing also.”

But one might ask: How is it possible for a good work to be my work and God’s work at the same time? The question is necessary because good works are indeed said to be our works, and we must give account for them in the judgment day. Scripture even goes so far as to say that our good works will be rewarded.

In the first place, we are compelled to answer this question by admitting that God’s works are always beyond our understanding. When the Canons discuss God’s work of sanctification, or, as they call it, regener-

ation, a work of God that enables us to do good works, they describe this work as mysterious and ineffable, not less in power than creation itself. Our fathers bowed in worship before the glorious work of salvation that God performed and performs in us.

Second, the Heidelberg Catechism itself points the way when it describes faith as a grafting (Lord’s Day 7). When, for example, a branch of an orange tree is grafted into a lemon tree, the orange tree branch gets every speck of its life from the lemon tree and is totally dependent on it. Yet, it produces oranges. So it is with us. We are grafted into Christ (John 15). All our life is from Christ and all we do is by means of the life of Christ who works faith in us by His Holy Spirit. Yet, each saint has his own unique work of salvation performed in him, his own sins forgiven, his own good works wrought by the Spirit. Paul urges us to work out “our own salvation” not somebody else’s. Yet the willing and the doing come from Christ.

Third, these works are rewarded indeed, but let us not forget what the Belgic Confession says in Article 14, in that beautiful and memorable phrase, that the reward of grace is God’s crown on His work!

If we should ask why God’s work and our works are the same, the answer is obvious. God is the sole Author of our salvation. But God wants us to know and experience our salvation fully so that we may indeed give all praise to Him. That is why He gives us our consciousness of and sorrow for sin. That is why He leads us to the cross so that at Calvary we may see His great love for us. It is His only begotten Son who went to hell for us. And so He works in us gratitude for what He has done, a gratitude expressed in our good works—good works brought about by His work of sanctification. Then we know that He alone is God, and that He saves us and saves by grace alone.

All God’s works are for His own glory, for of Him and to Him and through Him are all things, even salvation. The sinner knows this. He knows that faith, not works, are his salvation, and he goes to the cross in which is all his salvation. Must he do good works? Yes, he must. But knowing that he cannot do them of himself, he goes to Christ, remembering that no man can come to Christ except the Father who sent Christ draw him (John 6:37, 44). He finds his ability to do good works only in the cross. And so, as he lives in the consciousness of his salvation, he marvels at the wonder of it and gives God all the glory for it. He lives by the power of the cross an obedient life, for he knows that thankful children are obedient children.

This is what I was taught. It is the “old paths.” Let us walk in them.



All around us

Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan

A moral turning point: Marijuana

On his program, “The Briefing” (March 15, 2019) Albert Mohler describes the pressure that is building for the legalization of marijuana in the United States. The bottom line is that there is money to be made. Much of Mohler’s program is devoted to an article in *Fortune* magazine entitled “Pot Goes Legit: How to Bet on America’s Next Growth Industry.” Marijuana has already been legalized in Canada and is reported to be “big business.” American companies are already making billions by investing in Canada, but they desire an opportunity to expand their business into the United States. With big business on board, the legalization of marijuana for medicinal and then recreational use seems inevitable.

Mohler reports that in order to promote marijuana, big business plans to use Martha Stewart as an endorser and even to market it as a product for pets:

In the business section of the *New York Times* on Saturday, March the second, an article telling us that Martha Stewart, yes, that Martha Stewart, is also deciding to get into the cannabis business. Laura M. Holson reports, “She is better known for a love of copper pots than pot brownies, and the only cherry pie she seems to indulge in has a crust and is baked in the oven, but Martha Stewart, who built an empire as the doyenne of domesticity, has teamed up with a Canadian cannabis company to create and promote a new line of hemp-based CBD products.”

The newspaper then asks the question, “Could this be a new era of cush cuisine?” By the way, just when you think this story couldn’t get more bizarre, it sounds like something written as satire, but it’s not. It appeared in the business pages of the *New York Times*. Consider this paragraph. Pay attention, especially to how it ends. “Bruce Linton, chief executive of the Ontario-based company Canopy Growth Corporation, says Ms. Stewart would have an advisory role and assist with the development and brand positioning of a new line of offerings for humans and animals. He said they hope to introduce something for pets soon, which they

are currently developing.” Just pause and consider for a moment what this tells us. It tells us that there are people who are now falling head over heels, perhaps literally, by the way, in order to get into the cannabis industry. They need to find a new angle.

