

# The Standard Bearer

A Reformed semi-monthly magazine

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## Build my house

Rev. Michael DeVries

## Sabbaticals for our ministers

Prof. Barrett Gritters

## Obedience to the call of the gospel

Rev. Kenneth Koole

## Of sin and folly

Rev. Thomas Miersma

## A man of character

Rev. Joshua Engelsma



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## Contents

### Meditation

- 247 **Build my house**  
Rev. Michael DeVries

### Editorial

- 249 **Sabbaticals for our ministers**  
Prof. Barrett Gritters

### Letters

- 251 **Obedience to the call of the gospel**  
256 **Spiritual battles in the church**

### All around us

- 258 **Scottish police acquits *itself* of “hate incident”**  
Rev. Martyn McGeown

### Search the Scriptures

- 260 **Of sin and folly (Eccl. 10:1-3)**  
Rev. Thomas Miersma

### Strength of youth

- 262 **A man of character**  
Rev. Joshua Engelsma

### Activities

- 265 **News from our churches**  
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



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## Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan

# Build my house

**“...build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.”**

**Haggai 1:8b**

As our fathers have often expressed it, the faithful church is reformed and always reforming. The work of the church must continue and go forward. We need on-going and renewed zeal and enthusiasm! From this point of view, Haggai’s prophecy is of great significance for us today. His prophecy concerns the church and our calling to do the work of the church.

The prophet Haggai prophesied in Judah about fifteen years after some fifty thousand Jews returned from captivity under the leadership of the prince Zerubbabel and Joshua the high priest. But, even though the Jews had been back that long, the temple was still not rebuilt. When they first returned from Babylon, they immediately begun the work of rebuilding. It had not taken long to set up the altar of burnt offering. Within two years they had laid the foundation for the new temple; but then things stalled, and nothing more had been done.

The Jews had their excuses. There had been interference from their enemies; particularly the Samaritans had disrupted the work. Ultimately, they had succeeded in obtaining a decree from the Persian king ordering that the work be stopped. But, in recent years, it had become a matter of the Jews’ own indifference and worldliness.

The Word of God that Haggai was to proclaim was the call to build God’s house, the temple: “...build the house; and I will take pleasure in it, and I will be glorified, saith the LORD.” This is the Word of God for us today and for the church today. It is the call to love the church as the house of God! It is the call to work diligently in the place God has given us in the church—all this unto the great glory of our God! And God will take pleasure in it!

To apply this calling to ourselves and to understand the relevance of Haggai’s prophecy, we must see that Jehovah’s house, the temple, is a picture of the church. It prefigures the institute of the church, even each local congregation. The temple symbolizes the church as we see her, the visible church with her officebearers and

members. God’s house is the church as she is called to manifest the marks of the faithful preaching of the gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and the loving exercise of Christian discipline. It is the church as she is the communion of saints, worshiping God, and striving together to serve Him.

Scripture speaks often of the church as a building, a temple, a house. Ephesians 2:21 describes it as a building fitly framed together that grows unto an holy temple in the Lord. I Peter 2:5 describes it as a spiritual house. We read in I Timothy 3:15, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” The church institute is for us the house of God. And Haggai calls us to work in and for that house when he brings us the Word of Jehovah God, “Build the house!”

For this house always needs to be built. This work of building it is never finished in this life. In time of reformation the church must be raised up from spiritual shambles. She must be built up upon the solid foundation of the Word of God. But always the rebuilding must continue. The construction must go on. That is true today as never before! From a spiritual point of view, much of the visible church lies waste and desolate. Her foundation has crumbled and her walls are broken down. In much of what calls herself church the marks of the true church can scarcely be seen. Her worship and her activities are not according to the Scripture. She is hardly recognizable any more as the church instituted by Christ. She often resembles a center for entertainment or perhaps a social service agency. And many of her members sorely neglect her, at least as far as their proper calling is concerned. The church must ever and always be rebuilt, our churches too, as the pillar and ground of the truth!

We must hear and heed the call: “Build the house!” But not for a moment may we forget that it is ultimately God’s work. As Lord’s Day 21 of the Heidelberg Catechism asserts: it is the Son of God who gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself, by His Spirit and Word, His church. We have not in ourselves the power, the

strength, the ability to do the work. Nevertheless, God is pleased to use us, and He calls us unto the work. And the power to obey is even in the command as applied by the Spirit. And we ever look to God for the grace, strength, and wisdom we need to build.

What does this work of building involve? Obviously, for a building, the foundation is crucial. The Scriptures make clear that the foundation is sound doctrine, the doctrine of the apostles and prophets, the truth of God's Word as also set forth in our confessions. The cornerstone is Jesus Christ Himself (Eph. 2:20). So the faithful preaching of the gospel must be maintained, and sound instruction must be provided for the covenant youth in the catechism classes. We build by fervent prayer for the ministry of the gospel, and by our faithful attendance at the services for divine worship. We build by reading and studying the Scriptures with our families, in our personal devotions, as well as with our fellow saints. By all these means every member of the church is shaped and fitted together for a dwelling place for God Himself.

Making our own homes spiritually strong and stable is a vital aspect of this building. Our marriages, which are to be a reflection of Christ and His bride, the church, must be strong and godly. Instructing our children, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, is building God's house. Even our daily work and times of recreation, when done with a view to and for the sake of God's kingdom, are involved in building. All these things, and many more, are involved in building the house of God.

And we must emphasize that this calling to build belongs to every believer! Certainly, godly officebearers are vital for this work. Faithful elders to oversee the flock and zealous deacons to collect and distribute the alms are essential. Faithful pastors who give themselves to prayer and to the ministry of the Word are building. But this work of building belongs to every believer, young and old, men and women. Our children and young people must be at our side, learning, even assisting, in the work. All are to be builders in God's house. None may neglect that work. We may not simply leave that work to others. We may not be too busy with our own activities and affairs to have time to build.

For this is an urgent calling—as urgent for us as it was for the Jews at that time. God issues this call with the promise that He will take pleasure in the house and

be glorified in it. His pleasure is God's good pleasure, His sovereign counsel. It is His purpose to magnify Himself as our covenant God and Savior, even in our Lord Jesus Christ. As our heavenly Father, He purposes to abide with us in His house. The church will be for us the place of fellowship with God, the place of His glory.

And yet the danger is very real that we, like the Jews at that time, neglect the work of building. The context (v. 2) tells us that the people of that day were saying that the time to start building had not yet come. They had their excuses—they were too poor; their enemies were still too strong; there was the decree of the king. And besides, they were too busy! And here we get to the heart of the problem. As verse 9 emphasizes, they were running to their own houses while God's house lay waste. God, through Haggai, admonishes them for their worldliness.

And that is frequently the problem today—our problem! How often do we not care more for our own houses than God's house! We too are often beset with a spirit of materialism and a lack of self-denial. We have precious little time for the church—for serving her, for

assisting others in their need, even for the work of building up spiritually our own marriages and families! So many of the pleasures and treasures of the world draw us away from the great work of building the house of God. To the extent that this is true of us, we cannot prosper spiritually. And we will ex-

perience the spiritual famine and blasting of which the context warns!

Let us hear this Word of God, "Consider your ways!" Think on these things! Build the house! Deny yourself; take up your cross; follow Him who is the Master builder, Jesus Christ! Yea, Christ reaches down, as it were, and fits us into our particular place where we can be used by Him to build, to serve, to the glory of Him whose house is being built. And our joyful song shall ever be:

"Zion founded on the mountains,  
God thy Maker loves thee well;  
He has chosen thee, most precious,  
He delights in thee to dwell."

(Psalter 237)

**...this work of building belongs to every believer, young and old, men and women. Our children and young people must be at our side, learning, even assisting, in the work. All are to be builders in God's house. None may neglect that work.**



## Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

# Sabbaticals for our ministers

Tired ministers are not useful ministers. Weary, they will not do the good work we have asked them to do, Christ requires them to do, and they themselves *want* to do. Pastors become weary because of many factors, some they can control and others beyond their control. And often they do not get enough rest.

Our churches, with consistories at the lead, may examine how they give rest to their pastors.

In Reformed churches like the PRCA and our sisters, pastors have colossal pressures put on them. Ministers have always been given substantial workloads, but these days, with generally larger churches, the workloads are correspondingly greater. By my estimation, a man in even a small congregation will need at least 70 hours each week to get his work done if he devotes a minimum 16 hours to each sermon and 2 hours to each catechism class—and a minimum is never ideal. In coming to this estimate, I included leading two Bible studies, visiting the sick and elderly two hours per week, consistory meetings, evangelism meetings, family visitation, a few hours for private catechetical instruction or personal counseling, and about an equal amount of time preparing for each of these meetings. This estimate does *not* account for weddings and funerals, the unexpected call to the hospital or to the family in trouble. The hours do *not* include denominational committee work, chapel speeches for the Christian school or the local nursing home, or writing for our magazines. I did *not* factor in personal reading or correspondence. All of which are a normal part of most pastor's responsibilities.

Then there is Sunday itself, when a man preaches two sermons. Someone once estimated that the emotional and physical energy it takes to speak vigorously for an hour is like six hours of manual labor. He might lead a Young People's Bible study or speak at a Young People's Mass Meeting. Sometimes the elders call a special counsel meeting after church to deal with a pressing issue.