One of the new angles is getting Martha Stewart to be an advisor to the corporation and a public symbol. The other is developing lines of cannabis-based products for pets. That’s right. Fido needs his marijuana, too.

Mohler also reports about the plans of Barneys New York, a high-end retailer, that indicate how much big businesses have determined to embrace and market marijuana. He writes,

Barneys New York will unveil a shop selling cannabis-related accoutrements including blown glass pipes and 24 karat gold rolling papers at its Beverly Hills flagship next month. Again, a sign of the times. We’re talking about Barneys New York, in its Beverly Hills flagship store, opening a shop that is going to sell the coolest and most luxurious cannabis and marijuana accessories of all, blown glass pipes and 24 karat gold rolling papers. As you’re thinking about what this means in moral change, how moral change happens, just remember that we have trace to the similar kinds of trajectories of the normalization, the vast moral change, on the questions of homosexuality, specifically looking at same sex marriage, and also at the legitimization and the normalization of marijuana. This article gets right to it: “Barneys believes that by lending its craftsmanship and cache to cannabis related products, some of the stigma may fall away.”

Mohler pounces on the word “stigma,” which indicates that the legalization and use of marijuana is not simply an economic matter; it is a moral matter. Mohler’s explains that in this sinful, fallen world, too often moral issues are settled on the basis of economic considerations. Just as businesses have accepted and promote the LGBTQ lifestyle because they see how they can use it to make money, they will now embrace marijuana if they see their way to profits. Too often the

moral issues—the “stigmas”—get easily swept aside.

But there are issues regarding marijuana that we (especially Christians!) should consider very seriously. Mohler touches on only some of the issues in his article. He explains that there is evidence that links marijuana usage to suicide, schizophrenia, car crashes, lowered IQ, and violence.

Mohler does not address some of the other questions that need serious consideration. What do we think of marijuana’s medicinal use, and how is it different from other painkilling drugs? What do we think of its recreational use? Is it possible to use marijuana “moderately,” like tobacco or alcohol, or does it so alter the mind that it is always sinful for a Christian to use? My inclination is to say it is best to abstain from marijuana and

that the church should strictly forbid its use. We have enough other problems, let’s just keep this one out. But Mohler’s report reminds us that we will not so easily answer and dismiss marijuana and all the questions that arise regarding its use.

However, we can clearly see that a moral turning is taking place. There was, but soon no longer will be, a stigma attached to using marijuana in our society. Much as the stigma is wearing off concerning homosexuality, so much so that it is possible that a “married” homosexual man will be the nominee for president for one of our major political parties in 2020 (“Mayor Pete”). So, when it comes to marijuana, let’s be reminded as Christians of our calling not to keep up with the world but to be different.



Taking heed to the doctrine

Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California

“As to our good works” (1)

Introducing the subject

We obey. We do. We labor. We work. We must work. We can work. We do work. By the power of Christ’s Spirit we elect believers who have been called into communion with Christ do good works. But what is the relation between our doing of good works of obedience according to the law of God and our salvation—our justification and sanctification? What is the relation between our doing of good works and our experience and assurance of the love of God in His covenant?

With this article we take up a biblical and confessional examination of the massive, fascinating, and critically important subject of the good works of the believer. And while we intend to say something about the *nature* of good works, we want to focus on the historically contentious issue of the *function* of good works. In explaining good works we must draw as precisely as can be the line of orthodoxy that runs between the works-righteousness of *legalism* (salvation by works) and the works-carelessness (salvation without fruit) or works-licentiousness (salvation with evil works) of *antinomianism*. We do not want to attribute to good works a place that is unwarranted by Scripture and the confes-

sions, for then we slight and deny Christ’s work *for* us; but neither do we want to fail to give to good works the place assigned by Scripture and the confessions, for then we slight and deny the Spirit’s work *in* us.

Purposeful

Our purpose in this soteriological examination is, first, to defend and promote the God-honoring and soul-comforting Reformation gospel of salvation by grace alone (*not* by our works), through faith alone (*not* by our works), in Christ alone (*not* our works but His). Without this gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation in the revelation of His righteousness, the church is not the church and neither has she any purpose in the world. Since the time of the first revelation of this gospel in Paradise, this gospel of grace has been threatened and attacked by some form of the teaching (usually subtle teaching), of salvation by our good works. The first purpose of an examination of good works must always be the defense and maintenance of the gospel of grace.

Secondly, our purpose is to confirm and sharpen our understanding of God’s truth in the matter of our good

works. Although this subject is always controversial in the history of the church, it is not hopelessly complicated. We know the ABC's of it:

- I do not do good works in order to get something from God.
- My Savior's perfect work obtained everything I receive from God.
- I (yet not I, but the grace of God that is with me) do good works in order to give grateful praise to my gracious God for all His benefits to me.

While we know the fundamentals, we can always be sharpened and mature in our understanding of the details.

Thirdly, our purpose is to inspire a thankful life of holiness unto the God of our salvation by loving Him, His precious truth, and our neighbor. While the doctrine of salvation by works is an ever-present *doctrinal* threat to the church, worldliness, as the antithesis to a holy life, is the ever-present *practical* threat. Worldliness characterizes the life of the professing Christian who has an intellectual apprehension of the gospel but "the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful" (Matt. 13:22). Even as it was in the days of Noah and shall be in the days of the Son of man (Luke 17:26), worldliness is not only gross wickedness but also giving to things that are perfectly legitimate in themselves too much of our time, interest, and enthusiasm, so that our hearts and homes start leaning toward Babylon while our love for God, His Christ, His church, and His truth waxes cold.

As every believer knows, the solution to the perilous threat of worldliness is not, never has been, and never shall be a doctrine of works. A doctrine of works produces pride and "the pride of life is not of the Father but of the world" (I John 2:16). The solution is *grace*. The Spirit accomplishes the goal of godliness in teaching us that "denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world" (Titus 2:12) when He works in us the gift of faith so that we can believe the gospel. And what is the gospel but the declaration of everlasting covenant friendship with Jehovah for unworthy law-transgressors by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone! The fount of godliness is the cross of the everlasting love of God where our Lord "gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father" (Gal. 1:4).

Beneficial

The benefit of selecting good works as our subject in this soteriological exam is that we do not have to choose

between justification or sanctification as our subject, but will examine both from the viewpoint of good works. Reformed theologians in their systemization of biblical doctrines typically do not elevate good works to the dignity of a special article. In classic Reformed soteriology the subject of good works is not a distinct chapter or article. Rather, the subject of good works is informally treated under the heading of "justification," when from a strictly negative point of view Reformed soteriology emphatically denies that good works contribute anything to the elect sinner's righteousness before God. Justification is by faith and not works. Moreover, the subject of good works is formally treated and positively developed under the heading of "sanctification" as a logical explication of the details of sanctification (thus Belgic Confession, Art. 24 is entitled "Man's Sanctification and Good Works"). By taking good works as our subject, we will take heed to the doctrine of justification and the importance of *faith alone*, as well as the doctrine of sanctification, which is also by faith alone, and where the positive benefits of good works as blessed fruits are to be explained.

Furthermore, the benefit of focusing on the concept of works is that we can emphasize *what* works do save us. In repudiating our good works as the ground for our righteousness before God and that upon which any part of our salvation depends, we can still be positive regarding certain works. The gospel declares the holy works of *Christ* on our behalf. We fail to vindicate sound doctrine if we do not highly exalt works—not ours, but all those perfect works God's incarnate Son performed in fulfilling all righteousness under the law on our behalf through His lifelong obedience and sacrificial death of infinite worth. *He*, the Lord from heaven, lived the life no son of Adam could ever live, and triumphed over death, bringing life and immortality to light so that He is not only the Way and the Truth, but also the *Life* (John 14:6) by whose life we are and shall be saved (Rom. 5:10). *He* satisfied divine justice on our behalf, not only by suffering all that the law threatened but also by rendering all the obedience that the law required. *He* is our righteousness (Jer. 23:6, Rom. 3:22), in whom we have a right to every blessing of God. *He* was sent to accomplish full and free salvation, and He did when He cried from the cross what no man may ever dare deny: "It is finished!" (John 19:30). Salvation is by faith in *Him*. If we do not do justice to the work of Christ, then no matter how often we condemn salvation by our works, or repeat that "salvation is by grace," our works will subtly creep in somewhere, somehow, and find a place in our doctrinal expressions or in our thinking that they may not have. It is not enough to op-