Pastors are busy, as one recent writer put it, *Crazy Busy*. They become bone-weary tired. On Monday morning they often feel wrung out like a dishcloth, at which point many must prepare for and teach four-to-six catechism classes.

If pastors and their elders are not careful, something

will give. The ministry may suffer. The people of God may suffer. So may the man's health when he does not get sufficient sleep or proper exercise to maintain himself. His family may not get proper attention. Soon, sermon-making time will get shorter, personal reading time will disappear, and the 'guilt of the unmade call' will bear him down. When conflicts arise (they always do in a sinful world), he may be irritable. And when right judgments in hard cases are crucial (they always are in Christ's church), he makes poor judgments.

Faithful ministers who read this may not like such attention drawn to their large workload. They went into the ministry aware of the wholehearted devotion required. In a special way, ministers are willing to dedicate themselves to their calling unlike almost any other. They promised, as Paul to the Corinthians, a willingness "to spend and be spent" for the church, to have the work *exhaust* them. Besides, they love their work because they love the Lord Jesus who called them to it. So, to imagine that the Lord's work might suffer because they become overly tired is not what they like to consider.

Yet all of us will admit that tired ministers are not productive ministers. Ministers need proper rest.

## The unstudied discipline of rest

There is no course in seminary that teaches men how to rest. But there is careful study of the biblical concept of rest. Rest, and the need for it, are woven into the very fabric of Scripture and the life of the people of God. (Although the need for and provision of *spiritual* rest is the heart of it, the physical is important as well.) Rest begins in the creation week, which ended in an entire day of rest. Patterned after God's own conduct, our week consists of six days labor and one day rest. This rest that God *required* of His people was also a good and necessary *gift* He gave. Human frailty—the Lord knows that we are dust—requires an entire day to rest from or prepare for six days of work.

So is *night rest* a gift of God. He created daytime *and* night. After a long day's work, we all may rest in sleep, expecting to awake in the morning ready for an-

other day's labor. The rare nights when I cannot sleep, I appreciate more that God *gives* His beloved sleep (Ps. 127:2; also 4:8). Sleep is sweet (Prov. 3:24).

Included in the Scripture's system of rest were the annual feasts—seven of them—most of which required that the Israelites “do no servile work therein,” that is, no ordinary labor. The feasts were celebrations of God's goodness to them, which included rest. Then, every seven years, and even every fifty years, were additional times of rest.

God provided special times when farmers, fields, manservants and maidservants, even oxen and asses, rested. The creature needs rest.

### Ministerial rest

Ministers are like all the rest of us. If any of us imagine that we can labor without rest—and what younger and strong person, man or woman, does not imagine that sometimes—we soon find ourselves exhausted and unable to function. We may become ill because our immune system is weakened by lack of sleep and rest. It may even come to doctor-defined exhaustion and a prescription of rest for some weeks or months. Ministers are no different. In fact, just when most other Christians are getting their weekly rest—on Sunday—the minister works his hardest. And then on Monday, they are right back at it, most of them teaching four to six catechism classes, maybe until 10P.M., and maybe counseling a young person after that.

Even though I recommend that consistories grant periods of rest *in addition to* the normal vacations, I am keenly aware that ministers themselves, for the most part, must see to their own rest. An entire article could point out the need for a minister to have self-imposed disciplines, rigorously maintained: he has a tight but flexible schedule—daily, weekly, and monthly; he is able to put away the phone and turn off the audible tone of the next email's arrival; he eats right, sleeps enough, and gets the proper exercise; he knows how to say “no” to requests to do more work that cannot reasonably fit into his plans; and he jealously guards the time he must spend with his wife and children. And take a half day off each week? Hardly realistic, many ministers would say. So the elders' committee (“Workload committees” are not uncommon in churches these days) should be very open with the minister about his disciplines and help him if he struggles to impose them upon himself. We talk about these things with the students in seminary.

But ministers may need, or benefit from, more than their two or three weeks of vacation each year. I recommend a *sabbatical*. It is true that ministers today do not have congregations of some 2,000 members, as Herman Hoeksema did in First PRC's heyday when he

carried a load beyond what most mortals can. Even he, at one point, almost broke, and his consistory sent him for some extended summer breaks on the east coast—a kind of sabbatical. Most of our ministers today work as many hours as they can, to the limits of their physical constitution. And because the precious treasure of the gospel is deposited in “earthen vessels,” a sabbatical could be of great benefit for minister and churches, not only to keep them from breaking, but also and especially to encourage their development.

### Sabbaticals

A sabbatical is a longer or shorter period of time (perhaps six weeks to six months) when a man rests from his *regular* work in order to do *different* work. The break from his *regular* work provides some rest. The *different* work enables growth and development for the sake of his regular work. *Sabbatical* comes from the Hebrew for sabbath, which means *rest*.

A sabbatical, though, is not a vacation. It may provide some free evenings and maybe a regular day off per week that he was not able normally to get. But it is not designed for beach-going, golfing, or other leisure.

Carefully preplanned with and supervised by the elders, a sabbatical is for the professional development of the minister. Sabbaticals have their purpose that the man of God grow for the sake of the *ministry*. The minister will read, perhaps broadly, perhaps narrowly, in a subject of great personal interest—some area of theology, church history, the doctrine of marriage, worship, church polity, or some subject the church is dealing with. He can take a course at a nearby seminary. He could plan out his year of preaching, or do preliminary work on a series of sermons that he would not otherwise have time for. He might devote himself to a fresh study of the Heidelberg Catechism so that he comes to his next round (or rounds) invigorated, rather than tired or fearful of repetition. The many possibilities would be limited by only one thing: the elders' judgment that the proposed work would benefit the minister for the sake of his ministry, both in their congregation and in the denomination.

No one will deny that ministers must grow and develop without sabbaticals, difficult though it may be. By grace, they will devote time to read books, other church magazines, and theological journals. They will carve out time to prepare for sermon series and write for the *Standard Bearer* and other magazines, so that they do *original* work. They will learn to budget their time so that, with sufficient rest and exercise, they do not burn out. But usually, this comes at the expense of other things they and the elders would like him to be able to do. Here is where the sabbatical comes in.

## Implementation

I can imagine some questioning the practicality of sabbaticals. When the congregation's demands continue week by week, a minister cannot simply take leave for six months, or even two. Who will step in to take his place?

Here, I suggest the services of an *emeritus* minister or ministers. When ministers first retire, they usually have some strength left. It may not be enough to labor *full-time* in one congregation any longer, but it would likely be enough to take a large portion of a congregation's work for a shorter period. I have talked to ministers—retired and about to be “put out to pasture,” as they put it—who would jump at the opportunity to help a congregation in this way. Some, in the past, have. Soon, two of my colleagues and I at seminary will be laying aside the mantle at the synodically-mandated age limit. The three of us are still healthy and may still be healthy when our replacements fully take over. We

would gladly consider a request to help out for a minister's sabbatical.<sup>1</sup>

Nor are the offers limited to churches in the West Michigan area.

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Is a minister tired? Does he need development? May he and his consistory consider a sabbatical. Under God's blessings, he may return surprisingly invigorated and refreshed. Remember: “What a glorious work the ministerial office is, since so great things are effected by it; yea, how highly necessary it is for man's salvation” (Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word)! Let us protect this office and the man who holds it. Let us do everything we can to look out for its growth. For the church's sake. For God's sake. “The church He loveth well.”

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1 May I also make bold to recommend (even if it's only by footnote) that the sabbatical take place during the *busy* time of the year, rather than during the summer, so that the minister is relieved when the pressures are the greatest. Visiting ministers can take societies and catechism classes without any problem. As one of my colleagues said, with a smile, “I'll do anything but family visitation.”

## Letters

### Obedience to the call of the gospel

Dear Editors,

I write regarding the editorial in the October 1, 2018 *SB* entitled “What must I do...?” The main doctrine that the editorial intends to teach is that obedience is necessary and possible for the child of God. With this doctrine, I am in full agreement. However, I take issue with the editorial for going beyond the truth that obedience is necessary for the child of God, and teaching instead that obedience is necessary for the child of God *unto salvation*. By doing so, the editorial teaches salvation by man's obedient working, rather than salvation entirely apart from man's obedient working, that is, salvation by faith alone.

I would like to point out three places where the editorial develops the idea that obedience is not merely necessary, but that it is necessary unto salvation. First, on page 7, the editorial poses the question, “And then, [is it altogether improper for preachers], in the end, to go so far as to declare that if a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do?” The editorial answers that it is biblical and Reformed for a preacher to declare that if a man would be saved, there is that which he must do. The editorial here teaches a relationship between man's salvation and man's obedient doing. The relationship, according to the editorial, is that man's salvation de-

pends upon his obedient doing. “If a man would be saved, there is that which he *must* do.” This statement says much more than that man's obedience is necessary. It says that man's obedience is necessary unto salvation.

In response, I ask the editors: Does any gift or blessing of salvation that we receive from God depend on our obedient working in order to receive it?

Second, on page 8, the editorial asserts that the Canons of Dordt

confessed and taught that 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.

Here again, the editorial teaches a relationship between man's salvation—his consciously entering the kingdom—and man's obedient responding to the command of the gospel. The relationship, according to the editorial, is that man's obedient responding obtains his salvation and entrance into the kingdom. “If a man with his household was to be saved and consciously enter into the kingdom...he was called...to respond obediently....” This statement says much more than that

man's obedience is necessary. It says that man's obedience is necessary unto salvation.