pose salvation by our good works; we must be positive, and believe and teach salvation by the perfect works of Christ. Those who are saved by grace alone through faith alone sweetly repose in Christ and what *He* has done. Necessarily, then, our doing and working cannot be anything other than the fruit of thankfulness to the praise of God's grace in Christ our righteousness.

Historical

A doctrinal examination of the believer's good works must necessarily be historical in accounting for what God has already led the Reformed faith to say about good works, including and especially what God has led the PRC to say about good works. An official summary of what the PRC have said on good works is found in the "Declaration of Principles," which Synod 1951 adopted as a systematic statement of what the Three Forms of Unity teach on the doctrines of grace and the covenant.

The first truth the PRC have affirmed about good works concerns the *nature* of good works: works are only good if they proceed out of a heart regenerated by the Holy Spirit. In the third point of common grace, Synod 1924 of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) declared that the unregenerate are capable of performing certain kinds of works that are good and pleasing in the eyes of the Lord. In his writings Herman Hoeksema argued extensively and persuasively that the works of the unregenerate, glittering though they may be to our eyes, are not good works. The "Declaration of Principles" later gave expression to the Protestant Reformed and confessional repudiation of this error of common grace, stating, "That the unregenerate man is totally incapable of doing any good, wholly depraved, and therefore can only sin."¹

The second confessional truth the PRC have affirmed about good works concerns the *function* of good works: good works never function as prerequisites or conditions for the reception of covenant membership, the covenant promise or any blessing in the covenant, but are necessary and inevitable in the Lord's covenant friend-servant as fruits of thankfulness. In the early 1950s the PRC repudiated the teaching that the covenant promise of God is given to every baptized child with the fulfillment of that promise conditioned upon the faith and obedience of the child. The "Declaration" states, "That faith is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, but a gift of God, and a God-given instrument whereby

we appropriate the salvation in Christ."² Although the subject of our good works of obedience was not explicitly addressed, the implication is crystal clear: if the *instrument* of salvation—faith—is not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation, then most certainly the *fruits* of salvation—good works—are not a prerequisite or condition unto salvation.

After repudiating a conditional covenant, the "Declaration" wards off the charge that the denial of conditions in salvation is inherently antinomian, minimizes the importance of good works, and leads to the loose living of antinomianism, by adding:

The sure promise of God which He realizes in us as rational and moral creatures not only makes it impossible that we should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness but also confronts us with the obligation of love, to walk in a new and holy life, and constantly to watch unto prayer.

All those who are not thus disposed, who do not repent but walk in sin, are the objects of His just wrath and excluded from the kingdom of heaven.³

Careful

An examination of the good works of the believer must be conducted carefully with precision of expression. We have no desire to press the church into a hopeless quagmire of endless distinctions that stifles the pulpit, pew, and pen. Our desire is faithfulness to God and His Word. Almost every Reformed believer knows by memory a passage full of fine soteriological distinctions: Ephesians 2:8-10, which teaches, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." We are not saved *by works*, but *by grace*. We are not saved *through works* but *through faith*. We are not saved, nor do we have faith *of ourselves* or *of our works*, but as *the gift of God*. We are not created *by* (our) good works but *unto* good works, and not that we should *occasionally do some*, but that we should *walk in* them.

If the surgeon or airline pilot makes fine adjustments to his instruments for precision of movement in the interest of physical lives, then the teacher of sound doctrine will want careful precision in rightly dividing the Word of truth for the sake of spiritual lives.

1 "Declaration of Principles," in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 413.

2 "Declaration of Principles," 423.

3 "Declaration," 426.

Personal

An examination of good works is not something abstract or remote; it touches our personal experience. It is our experience that God, through His Holy Word, takes us down into the dark valley of the knowledge of sin where there are two tables of stone, and off opposing mountainsides the constant pronouncement, “Blessed are they that do,” and “Cursed are they that do not.” Not every preacher or congregant wants to go down there, but we know we must and the pain administered by a sharp and deep law will serve our good. With all of our works exposed as sinful, we stand trembling before the just Judge of heaven and earth and we cry, “The evil that the law forbids and that I would not, that I do! And the good that the law requires and that I would, that I fail to do! Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?!”

But we do not stay in that dark valley. To stay there would bring despair. The same Spirit that works conviction of sin through the law leads us up out of the valley of darkness to a little gospel hill. Running into the hill is a trail of inexpressible sorrow. Under the shadow of the hill sits an empty tomb. Standing on the hill is a cross that once carried a bloody, crying, dying Lamb without blemish. To that hill we come by faith under the light of God’s Fatherly countenance and unload at the foot of that cross all our transgressions, while beat-

ing our breasts and crying, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” God declares what the good but impotent law of the dark valley could not, “Grace, mercy, and peace be richly multiplied unto you. For the sake of my Son and His perfect work on your behalf, I declare you pardoned of all sin and I impute to you His perfect righteousness. You are an heir of everlasting life.”

But we do not stand idle before the hill. The same Spirit that worked in us repentance of sin and faith in the glad tidings quickens us to go forth from that hill motivated by a heart of gratitude. To the Gentiles in the streets who cry, “Come run with us to the same excess of riot!” and to the devil who whispers, “Christ has paid the price, you are free to run with them and enter those worldly tents of wickedness without any penalty!” we say, “Never! I love the Lord who heard my cry! My life will I render unto Him for all His benefits toward me! The “must” of His law is the sincere desire of my grateful heart!” Avoiding the streets and tents we go off to the beautiful hills beyond, the little hills that skip like lambs where the light of God’s countenance continues to shine. There, with the law written on our hearts, we are free. We run in the Spirit, offering ourselves in praise and thanksgiving to God in a life of good works.

This is the ongoing, repeated experience of the sinful, redeemed, thankful believer.

Now what about those good works?



God’s wondrous works

Rev. James Laning, pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa

Foundational principles (14) Evils sent for our good

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2018, p. 88.

When evils come upon us in this life, it is a great comfort to know that they are sent by our Father in heaven who loves us. We may not always think about this right away. Yet, it is often not long before we begin to meditate on what God has told us. We think on how He has assured us that He loves us and that He is accomplishing His good purpose with our afflictions. We remember His promise that He will be with us, and that He will continue to uphold and guide us each day. Believing what our Father says, we are strengthened and remain patient in such difficult times.

There are a number of aspects to this subject. In this article we will briefly consider the following:

- What is an evil?
- Does God really send evils or is it better to say that He permits them?
- Are evils sent as a punishment for sin? What about the evils that come upon God’s people whom He loves?
- How is it that these evils are turned to our advantage?

God sending evils

The word *evil* is used in more than one sense. In addition to its common use to refer to that which is sinful, it is also used to refer to that which would tend to cause injury, pain, or sorrow. Scripture speaks of *evil* beasts (Lev. 26:6; Ezek. 34:25) and *evil* diseases (Deut. 7:15), for example.

When an evil comes upon us, it is correct to say that God has sent it. Although some are uncomfortable saying this, it is biblical language. God spoke of sending evil beasts and the evil arrows of famine: *When I shall send upon them the evil arrows of famine, which shall be for their destruction, and which I will send to destroy you: and I will increase the famine upon you, and will break your staff of bread: So will I send upon you famine and evil beasts, and they shall bereave thee* (Ezek. 5:16-17a).

Even evil spirits are said to be sent by God: *Then God sent an evil spirit between Abimelech and the men of Shechem; and the men of Shechem dealt treacherously with Abimelech* (Judges 9:23).

God sends evil upon those committing evil. God spoke of this when He warned the Israelites about what would come upon them if they turned to other gods: *Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us? And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods* (Deut. 31:17-18). Those who commit evil receive the just judgment of having evil come upon them.

This refers to God sending not only evil diseases and wild beasts, but also evil persons who attack. Repeatedly in Scripture we read of God using one group of people to attack another. When the Assyrians took Israel captive and when the Babylonians took Judah into captivity, it was Jehovah who was using these ungodly empires to execute His judgment.