In response, I ask the editors: In order to enter into or inherit the kingdom of heaven, is there some obedient work that we must do?

In the preceding two points, I recognize that the editorial is talking about faith. Man's obedient doing on page 7 and man's obedient responding on page 8 are faith. I fully agree that God grants salvation to his people through faith. The problem is that the editorial treats faith as a work of obedience. It consistently refers to faith as "obedience." It develops the idea that faith is an obedient doing and an obedient responding to a command, which makes faith a work. In reality, faith is not a good work of obedience, but the opposite of working. Even faith's activity of believing—knowing and trusting God—is not working, but the opposite of working. Faith is the opposite of working because faith is the instrument through which I receive Jesus Christ alone and all his benefits. See Romans 4:1-5 where Paul develops this distinction between believing as one thing and working as an entirely different thing. When the editorial makes faith a work, it teaches salvation by works, rather than salvation by faith and by grace.

Third, on page 8, the editorial offers its exegesis of Acts 2:37, 38 and Acts 16:30, 31. In these two passages, distressed sinners ask Christ's apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" and "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" The editorial apparently understands the apostles' answers—repent, be baptized, and believe—to mean that this repenting, being baptized, and believing were good works of obedience unto salvation. As the editorial puts it, "There was something they were called *to do*. And they did it." In my judgment, this explanation completely reverses the actual answers of Christ's apostles. In both passages, the distressed sinners were asking what they should do. The premise of their questions was that there was some work they could do to be saved from sin and death: "What must I do to be saved?" When the apostles answered, they did not affirm the premise of the question. They were not saying, "You are correct, there is a work for you to do that will save you, and here is the work: repent, be baptized, and believe." Rather, when Paul answered, he did not talk about good works of obedience at all. He called the people to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, which is the very opposite of working. When Peter answered, he called people to repentance as the fruit and evidence of faith, and to baptism as the sign and seal of the only ground of their salvation in the blood of Christ. By these answers, the apostles were denying the premise of the questions. In effect, the apostles answered, "What

must you do to be saved? Nothing! There is nothing you can do or must do to be saved, because Jesus Christ has done it all. Therefore, disregard all of your obeying and working and instead believe in Jesus." The editorial's treatment of these passages continues the same earlier error of making man's obedience necessary unto salvation. For salvation, "there was something they were called *to do*. And they did it."

In response, I remind us that Herman Hoeksema exegeted Acts 16:30, 31 much differently than the October 1 editorial. Hoeksema said that Paul's answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" was: "Nothing!" See his sermon "The Calling of the Philippian Jailer" on SermonAudio at <https://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?SID=4612137350>. Therefore, I ask the editors: Does the *Standard Bearer* agree with Herman Hoeksema's exegesis of Acts 16:30, 31, and does the *Standard Bearer* agree with Hoeksema's theology expressed in that exegesis?

Once again, I am in full agreement that good works are possible for the child of God by the work of God's Spirit in our hearts. I also wholeheartedly confess that obedience is necessary for the child of God. With the Canons, I repudiate the idea that the children of God are "stocks and blocks." However, I object to the editorial's explanation of *why* obedience is necessary. The editorial should have developed that obedience is necessary as the inevitable result of Christ renewing us by his Holy Spirit after his own image, as the required fruit of gratitude for salvation, as the goal of our salvation in the glory of God, as the evidence of our true faith, or as the means God uses to gain others to Christ (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 32, QA 86). Instead, I believe the editorial went beyond these necessities of obedience to teach that obedience is necessary unto salvation. In so doing, has it not taught a doctrine of salvation by man's obedient working, rather than salvation by faith alone in Christ alone?

Warmly in Christ,  
Rev. Andy Lanning

## RESPONSE:

Brother A. Lanning:

First a correction. Your letter addresses "Editors" and asks for the judgment of the *SB*. That is incorrect. For the content of the editorial being challenged, I take ownership. This means that the response that follows is mine also, not anyone else's. Let that be established first.

Now to your letter.

In light of the issues raised and challenged, doctrinal matters that have become a matter of no little discussion



and dispute in our circles, allowance is made for the length of your letter. And because of the importance of what must be established, namely, what language is conformable to biblical and confessional orthodoxy and what language is not, I will give a lengthier reply than normal, this being the first of two installments.

Your letter makes plain that the issue between us comes down to this—may we, when we speak of faith as a response to the call of the gospel, speak of it in terms of that which one is called ‘to do,’ in fact, that which one *must* do, if he will be saved?

To boil it down to simplest terms, you object to my calling faith (believing) “a doing” and then speaking of it in terms of an obedience, because, you claim, this would mean faith has been turned into a work (a good work); and this would imply teaching faith has merit and, therefore, teaching that salvation in the end *depends* on the work of a man.

So, conditional theology after all. A form of Arminianism.

To that *line of reasoning* I take exception. I used neither the words “works” nor “depends upon.” It is my conviction that to refer to faith (believing) and to repentance as a ‘doing’ and in terms of an ‘obedience’ in connection with one being saved does not turn either into a work (something meritorious) on which a man’s salvation then depends.

In your words “[T]he editorial [in question] teaches that if a man desires to be saved, he first must perform some obedient activity. By teaching this, the editorial teaches salvation by man’s work, rather than salvation entirely apart from man’s work, that is, salvation by faith alone” (paragraph 1). “If a man desires to be saved...” You then state that my article teaches “he first must perform [something].”

Leaving aside for the moment the accuracy of your claim that my article taught that one “*first must perform* some obedient activity,” my question is, how should or could that statement be properly ended? This way, perhaps: if a man desires to be saved, *he must do nothing?! Or perhaps: there is nothing he is called to do?! That would be proper? That defines orthodoxy? Faith is ‘doing nothing’? What about ‘believing’? It is an activity, you concede. Such, I say, is not a ‘doing nothing.’*

I respond: certainly, believing has *nothing* to do with making oneself *worthy* of salvation. And, by believing one does *nothing* to *contribute* to one’s salvation. But it is not ‘doing nothing.’ Faith itself is not ‘nothing,’ and the act of ‘believing’ is not ‘doing nothing.’ It is an activity of the mind, of the understanding, of the will and is, therefore, a ‘doing something.’ Such is orthodox, confessional, and biblical.

On what I base that conviction I will demonstrate as we proceed.

Perhaps for some the problem starts already with how you cast my position, “[I]f a man desires to be saved, first he must perform...”? Sounds almost Arminian. A man desiring to be saved? And something he must do (perform?) *first*? A pious soul might say, “Surely no man can of himself desire to be saved. And that ‘first’? Is not God always first?”

True enough.

But we are not speaking of the spiritually dead. Rather we speak of those who sincerely desire to be saved, or, to use my own language, “If a man *would* be saved...” In other words, we are speaking of the regenerated, those in whom *God* has worked *first*. And of such men and women, born-again by the Spirit of Christ, it can be said, they desire to be saved. As Scripture declares, “Whosoever *will*...” (Rev. 22:17).

In other words, we are not speaking of *man* doing something *first*, but of a man in whom *God* has done something *first*, and the decisive ‘something’ at that, and then that man responding to the gospel in proper fashion.

And while we are on the subject, notice, that in the text referred to, men are called to *come* to Christ in order to quench their thirst for the water that is uniquely spiritual. That they so desire, that they thirst for spiritual water indicates they already have a spiritual life. And yet they are called *to come*. And what is that *coming* but another way of describing faith, believing? And surely one’s coming involves a ‘doing.’

And let it be noted, the phrase you attribute to my perspective and statements, namely, “he first must perform some obedient activity,” is not an accurate portrayal.

Rather this: “If a man desires to be saved (in sincerity, which would be due to the inward working of the Spirit), there is that which he is called *to do* to be saved (that is—if he will be saved).” One is not called first to *perform* something (a phrase pregnant with unsavory connotations—works!), but one is called to a specific *response*—namely, that of repentance and faith. “Repent and believe,” is how Scripture puts it again and again. And repenting, I say again, is what we are called *to do*.

So I say once again, the statements “One *must* believe (on the Lord Jesus Christ) to be saved,” or, “If you will be saved, you *must* believe!” are orthodox statements.

But ‘saved’ in what sense? That’s the great question.

From one perspective, those of whom we are speaking are already saved, being born-again by an irresistible grace on the basis of what Christ purchased centuries ago. And yet Scripture says “He that believeth

shall be saved.” Not “has been saved,” but “shall be.” I had a catechism student once ask me about that text, in light of my emphasizing in class that salvation is worked according to God’s sovereign election, not waiting upon man’s so-called free-will. “But, Reverend, doesn’t the Bible say our believing comes before we are actually saved?” And he quoted that phrase and a number of others like it.

Answer? The text is speaking of salvation in the sense of *knowing* one is saved, laying hold of the assurance that the most righteous Lord would even be willing to receive and forgive the likes of me! Or if you will, it is *by* believing, taking God’s gospel at its word, that one is saved and may have the certainty of his own personal salvation (“shall be” for time and eternity). But *until* one believes, one cannot *know* that.

Now, one might reply, what about elect infants, saved in infancy? Surely, no believing as an obedience is required of them.

True. But elect infants are in a unique category as those who have simply been granted the *faculty* of faith. We are talking about unbelieving adults. And such, we maintain, are *required* actively to believe for their salvation, which believing also has gracious implications for one’s family.