God used the word “evil” to refer to such invasions: *Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?* (Amos 3:6). When there was “evil” (for example, an attacking enemy) in the city, the one who had “done it” was Jehovah God. He was the one who was sending the evil as a just judgment against the sin of the people.

That God sends evils has long been known and confessed by God’s people. The prophet Jeremiah, for example, asked God to bring upon his persecutors “the

day of evil” (Jer. 17:18). Both in the old dispensation and in the new, God’s people have believed that evils come not by chance, but by the hand of our faithful Father in heaven.

The multitude of passages that speak of this assure us that God certainly is governing this world, executing His judgments throughout this age. Yet there is an important distinction between His judgments upon the ungodly and His judgments that come upon His people in Christ.

Evils coming upon God’s people

God sends evils also upon His people. An evil may come upon us even when we are walking with God with a good conscience. From the hand of our God we receive not only good, but also evil. This is what Job confessed when he rebuked his wife after she told him to “curse God, and die.” *But he said unto her, Thou speakest as one of the foolish women speaketh. What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In all this did not Job sin with his lips* (Job 2:10).

Job confessed that both good and evil come to us from our heavenly Father. It was not wrong for him to confess this. God says: “In all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

God does indeed send evils also upon His children, but He sends them in His love for our profit. All our sins have been punished already. The punishment came upon our Lord in our place. We confess this in our Lord’s Supper Form: *... the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) He hath punished the same in His beloved Son Jesus Christ with the bitter and shameful death of the cross.*

Though our sins have already been atoned for, our heavenly Father does afflict us with various evils. He does so in His love for us, teaching us to place our firm trust in Him alone.

We know this because our heavenly Father has told us. Though He does not tell us why a specific evil has come upon a specific person, He does tell us that He sends afflictions upon us in His love, and that He turns them to our profit. We sing in the Psalms that we know these afflictions are for our good: *Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word* (Ps. 119:67). *It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes* (Ps. 119:71).

We know, from the book of Job, for example, that we are not to look at the afflictions that come upon God’s people and think that the more holy a person’s life is the less afflictions he will receive. God has a specific place

for each one of us in the body of Christ, and He makes use of afflictions as He prepares us for this.

Learning in our afflictions

In our afflictions our Father is teaching us to withdraw our trust from ourselves and to place it alone in God. Paul says that this was the lesson that God was teaching him in a very difficult trial in which he thought he was going to die: *But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead* (II Cor. 1:9).

Elsewhere Paul said that God sent him an affliction to humble him, and to teach him that God's strength is made perfect in weakness (II Cor. 12:9).

Our affliction at times may seem heavy. It may seem very heavy, and it may appear to go on for a long time. Yet our Father in heaven tells us that our affliction is actually light and that it will last only for a short time. He also assures us that He is using these light afflictions to work for us an exceeding and eternal weight of glory: *For our light affliction, which is but for a moment,*

worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Cor. 4:17-18).

The last part of that verse tells us something about how He turns these afflictions to our profit. In our afflictions we learn to look not at the visible things, but at the invisible things. We grow more to think on and cling to the covenant promises of our God.

By means of this faith we receive more grace and are more conformed to the glorious image of our Lord. Knowing this, we actually glory in our afflictions. We say with Paul, *When I am weak, then I am strong* (II Cor. 12:10).

What a comfort it is for us to know that our Father in heaven governs all things, and that His good purpose is always being accomplished. With this comfort we learn to be patient in our afflictions, and to thank our God, not only when He averts the evils, but also when He sends them and turns them to our profit.



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdome, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

Can you tell me the name of the First Tech Challenge Robotics team at Trinity Christian High School in Hull, Iowa? Answer later in this column.

Young people's activities

The 2019 convention will soon be here. All information for the conventioners is available on the convention website prconvention.com. Southwest and Providence PRCs are looking forward to a great week of fellowship and fun for our young people!

The Hull, IA PR Young People's Society hosted the annual Resurrection singspiration for the five Siouxland area churches on a Sunday evening in April. It was a very fitting and enjoyable way to end the Sabbath!