This is why, in connection with the Philippian jailer, I made explicit reference to the jailer *with his household*. If a man with his household is to be saved, and he is to *know* that the salvation that is promised to those who believe is extended covenantally (to one’s household) he *must* believe on the Lord Jesus. Could the Philippian jailer, apart from believing, apart from faith, possibly *know* that if *he* believed (casting all his trust in Jehovah God) that God’s salvation would extend to his family as well? Of course not. It is by faith, and according to one’s faith, that such is *known*, namely, that the salvation that God extends to me through my believing, will extend to my household as well. And thus one with his household *consciously* enters the kingdom.

As one in whom the Holy Spirit was working, the jailer was *in* the kingdom already (because the kingdom life was in him), but he could not *know* that, be assured of that, apart from his faith. I say again, *until* one cries out “I believe!” one cannot *know* such things hold for oneself personally. By faith one consciously “enters in” (is given to *see* the kingdom) and knows that by grace he has been “brought in.”

And this, brother, has bearing on your third paragraph as well.

You ask whether I am not maintaining that “there [is] that which [one] must do in order to obtain the desired salvation?” You ask rhetorically, “Isn’t man’s obe-

dience, rather, the fruit—and only the fruit—of God’s salvation of him?”

To which I reply, the language I use in no way disputes that one’s obedience (of faith) is wholly the fruit of God’s salvation of him. Of course it is. After all, from what does this faith, as it obeys the gospel call, arise? From what but God Triune’s sovereign work of regeneration in a man, which new life is the seed in which every aspect of salvation and spiritual activity is found and from which it arises. One can do and does do nothing *to obtain* that salvation. It is “received.”

But how does one come to *know* (appropriate) that the salvation spoken of in the gospel is for oneself—“For me, yes, even for one such as myself, who was before a blasphemer and injurious to the body of Christ?” How else but by responding in obedience to the gospel call to believe? Thus one comes to know that God through His Son is merciful beyond understanding.

I say again, “If a man would be saved, there is that which he must do.” Which is to say, there is that which he is *called* to do. For *until* a man responds to the truth and call of the gospel by believing it, confessing it, he is not, and cannot be saved. Understood properly, a perfectly orthodox statement. “Repent and believe, or perish!”

As for the use of the term “obedience” when it comes to one responding to the gospel in faith, I am convinced not only that we *may* speak of faith in terms of being an obedience (convinced as I am that such is confessionally Reformed), but that we *must* speak of it in such terms—not *only* in those terms, to be sure, but still as one way of describing faith as it responds to the gospel, a manner that must not be forbidden or neglected.

You indicate you are of the persuasion that we may not, we must not use such terms and language, for that would imply/teach that something *depends* on man when it comes to one’s salvation (cf. your third paragraph and following ones as well). And who can deny that to teach or even imply such would not be truly, consistently Reformed?

I will come back to the charge that my language teaches a salvation now *depending* on something a man is called to do a bit later.

In support of the orthodoxy of the language I use, I would remind you and our readers that we as Protestant Reformed are known as the great critics of the “well-meant offer” of the gospel. Invariably, in our vigorous objection to the well-meant offer, we have insisted on referring to the gospel call as a ‘command.’ The promiscuous gospel call to all and sundry not a free (well-meant) offer, but a command! Our writings, beginning with H. Hoeksema, are replete with such insistence.

The confessions label it as such.

“The command to repent and believe...ought to be declared and published to all nations, to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel” (Canons of Dordt, II, Art. 5).

Scripture uses such language. “[God] now commandeth all men every where to repent” (Acts 17:30).

I realize you do not disagree with referring to the call of the gospel as a command or, as others label it, a divine summons. My problem and puzzlement is that, having acknowledged that, you would then consider it to be grievous error to refer to the believing response to that command as “obedience.

This raises a question. If one is not to speak of one who has responded in faith to the gospel call as having *obeyed* its summons, what word, what description, is acceptable? Or is that part of the problem? You would grant that one may speak of one who believes as one who has obeyed the gospel summons, but one may not speak of faith, or of believing, *itself* as an obedience, for that would turn faith into some kind of work.

At this point, I am not convinced that there is an essential difference between the two.

I state forthrightly once again, there is that which every person who comes under gospel preaching and the call to repent and believe is called *to do* (in obedience to that call), namely, to repent and believe.

Are all able to?

No!

But the inability of anyone of himself to do what is required by the gospel call (namely, to acknowledge oneself to be a damnable sinner standing in the need of grace and to cast oneself completely on the mercy of God by pleading upon the righteousness of Christ and His atoning death alone) does not, first of all, forbid confronting one and all with the gospel and its command to repent and believe.

With this, of course, you, brother Lanning, would not disagree.

But second, neither does man’s inability *of himself* to repent and believe mean that *none* who sit under the preaching of the gospel are able to repent and believe. There are those who are able (having been ‘enabled’, as I pointed out in the October 1 editorial), namely, those in whom the Spirit has determined to work, granting them newness of heart, spiritual life, which is the soil and seed of the activity of heartfelt repentance and faith. Those who have been born-again (cf. Canons, III/IV, Arts. 12, 13).

I reiterate, it is of such whom we speak when we speak of men ‘doing’ what the gospel summons calls (or

commands) them to do, namely, to believe—and even to “repent and believe.”

In that connection, let us not overlook Romans 10:16 concerning the response of some to the gospel as it was first sent to the Jews, “But they have not all obeyed [!] the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed [!] our report?”

Surely it follows that of the remnant who *did* believe Isaiah’s report, it can and must be said that they *obeyed* the gospel with its call to repent and believe, believing that God would keep His promises whether it appeared that way or not.

Again, I maintain that to refer to faith as it responds to the call of the gospel as ‘a doing,’ as an obedience to the gospel summons (as something that a man *must do, is necessary*, if he will be saved), does not imply teaching that salvation *depends* on a man’s doing something first, as you allege. Rather, it sets forth *the way in which a man comes to know*, or, if you will, appropriates the salvation declared even for one’s damnable self (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 22).

Further, in reply to your contention that my language by implication teaches that salvation now *depends* on something man must do, we point out that to teach that A is something that is *necessary* for B (for the enjoyment of B, let us say) does *not* necessarily mean the enjoyment of B *depends* on A. It can, in many instances, but not necessarily. In Reformed parlance, often this is not the case. All one is teaching is that activity A is a necessary element for the enjoyment of blessing B, and *that* by God’s own gracious determination. Not because the enjoyment of blessing B is *caused* by activity A, is *merited* by A, is the *deserved result* of A, or *depends* on A. But because they are two things God has determined to join together, and that most graciously.

This has confessional backing. Prayer as being necessary for Christians, one might say, for our very Christianity itself, comes to mind. This is Lord’s Day 45, where the Catechism pointedly asks, “Why is prayer necessary for Christians (since salvation is all of grace and everything has been sovereignly predetermined by God)?”

Answer? “Because God will give His grace and Holy Spirit to those only [!] who with sincere desires continually ask them of Him....” For grace, mind you, and the Holy Spirit.

Are we to conclude that the Catechism is teaching that these great blessings desired *depend* on our praying? Of course not. And yet for all that, according to God’s good pleasure, prayer is a *necessary element* in the enjoyment of grace and the operations of the Holy

Spirit. Something that is certainly confessional, exhorting us that we must be, we better be, a praying people.

And we could make the same point, confessionally and biblically sound, when it comes to attending to preaching as the God-ordained means of grace. Two things God has graciously joined together, preaching and hearing it by faith to one's salvation (apart from which preaching a man cannot be saved). Not B (salvation with its enjoyment) *depending* on A (actively attending to gospel preaching), but, A as a *necessary element* if B is to be enjoyed and appropriated as one's own.

We say again, to use the word *must* when it comes to faith as it relates to our salvation does not mean one is teaching salvation *depends* on self. That is an improper leap.

Further, such does not make faith a *prerequisite* for entering the kingdom (along the lines of making one's believing a *condition for entering into* the covenant). Rather, this is to make faith a *requirement* (a necessary element) if one is to know the kingdom is his, along with its covenantal promises. Apart from believing in sincerity, one has no right to claim such.

So much for the first part of my response. Next installment we will look at the passages giving rise to this dispute—my interpretation and exegesis of the two passages that have much to do with what constitutes acceptable and orthodox terminology. You make reference to H. Hoeksema's sermon on Acts 16:30, 31 as proof for the validity of your criticisms and contentions.

Next issue I will give my assessment of his interpretation of the Philippian jailer's question and of the apostolic response, bringing into consideration the perspective of a few others on what constitutes orthodox Reformed language, and what we ought not fear saying.

Yours for the cause of God and truth,

*Rev. Kenneth Koole*

## **Spiritual battles in the church**

Re "Fighting Ourselves" (*SB*, Jan. 15, 2019, p. 184).

Truly the human body is an amazing creation of God; even more so is the work of God in creating a spiritual body (I Cor 12:12-27). It is truly a work of God's sovereign grace to make out of many different members one body. This body is referenced in the title of the article as "ourselves."

As in science, so in theology it is very important to define terms precisely. "Ourselves" or "body" in the article is used to refer to the church. Scripture speaks of the church in the narrower sense—His elect (Rom. 9:6-7). Scripture also speaks of the church in the broader sense—"the sphere of the church," elect

and reprobate (I John 2:19). The seed of the serpent is always rearing its ugly head in the sphere of the church either in lawless life or in false doctrine (Gen. 3:15). Thus, there will always be warfare in the church on earth—the church militant (Phil. 3:2). God not only uses the preaching and Christian discipline to save His elect, but also to fight against the carnal and reprobate element in the sphere of the church. Therefore, it is very important to define what we mean by "fighting ourselves."