The Grace Young People invited the congregation to an Ice Cream Social fundraiser following their Good Friday evening service. Family and friends joined for refreshments/fellowship after the service, with donations going to the 2019 YP convention. The young people

also thanked the congregation for the support given through the recent sub/soup sale and the "Night of Music."

Congregational activities

The Men's Society of the Doon, IA PRC hosted the annual Bible Study meeting of the five area churches. The men from Edgerton, MN introduced the after-recess topic on "Personal Evangelism."

From the bulletin of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA:

Men's Bible Study will meet on Saturday morning at 8 A.M. **SPRING CLEANUP:** After the men's Bible Study this Saturday, around 9:30 A.M., we will do our annual Spring Clean Up. This will be a yard clean up, as well as a thorough cleaning of our church building, inside and out. Bring your rakes, shovels, buckets, rags, wheelbarrows, children etc., and come ready to work (and eat).

All in the Siouxland area were asked to reserve Thursday, May 9 for a presentation at Calvary PRC in Hull, IA by Mr. Ron Klaasen of the Trinitarian Bible Society entitled: “What are the differences between the King James Version and Modern Translations of the Bible?” Refreshments followed the presentation.

Young adult activities

From Lynden PRC concerning their Young Adults Retreat:

Registration for our 2019 retreat has been opened. Thank you to all that have registered already. Come join us July 1-5 for a week filled with spiritual encouragement, white water rafting, campfires, hiking, and other fun activities with like-minded believers! Check out our website (<https://lyndenprcya.wixsite.com/mysite>) to register and for more details. We also have a Facebook page (Lynden PRC Young Adults Retreat 2019). Email us at lyndenprcya@gmail.com with any questions you may have. We look forward to hosting all of you in Washington!

Young Calvinists invited area young people and young adults to “Taste of India” to be held at Georgetown PRC recently. The evening began with an authentic Indian dinner. Following dinner they presented a documentary on Grace Foster Home of Vellore, India. Pastor Paul Raj was to be there for Q&A afterwards.

Sister-church activities

From the April 21 bulletin of the Maranatha PRC:

The Protestant Reformed Seminary of the PRCA has invited two ministers of the PRCP, Rev. V. Ibe and Rev. L. Trinidad to attend the Conference of Dordt 400, a celebration of the great Synod of Dordt 1618-19 at Trinity PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on April 25-27, 2019. Our two ministers will be leaving on the 24th. Please remember them in your prayers that the Lord will guide them on their travel, meeting the delegates, and grant them the abundant blessing.

And another item was noted too: “The Classis of the PRCP will hold their regular meeting on June 12, 2019 at the Berean PRC, Mayamot, Antipolo City.”

From the bulletin of Provident Christian Church of Marikina:

The third and final meeting of Provident’s Council and Committee 2 (Contact Committee) of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines was recently completed. We are thankful to God for the good outcomes of these meetings and look forward, according

to the will of our Father in heaven, to be received as the fourth congregation of the PRCP this June.

Minister activities

We remember Rev. W. Langerak and his family as they have bid farewell to the congregation of Southeast PRC. He was installed as pastor of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI on May 12.

Rev. C. Spronk was led by God to decline the call extended to him to be minister-on-loan to the CERC in Singapore. May God continue to bless this sister in her vacancy.

Advance notice:

The Protestant Reformed Special Education Peer-to-Peer walk will take place September 21 at 10:00 A.M. in Millennium Park at 1415 Maynard Avenue SW in Walker, MI.

Evangelism activities

Georgetown PRC invited all to a slide program Sunday evening, May 12, on the work of the PRC of Vellore, India in the spread of the Reformed faith. Pastor Paul Raj related the history of the Vellore congregation, the outreach into Hindu villages with the Reformed faith, the training of area pastors, and the group of doctors and students from the Christian Medical College and their zeal for the faith, as well as the present opposition of the Indian government to Christianity.

School activities

The Adams’ Amazing Race—4 cities, 20 stops, and scavenger hunt! The Race took place on May 18!