The church is a battlefield. Satan is already prince of the world; it is the church Satan fights for [that is, to gain]. The devil is a relentless enemy. The devil, through false doctrine, did not make his last stand in the church at [the PRC] Synod 2018. Perhaps, the greatest threat to the church is that, in winning the battle, the church perceives that she has won the war and members, officebearers, and ministers put down their sword or advise others to do so. It is true as the writer states that officebearers are in and of themselves "weak men" to fight these spiritual battles in the church. However, they do not fight in their own strength, but they rule with the power of God Himself so long as they rule according to the Word of God (Heb. 4:12). Therefore, the question is not whether they are weak, but whether they are armed with the Word of God.

The author implies that although "...the initial trigger is a very real and dangerous teaching or practice," this battle has been won by Synod 2018. The church now fights "perceived threats to personal preferences," "Inflat[ed]...preferences," "distract[i]ons from the real problem at hand," "violence of wrongfully targeted internal strife," and "and it is unclear to many in the pews what the real problem is." The greatest threat to the church is the delusion that in winning the battle she has won the war. Thus there are those in the church who relax in a false sense of carnal security.

There is only true peace for the church as she fights this "good warfare" (I Tim. 1:18), especially through the keys of the kingdom: Christian discipline and the preaching. Knowing the nature of the enemy, the believer ought to have an "elevated sensitivity" or "hyper-vigilance." Satan is the master deceiver. "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light" (II Cor. 11:14) "call[ing] evil good, and good evil, put[ting] light for darkness" (Is. 5:20). He utters "false visions and lying divinations" (Ezek. 13:9), to deceive, if possible, even the elect (Matt. 24:24). The warning should not be against the watchman that does not sleep day or night because he cries out against the enemy; but against the watchman who is idle, sleeping or unable to recognize the enemy (Is. 62:6).

May God grant us the grace to watch, stand fast in the faith, and quit ourselves like men (I Cor. 16::13).

Wayne and Sarah Courtney

### Response:

I thank you for your letter in response to my article in the *Standard Bearer*. Such letters are a good opportunity for clarification and ongoing conversation, sometimes offering a degree of balance that is hard to achieve in one's own writing. I freely admit that not all perspectives were covered in my articles on the immune system. The analogy is limited, as is the man who wrote on that analogy. You may be sure, however, that there was certainly no intent on my part to suggest that the "battle has been won" by any recent ecclesiastical work of the PRC, or that we ought now to be at rest in our defense of the truth. I agree that such a position would be mistaken had it been the point I was trying to make.

This is not to say, however, I agree completely with your point of view. Perhaps the difference I would suggest is one of perspective rather than of content. With regard to the latter, I do not disagree at all that there is a "carnal element" in the visible church. I do not disagree—nor should anyone—that there is a necessary *vigilance* in the church. That is the point of an immune system, is it not? I would not wish to imply that we would be better off without an "immune system" in the church. In fact, the first article in this series was written specifically to affirm the necessary work of detecting and destroying false doctrines and practices that do arise in the church.

But there is a real and proper distinction between *vigilance* and *hypervigilance*. The former is a proper posture for the church—like a normally functioning immune system. The latter is improper because it goes beyond what God calls us to do in His Word. I alluded to several facets of hypervigilance in the article but would add one more in response to your letter. This form of hypervigilance involves assuming that one has the perfect ability to distinguish between the elect and carnal elements of the church. Based on this incorrect assumption, the posture of hypervigilance can lead zealous believers to attack indiscriminately any and all that express a different perspective than themselves. In this posture, all difference is error. Period.

The second half of Joshua 22 is illustrative of how the church—and by extension its members—ought to deal with situations where a *perceived* error of false doctrine or practice has been introduced. In this chapter men from the tribes given the lands east of the Jordan River (called Gilead) departed from the western tribes to return to their families after concluding the major

warfare in Canaan. While crossing Jordan, these men put up what appeared to be an altar, which would have been gross sin because it was effectively false worship to sacrifice apart from the Levites and the tabernacle at Shiloh.

To many in the western tribes this meant war in the church. In their zealous anger they were ready to kill their brothers over this matter—even though it had not been fully investigated in any sense. In God's providence, however, wisdom prevailed such that a delegation of elders from each of the western tribes, along with the high priest's son, were instead sent to investigate carefully and hear out their eastern-dwelling brothers. What they found was much different than what was first assumed. As it turned out, the pile of stones set up by the departing men of Gilead was a monument of remembrance rather than a sacrificial altar. It was not gross sin; Israel had misunderstood. War was averted.

So here is the crux of the matter for all of us: how should we primarily view the church? Is it first and foremost a "battlefield" between the elect and reprobate elements? Or is it the beloved bride of Christ, bought and paid for by His sacrifice on the cross? It is both, but what it is *first* in our minds matters a great deal! It matters because it influences how we respond to someone in the church who expresses an idea that does not sound right upon our first hearing of it. If we primarily think "battlefield" when we regard the church, our response will likely be condemnation and a readiness for war. If we primarily think "bride of Christ" when we regard the church, our response will be to listen carefully, to understand rightly, and to respond gently (James 3:17). It does not mean we stop being vigilant or robust in our defense of the gospel from attacks within and without the church. But it does mean that we are certain about error before we march to war.

Brother and sister, in the closing of your response letter you quoted I Corinthians 16:13 to solidify your point with the Word of God. This is a good practice. But when you quote this passage, I pray that you remember to add verse 14 as well.

In Christian love,  
Brendan Looyenga



## All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland

# Scottish police acquits *itself* of “hate incident”

“One Scotland” is a campaign by the Scottish government to tackle bigotry, prejudice, and hatred in Scotland. The website of “One Scotland” bears the logo of the Scottish government and boasts that its aim is to promote a “fairer Scotland.” In conjunction with the Scottish police, “One Scotland” actively encourages members of the public to “report hate crimes.” The website of the Scottish Police states:

Did you know that “Hate Crime” is any criminal offence committed against an individual or property that is motivated by a person’s hatred of someone because of his or her actual or perceived race, religion, transgender identity, sexual orientation or disability? “Hate Crime” is wrong, it is against the law, and everyone has the right to live safely and without fear. No two individuals are ever the same—embrace individuality and help put an end to “Hate crime” by reporting it.<sup>1</sup>

The Scottish Police made their feelings very clear with a series of posters throughout the cities and towns of Scotland. I quote a sample of these posters.

Dear transphobes, do you think it is right to harass people in the street?... Well, we don’t. That’s why if we see you doing harm, we’re reporting you. We believe people should be allowed to be themselves. Except if they’re spreading hate. Yours, Scotland.

Dear homophobes, we have a phobia of your behaviour. If you torment people because of who they love...you should be worried. If we see or hear your abuse, we’re calling the police. That’s because love lives in this country, not hate. Yours, Scotland.

Dear bigots, division seems to be what you believe in. We don’t want your religious hate on our buses, on our streets and in our communities. We don’t want you spreading your intolerance.... You may not have faith in respect and love, but we do. That’s why if we see you, we’re reporting you. End of sermon. Yours, Scotland.

And perhaps the most sinister of all: “Dear bigots,

you can’t spread your religious hatred here. End of sermon. Yours, Scotland.”<sup>2</sup> Each poster concludes with the statement, “Hate crime. Report it to stop it” with the logos of “Police Scotland,” “Safer Scotland: Scottish Government,” and the website “onescotland.org.” Notice that the targets of these posters are “transphobes,” “homophobes,” and (religious) “bigots,” and that they purport to speak for all Scots: “Yours, Scotland.”

David Robertson, minister of St. Peter’s Free Church of Scotland, Dundee, found the last poster particularly offensive, so offensive that he decided to report it *as a hate crime* to the Scottish police! Robertson deemed the poster with its reference to “religious hate” and “end of sermon” an expression of animosity against religious people, and Christians in particular. In his complaint to the authorities on October 3, 2018, Robertson quotes from the Police Scotland website, which states, “A hate incident is any incident that is not a criminal offence, but something *which is perceived by the victim or any other person to be motivated by hate or prejudice*” (emphasis added). Based on the police’s own definition, the “Dear bigots” poster constitutes a hate incident, if not a hate crime. Robertson writes, “I perceive it as being motivated by hate and prejudice,” and includes in his complaint examples of nasty correspondence that he has received from secularists. Robertson fears that a poster campaign targeting “religious bigots” will stir up further hostility against religious people, especially church-going Christians.

Another Christian gentleman, this time Mr. John Allman from Devon, England, also complained to the Scottish police on October 3, 2018:

A publicly-displayed poster, apparently published jointly by Police Scotland, contains unmistakable hate speech which is directed against all members of any faith community, including my own (Christian) faith community.

The poster thus insinuates that we who are “religious” are “bigots” for proselytising. It characterises the

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.scotland.police.uk>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://theweeflea.com>.

Christian gospel (and any other religious creed for that matter) as “hate.” The poster is an attempt to intimidate people of faith into believing that the police have the power to silence us, if we dare seek to share our faith (referred to as our “hate”) with others, for example by preaching, anywhere in Scotland.

The offensive poster, which is itself an undisguised incitement to hatred of religious people, and is therefore itself a hate crime, bears the logo of Police Scotland. The poster not only accuses preachers of the gospel of spreading “hate,” it also implies that such preaching is a criminal offence. (Is it?)

The poster seems to be calculated to make Scots feel intimidated who have a religious belief they might wish to spread. It makes potential visitors to Scotland wary of setting foot in so intolerant a country of the United Kingdom. It will inevitably make people of faith feel unwelcome in Scotland, even if they were born there.<sup>3</sup>

After initial email correspondence from Police Scotland, Mr. Allman received a letter from the “Superintendent of Safer Communities,” David Pettigrew, on October 26, 2018:

I understand from your correspondence, however, that you perceive some of the campaign material, to target those of faith. Furthermore, you request that a hate incident be raised based on your perception.... *Ordinarily, the perception of the victim or any other person is the defining factor, in determining whether an incident is hate related for recording purposes....* Given that the campaign was delivered to raise awareness of hate crime, *I am content in the certainty that the motivation of the campaign is not based on malice or ill will towards any social group.* I can therefore confirm that the circumstances will not be recorded as hate related and that no further action will be taken in respect of this matter.

Police Scotland also responded to Robertson, as reported on his blog on October 31, 2018. The typically bureaucratic answer includes this paragraph (emphasis added):

Police Scotland has assessed the circumstances you raise. *The motivation of the Scottish government is not based on malice or ill will towards any social group; therefore, the circumstances will not be recorded as hate related.* Details of your correspondence have been recorded and the content passed to the Scottish Government Connected Communities Unit. No further action will be taken in respect of this matter.

The Chief Superintendent, John McKenzie, “Head of Safer Communities” added, in response to a query from the press, that it would be “inappropriate” to comment on “personal correspondence” and that “Police Scotland welcomes correspondence and communication with members of the public.”

Robertson expressed his dissatisfaction at the official response on his blog and informed his readers that he would be taking the matter further:

The police have made a public campaign which implies that hatred stems from “religious” people and those who preach sermons. I have made a public response—my letter is public and the press are involved. Instead of answering the complaint the Chief Superintendent makes these two inane comments.

There is no point in “welcoming” letters from the public if you are just going to throw them in the bin or answer them with platitudes and inanities. The fact is that your own law says that it is the perception of the “victim” that turns something into a hate incident. I think that’s unworkable and illogical but you clearly don’t. So the question that the public needs answered is why that law/principle only applies in some cases and why the police and government are exempt from their own laws? My perception, and that of many others, is that your poster campaign is motivated (at least in part) by hatred of religion—or at least those religious views which contradict the doctrines of the State. What gives you the right to determine that the perceptions of some are invalid but the perceptions of others get reported as hate incidents? In effect you are making a farce of the law and playing politics. You are determining that some groups are hate victims and others hate perpetrators.

The police should get on with solving crimes not creating them. It’s time for you to get out of politics and do the job that you are paid to do. Stop funding and running political campaigns and using your overstretched officers for this purpose. Stop demonising and criminalising members of the public who disagree with the philosophy of the political elites. Get on with catching real criminals. Please.<sup>4</sup>

Robertson is, of course, exactly on point. He expos-

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4 <https://theweeflea.com>. Mr. Allman is also not satisfied with the official response: “I intend to ask for figures eventually, under the Freedom of Information Act, indicating how many reports of hate crime have been made to Police Scotland, *against* Police Scotland.” Presumably, in the light of this decision, the answer I shall receive will be “none.” But that will be a lie, an artefact of the manifestly unlawful decision not to include in the hate crime and incident report statistics any or all of the reports in which the perpetrator of the hate crime or hate incident reported was *Police Scotland itself*.”

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3 <https://johnallmanuk.wordpress.com>.

es the absurd, unworkable, and inconsistently applied standard for “hate crimes” and “hate incidents.” There are plenty of examples in the post-Christian West of believers being investigated because of their “perceived” hatred of certain people guilty of sexual sins (so-called “homo- and transphobes”). Many of these incidents rest on the believer’s sincerely held, and even politely expressed, view that certain sexual behaviours and orientations are sinful. That is anathema to the modern, secular State. The only intolerance allowed in our modern age of “tolerance” and “openness” is intolerance of Christianity, whether of Christian doctrines or of Christian morality. Every other intolerance, perceived or otherwise, is increasingly becoming criminalized.

Christians oppose hatred. Our Lord taught us to love our neighbors and even our enemies. The sixth commandment forbids that I should “dishonour, hate, wound, or kill” my neighbor, whether in “thoughts,” “words,” “gestures,” or in “deeds” (Heidelberg Catechism, A. 105). Nevertheless, Christians must exercise love according to the biblical definition. Love seeks the welfare of the neighbor, especially his spiritual welfare. Love seeks the welfare of the neighbor whose “sexual orientation” is sinful or whose “transgender identity”

is contrary to God’s revealed will by calling that neighbor to repentance and proclaiming to him the gospel of Jesus Christ, which gospel includes the good news that Christ not only forgives sin, but also transforms sinners, all kinds of sinners, by the power of His grace. To erstwhile homosexuals Paul wrote, “And such were some of you, but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11).

No matter how kindly and gently you explain that to a homosexual or transgender person, the Scottish Police could very likely record your statement as “a hate incident” or even view you as guilty of a “hate crime.” Robertson is correct: the role of the police is to catch real criminals (murderers, rapists, thieves, burglars, abusers, and the like) and not seek to criminalize citizens’ speech or even thoughts. Jesus—not Police Scotland—rules over our thoughts, words, and deeds: “Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man” (Col. 4:6). “But I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36).



## Search the Scriptures

Rev. Thomas Miersma, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

# Of sin and folly

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2018, p. 272.

### Ecclesiastes 10:1-3

**“Wisdom is better that weapons of war: but one sinner destroyeth much good” (Eccl. 9:18).**

In the preceding verses the difference between wisdom and strength was set forth. Wisdom is the better portion, for it has a greater strength than earthly might. But now the text sets forth a contrast: one sinner destroys much good. Sin is destructive. It is folly. It works the corruption of that which is profitable under the sun as well as moral evil. It destroys that which is wrought with wisdom.

Yet man is a sinner who walks in the way of sin by nature. Man by nature is a fool because of sin that dwells in him, a fool who seeks his own way and will not have God in his thoughts. Psalm 14:1 draws the connection: “The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt, they have done abomina-

ble works, there is none that doth good.” Sin and its folly cleave also to one who is a believer. Rooted in his flesh by nature, sin works not only guilt before God but also the sorrowful consequences of sin in this life. Yet Solomon does not simply say *sin* destroys much good, but one *sinner* destroys much good. It is the *person* he would have us to see, not merely his activity.

This is our problem, for we are sinners. This was Solomon’s problem. For all his wisdom he was still a sinner, as would be the one after him who inherited all his works. Solomon, in the folly of his old age with his heathen wives and idolatry, would sow the very destruction and decline of the kingdom. In the days of his son the kingdom would be divided. This leads to the sober reflection in the next verse.

**“Dead flies cause the ointment of the apothecary to send forth a stinking savour: so doth a little folly him**



that is in reputation for wisdom and honour” (Eccl. 10:1).

This observation is a warning and at the same time an indirect confession on the part of Solomon of his own downfall in sin and folly. The picture is that of a fragrant ointment compounded by the apothecary or perfumer. This ointment is like wisdom and honor that form the reputation of a person. Such were the gifts of wisdom and attendant honor compounded like an ointment in Solomon’s life. They were like a fragrant smell in the life of the church and in the world. He was one lifted up to high estate in glory and honor.

Yet, he was also a sinner with the root of folly in his flesh. Age did not eliminate that presence of indwelling sin. His long honor and majesty in the world bore the fruit of pride in his old age. He uses the figure of dead flies or flies of death corrupting the ointment. The idea is not simply that of the bodies of fallen insects but of the effect flies have on something exposed to their presence. They carry disease, pollution, and corruption. Where they land, walk around and also die, they work contamination so that the ointment in the figure sends forth a stench instead of a sweet smell. Hence the warning: so does a “little folly” in the life and walk of one held in honor for wisdom and dignity.

Rather than a direct personal confession, for that is not the purpose, Solomon sets this figure before us as a warning. He has in view the instruction of the young starting out on the path of life. His personal history and experience confirms that warning and its seriousness. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (I Cor. 10:12). We are of like flesh and blood, sinners and by nature foolish. Sin, like the flies in the ointment, works corruption in our lives. Sin seems a small matter, a little thing, when we start down its pathway. But it contaminates and works through when given place. It brings one to shame and reproach.

So it was with Solomon and his heathen wives. He did not marry them all at once. It took place over time, as did his catering to their desire for temples to the idol (I Kings 11). What was a “little folly” in the beginning, out of a desire to please his wives, became great folly, which sowed the seeds of idolatry in the kingdom. It is for good reason, therefore, that we are taught to pray at the end of Psalm 119, “I have gone astray like a lost sheep; seek thy servant; for I do not forget thy commandments” (Ps. 119:176).

Setting that warning before us, the text turns again to the nature of folly and of the unbelieving fool to underscore it. He has said before in Ecclesiastes 2:13, 14, “Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man’s eyes are in his head;

but the fool walketh in darkness.” Now he uses a similar figure: “A wise man’s heart is at his right hand; but the fool’s heart at his left” (Eccl. 10:2).