Senior activities

“God’s Care For Us “ is the theme for the fifth Protestant Reformed Senior Retreat being held this Fall, September 17-20, at Gull Lake Ministries in Hickory Corners, MI. Scheduled from late afternoon Tuesday through breakfast on Friday, the retreat will be a time of speeches, discussion, and relaxing social interaction with fellow believers. The three speeches will be given by Rev. C. Spronk, Rev. W. Bruinsma, and Rev. K. Koole, after which the attendees will separate for discussion groups. Other programs and special numbers are being planned. There will be plenty of time for coffee, snacks, and conversations with new and former friends. Registration is open from May 1-August 1. Forms can be downloaded from the website—go to Zion PRC’s website (zionprc.org) and click on “Senior Retreat.”

Forms will also be sent to each of the churches and available there. Looking forward to seeing you there. Did we mention lots of coffee and goodies?!

Trivia answer

The Trinity Christian High School Robotics team is labeled the “bzBots.” The “Bots,” of course, comes from Robots. The “bz” is derived from the biblical figure Bezaleel, of whom we read in Exodus 31:36-39, a man known to be the chief artisan of the tabernacle and a highly gifted master workman.

And how did the bzBots do this season? After sweeping the table in northwest Iowa, they traveled in March to Coralville for the State of Iowa championships. They finished second in the State there, and would have finished

first had their alliance partner not failed to latch to the lander in the last seconds of play. Second place in the State of Iowa earned them a spot in the World First Tech Challenge Competition in Detroit, MI in April. 160 teams gathered in Detroit. Many teams from the USA were there, but also teams from Cyprus, China, India, Israel, South Africa, South Korea, the Netherlands, Germany, Romania, and the United Kingdom. Over the course of four days the bzBots won six of their nine challenge matches and finished with an 18th place ranking of the 80 teams in their division. Congratulations to the team on a fine season and for representing Trinity Christian High so well!

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:3

Announcements

Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness and praise to our great God, we rejoice with our parents, **Chet and Sharon Haveman**, who will celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on June 19, 2019. We give thanks for the many years God has given them together and for the godly example they have set for us in both marriage and a Christ-centered home. Psalm 106:1: “Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever.”

Joel and Janna Huisken

Trevor, Mitchell, Kelly, Emily

Michael and Heidi Haveman

Ethan, Darcie

Hudsonville, Michigan

Classis West

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Calvary PRC, Hull, Iowa, on Wednesday, September 25, 2019, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk 30 days before classis convenes, that is, by August 26, 2019. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Calvary’s consistory.

Rev. J. Engelsma, Stated Clerk

Teacher needed

The **Edmonton PR Christian School** is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2019–2020 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–4, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2018 appointed First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI the calling church for the 2019 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2019 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 11, at 8:00 A.M., in the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 10, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. VanOverloop, president of the 2018 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. Dan Monsma, 460 Comstock Blvd. NE, Grand Rapids, MI 49505. Phone: (616) 308-3664.

Consistory of

First Protestant Reformed Church

Dan Monsma, Clerk

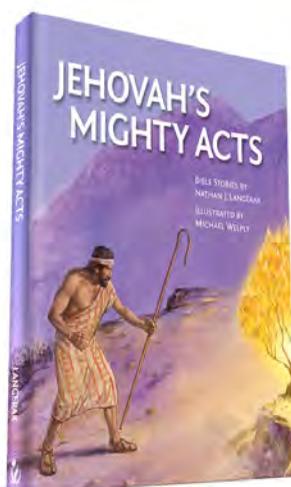
Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

- | | |
|---------|--|
| June 2 | “Now and Then” I Corinthians 13:12 |
| June 9 | “The Greatest of These Is Love” I Corinthians 13:13 |
| June 16 | “Religion Defended (1)” Isaiah 48:11 |
| June 23 | “Religion Defended (2)” Isaiah 48:11 |
| June 30 | “Unconditional Election (1)” John 6:37-40 |

Announcements continued

Coming soon!

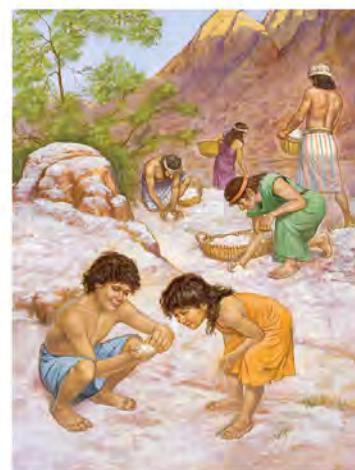


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