The contrast draws perhaps on the fact that, physically, one covers his heart with his right hand. The heart is the spiritual center of man’s life, while the hand, particularly the right hand, is the normal instrument of the body for human activity. The point of the fool’s heart being “at his left” is that the fool is backward, spiritually, in his heart and activity, backward because he is turned from God in sin and folly and, therefore, from the way of wisdom under the sun. He is a fool within his heart, blind and in darkness, without understanding and the fruit of his hand is the folly of sin.

Sin is both a striving with God and His law, a moral evil, but it is also a striving with the boundaries of life that God has set and maintains in the creation. Man is a fallen, rational-moral creature. He can think and make choices, but he does so out of the folly of sin. Striving against God’s holy law, he also strives with the order of things under the sun. Sin in that sense is unreality, a striving with God’s imposed limitations on man’s natural life under the sun.

The Canons of Dordt summarizes this fact:

There remain, however, in man since the fall the glimmerings of natural light, whereby he retains some knowledge of God, of natural things, and the differences between good and evil, and discovers some regard for virtue, good order in society, and for maintaining an orderly external deportment. But so far is this light of nature from being sufficient to bring him to a saving knowledge of God and true conversion, that he is incapable of using it aright even in things natural and civil. Nay further, this light, such as it is, man in various ways renders wholly polluted, and holds it in unrighteousness, by doing which he becomes inexcusable before God” (III/IV, Art. 4).

Considering the person of the fool, the folly of his heart and activity, the text would have us take warning by having us to see this folly in his walk and speech. The corrupt tree brings forth corrupt fruit while out of the abundance of his folly, in his heart, the fool also speaks.

“Yea also, when he that is a fool walketh by the way, his wisdom faileth him, and he saith to everyone that he is a fool” (Eccl. 10:3).

This is the effect of folly in the heart. His wisdom—more literally, his heart—fails or is lacking. It is devoid of understanding spiritually and in large measure, practically. His walk is the pathway of his life. His heart being full of himself and estranged from God, he walks the broad way to destruction. Thus, as Solomon has pointed out, the

fool heaps and gathers to himself earthly riches, without asking whose things these shall be, for he shall die. This characteristic has been illustrated in this and other forms over the course of the book. The fool is a sinner that destroys much good (Eccl. 9:18).

His speech also reveals what lives in his heart. This is so whether it be the hard speeches of ungodly men against God and His law, or the foolish talking and mockery of men. Man proclaims himself to be as God and walks with his tongue through the earth. He makes transparent excuses for his folly and justifies his sin. He seeks to change times and laws and seasons. He will even claim the right to determine his own gender, as if the boundaries of life are in his hand. The vain notions of his heart come out of his mouth and he declares to everyone that he is a fool. Other

fools will follow because they too are at enmity with God.

This warning the text would underscore so that we see it and flee from the foolishness of sin that also cleaves to us as children of God. The Word of God has a multitude of examples of children of God who stumbled in sin and pride and fell into folly to their sorrow. The spirit of an unbelieving world around us affects our discernment too, for we have the same root of folly in our own sinful flesh. We are not untouched by the propaganda of a sinful world that says right is wrong and good, evil, of a world that daily justifies its depravity.

The way of wisdom is one of daily conversion. That way of daily conversion is one of daily repentance and turning to God in prayer and humility. To underscore this need to take heed the text turns in much of the rest of the chapter to illustrate both folly and its fruit.



## Strength of youth

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa

# A man of character

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2018, p. 14

For a young man to be what God calls him to be, he must be a man of high character.

The mention of character sounds strange to the modern ear. It makes us think of some long-forgotten, more formal era. The worldly man is not concerned with character, and the examples of men in the media today are the farthest thing from men of character.

This makes it all the more urgent that the Christian young man be a man of character. The character about which he is so concerned is a set of spiritual attributes graciously given him by God. Having received them from God, the man of God then carefully cultivates and diligently develops them in his life.

There is certainly more that could be said, but here I want to mention three aspects of a godly man's character: sobriety, wisdom, and compassion.

### Sober

A man of character is a man who is sober. In Titus 1:6 Paul tells pastor Titus, "Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded." The word translated "sober minded" means literally to have a sound mind or to be in one's right mind.

We are not dealing here with literal drunkenness, with beer, whiskey, rum, or vodka, with kegs and parties. And yet this is a helpful way of illustrating what the Bible means when it speaks of being sober. Think of a man who is drunk. Looking either to find a good time or to lose a bad memory at the bottom of the brown bottle, he's drunk himself into a stupor. His mind is in a thick fog. He's not thinking clearly. He's unstable, undisciplined, and out of control. He's as far from having a sober mind as possible.

From a spiritual point of view, the opposite of being sober minded is to be spiritually drunk. It means that our minds are in a fog. We are unstable, undisciplined, and out of control. But the one whose mind is clear, who is disciplined and in control, is the man with a sober mind.

How does one get a sober mind? It is a gift of God's grace. The fact that we are conceived totally depraved means that we are characterized by "blindness of mind, horrible darkness, vanity, and perverseness of judgment" (Canons III/IV, 1). In regenerating us, God "powerfully illuminates [our] minds by His Holy Spirit, that [we] may rightly understand and dis-

cern the things of the Spirit of God” (Canons III/IV, 11).

We grow in having a sound mind especially through our hearing of, reading, studying, and meditating on the Word of God. God’s Word teaches us reality, what is true of Him and of the world that He made. We can only have a sound mind if our thinking is guided and directed by His Word.

If a man has a sound mind, that will show itself in his life. The word for “sober minded” can also mean that a person exercises self-control. The way that we think and the things we believe dictate how we will talk and act. If we are not thinking clearly, or if we have faulty thinking, or if we simply do not think at all, that will show itself in sins in our lives.

Having a sound mind has been compared to the brakes on a car. The brakes are essential for slowing the car down and bringing it to a stop. If, for example, your car is going down a steep hill or there is some danger ahead, it is essential that your brakes are working properly so that you do not get hurt. So also is it essential for our Christian life that we have the brakes of a sound mind. A sound mind stomps on the brakes and keeps us from rushing into spiritual danger. Having a sound mind, we put the brakes on saying sinful words, on indulging in sexual sin, on copping a disrespectful and rebellious attitude.

Part of the difficulty in having a sound mind is that we have slew of enemies that are intent on driving us to spiritual drunkenness. The lies of the devil and world, the lies that our sinful flesh loves, are intended to distort reality. They distort reality by saying that what is sinful and ugly is actually good and enjoyable, and by saying that what is good and holy is actually miserable and worthless. They want us to think that black is white, and white is black.

Putting it that way might make you think that these lies can be written off as easy to spot, but what makes them so effective is that sin blinds. Sin is so deceitful that we think we see clearly when in reality we are blind. We are the blind man who is convinced that he has 20/20 vision. Talk about drunkenness!

One of the ways that our enemies try to rob us of a sound mind is with regard to our manhood. The world is trying to emasculate us men. They do so by portraying manly strength as a vice rather than a virtue. They do so by saying that men and women are not different but fundamentally the same.

The world also corrupts our view of manhood by encouraging us to prolong childhood and delay growing up. In their view a man is someone who is only concerned about having a good time. He spends his

twenties partying, spending money carelessly, having fun with his buddies, and dating several women but never getting serious with any of them. Maybe when he is in his thirties will he settle down and start thinking about marriage and a family. Soon, if the child of God is not careful, he starts to adopt the thinking of the world about manhood.

Another way in which our enemies try to rob us of a sound mind has to do with the way we speak. It seems as if everywhere a young man turns he is bombarded with dirty, blasphemous language. He hears it at work; he hears it in the music of the world; he hears it on TV; he hears it on YouTube. Soon, if he is not careful, what has been coming into his ears affects his mind and comes out of his mouth.

Another way in which our enemies try to rob us of a sound mind is with pornography. Obviously there are websites, YouTube channels, and Instagram accounts devoted to the most blatant and vile forms of this sin. But then there are the supposedly “soft” versions of pornography: the scantily clad women posing on billboards, on the magazines at the grocery store checkout, on Netflix, and on almost every webpage you visit. The strange woman of Proverbs is everywhere-present.

I hope to devote more attention to this in future articles, but for now I want briefly to mention the effect that viewing such things has on the mind of a young man. One of the ways that this robs him of a sound mind is by desensitizing him. Because he sees these images so often, things that used to bother him do not any longer. It also affects the way that he views women in general. He views them as sex objects, meant only for his sexual gratification. He may also think it normal to demand of women that they do the things which he has seen the women on the Internet do. It also affects the way in which a young man thinks about beauty. His view of beauty is warped by the airbrushed, photo-shopped model. His view of beauty is that it is only skin-deep.

Drinking from this tap of lies is intoxicating and addicting. Which is why the godly man refuses to drink from it. He guards his mind and heart, as well as his eyes and ears and hands, so that he is sober.

Are *you* sober?

## Wise

Not only must the Christian young men be sober, but he must also be wise.

This is the emphasis of the book of Proverbs. Proverbs was written by a father to his son to impart wisdom to him. Certainly it is true that what is said in the book is for all God’s people; but it has special application to young men. Especially young men must hear the com-

mand: “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding” (Prov. 4:7).

Wisdom is knowing what is true and right in every situation and then living in harmony with that reality.

Wisdom is closely related to understanding. Understanding is the spiritual ability to take the knowledge we have gained and to discern the truth that lies at the heart of it. It is the ability to penetrate through all outward appearances to perceive things as they truly are. Understanding is especially the ability to discern how everything that we have come to know is connected to God. All things stand in the service of God their Creator; He is the truth and reality of all things. Understanding is the ability to see the connection of all things to God and His glory.

Understanding is related to wisdom, but the two are not identical. The wisdom that we are called to get is understanding put into action. A wise person is one who has the ability to apply his understanding, the ability to live in accordance with the reality of understanding. Very simply, wisdom refers to acting godly. It is the application of our knowledge and understanding to every circumstance of life so that we direct all things to the highest end: the glory of God.

A wise man glorifies God in all he does. He seeks to glorify God in single life and in marriage. He seeks to glorify God in the rearing of the children God gives him. He seeks to glorify God in school and at work. He seeks to glorify God in his friendships and in his relationships to others in the church.

To give just one specific application, a wise man glorifies God with his mouth. A foolish man opens his mouth when he should keep it shut, but a wise man knows when to be quiet. A foolish man keeps his mouth shut when he should speak, but a wise man speaks when he must. A foolish man says the wrong thing at the wrong time, but a wise man says the right thing at the right time.

Are *you* wise?

## Compassionate

A third attribute of a man of character is that he is compassionate. For “compassionate” you could substitute any number of synonyms: caring, considerate, kind, loving, merciful, sympathetic, tenderhearted, thoughtful, and so on. A man who is compassionate is one who has pity on others in their misery and seeks, as he is able, to alleviate that misery.

At first the idea of being compassionate might not seem very manly. It might seem more like a feminine virtue. It certainly flies in the face of what the world

thinks about a man. Some think that a man must be an inconsiderate, self-centered brute. They say that compassion is weakness.

But when we look more carefully at what the Bible says of manhood, it is clear that a man of character is a man of compassion. Previously, we spoke of how men are to be leaders, and how leadership involves selfless service to others. Husbands are called to love their wives and dwell with them as men of understanding. Our Lord Jesus, the model of biblical manhood, is frequently described as a merciful and sympathetic Savior.

Do not mistake this compassionate attitude for weakness. It does not mean that we become a doormat for others to walk all over. It does not mean we never open our mouth and stand up for a just cause. So much does the compassionate man care for others, that he is ready to open his mouth to defend a just cause and ready to stand up for the helpless. Compassion is strength.

Are *you* compassionate?

## Conclusion

If we would oversimplify things and boil the characteristics of a mature Christian man down to two things, I would argue that they are the following two: strength (see the last article in this series) and character.

It is these two qualities that enable the Christian man to carry out his chief responsibility from God to be a leader. It is with strength and character that he is able to serve and protect, to provide and make decisions, to instruct and be an example. Without the strength of conviction, he is crippled, weak, and unable to lead. And without character, he bungles everything and makes a mess of it all. He might have all kinds of strength and energy, but his zeal is misguided and destructive.

Our marriages need husbands who are men of strength and character. They need to have strength to lead with conviction, but they also need to harness and direct that strength with good character so that they do not damage their wives.

Our families need fathers who are men of strength and character. We need fathers who take seriously their responsibility to lead the home, and then do so with great care and wisdom. Without wisdom, the home is a mess. But “through wisdom is an house builded” (Prov. 24:3).

Our churches need men who are men of strength and character. Certainly we need wise men to serve in the special offices in the church as pastors, elders, and deacons. But we also need wise men to hold the office of believer. What hurt we can do to the church through our foolishness, but how useful we can be when characterized by wisdom.

God, give us men of character!



## News from our churches

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

### Trivia question

Some issues ago we revealed that most of the churches in the PRCA meet at 9:30 A.M. for their first service of the Sabbath Day. Do you know which starting time is most used for the second service of these congregations? Answer later in this column.

### Mission activities

Each calendar year a delegation of two men is sent to the Republic of the Philippines. Until now, one man has represented the Council of the calling church in Doon, IA while the other has represented the Foreign Mission Committee. The 2019 delegation consisting of Rev. J. Engelsma and Rev. N. Decker visited from February 15-26. Rev. Engelsma represented both Doon and the FMC, while Rev. Decker represented the Contact Committee of the PRCA. The Contact Committee has become involved now that a sister-church relationship has been established with the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines.

The adopted mandate of the delegation consisted of conveying greetings to the missionaries and their families while bringing encouragement and appreciation for their diligent labors. The delegation worshiped with as many of the churches and groups there as possible and brought official greetings. They met with the Councils of the three established PRCP churches and attended the Classis of the PRCP on February 25. Family visitation was conducted with the missionary families. If possible, the men planned to attend the Bearers of Light Community Church in Guiguinto with Rev. Holstege. This is a relatively new contact for our missionaries. Another goal was to visit the official mission station of the PRCP, the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albueria, Leyte. And of course, submit a written report to the Doon Council, the FMC, and the CC of their work. We find these delegations get busier and busier!

Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn began their furlough in January. Rev. Kleyn has assured us that things are going well. However, their bodies are not used to Michigan winters, and weeks into the furlough Rev. Kleyn revealed that they had not warmed up yet since arriving in the States. This from someone who, when he was the pastor there, used to call Edgerton, MN balmy!

On Friday, January 25, Kalamazoo PRC had opportunity to view a picture presentation by Rev. Bill Langerak on his 2017 visit to South Korea as a member of our Contact Committee delegation. Flyers promoting the program were available to use in inviting friends, relatives, and neighbors. The ladies brought cookies and bars for the refreshments.

### Young adult activities

Lynden PRC Young Adults' Retreat updates:

A reminder that registration for our retreat opened in February! If you haven't already, request an invite to see the Facebook page Lynden PRC Young Adults Retreat 2019, and invite your friends as well! As previously announced, our retreat will take place at Mt. Baker Bibleway Camp during July 1-5, 2019. Our speakers for the retreat will be Prof. Gritters and Rev. Regnerus. Our retreat theme is "An Unchanging God In an Ever-Changing World." Come join us for a wonderful retreat in beautiful Northwest Washington!

### Young people's activities

This from one of our church bulletins:

Last week, the Young People brought questions to discuss on the faith and practices of the PRC. One of the questions was this: why do we worship twice on the Lord's Day? This led to a discussion of the creation ordinance of God to set aside a whole day for the Lord (not just a morning) (Gen. 2:1-3), the Old Testament practice of morning and evening prayers (Ps. 92:1-2), the importance of "not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25), and the privilege and blessing of the Lord's Day (Is. 58:13-14). Another question: why do we have congregational silent prayer before the worship service? This led us to discuss the Old Testament practice of sanctifying oneself before coming into God's presence (Ex. 19:16-25) and what we should pray for before worship. These were just a couple of the questions we discussed! We had such good discussions that we didn't get to all the questions. We'll get to the rest of the questions next week, the Lord willing!

Southwest and Providence PRCs will be hosting the 2019 PRC Young People's Convention on August 12-

16, the Lord willing. The convention will be held at Michindoh Conference Center in Hillsdale, MI. Registration for chaperones is open! If you are interested, visit the website at [prconvention.com](http://prconvention.com) to register.

### Evangelism activities

In January, Rev. D. Overway and R. Peterson of the Myanmar committee of Hope PRC (GR) departed for Myanmar with Cal and Seth Kalsbeek and John VanBaren. The Myanmar committee had a list of mandates, including conducting a seminar for forty men arriving from many churches all over Myanmar and giving encouragement to the saints on the other side of the world.

### Minister activities

The Domestic Mission Committee and Byron Center PRC's Council approved a request for Pastor A. Spriensma to assist the saints in Singapore from January 15 until February 12. Besides the four Sundays of preaching, Rev. Spriensma was busy teaching catechism and leading Bible societies. He also conducted a wedding and a funeral, administered the sacrament of baptism, and worked with Singapore's Evangelism committee.

Rev. E. Guichelaar was led by God to decline the call to be missionary-on-loan to the CERC of Singapore. Grandville PRC Council then formed the next trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, G. Eriks, and C. Haak. On February 10 the congregation voted to call Rev. Haak.

On January 20, Trinity PRC of Hudsonville, MI called Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon, IA PRC) to be their next pastor. On February 10 he declined their call.

From her new trio of Revs. J. Laning, M. McGeown, and C. Spronk, Immanuel PRC called Rev. Laning on February 10.

### Sister-church activities

On January 9, Rev. and Pat Koole and Peter and Dorothy VanDerSchaaf traveled to Ballymena, Northern Ireland and Limerick, Ireland on behalf of our churches to conduct church visitation. We are thankful for safety, and by this labor may God prosper the gospel and saints in our sister church and mission field on the island.

### Congregational activities

Providence PRC chili and soup cook-off was held Saturday, February 9. All were encouraged to invite family and friends and join at Adams Christian School at 5 P.M. Sounds delicious!

### Seminary activities

The Seminary is sponsoring a three-day conference for the 400th anniversary of the Synod of Dordt. This conference will be hosted by Trinity Protestant Reformed Church and be held April 25-27, 2019. Mark your calendars and visit the special conference website at [dordt400.org](http://dordt400.org). (See back page for details.)

### Trivia answer

Twenty of our congregations use 5:00 P.M. for the starting time of their second service. Other times used by some of our congregations are: 1:00, 2:00, 3:00, 3:30, 4:00, 5:30, and 6:00 P.M. More trivia next time.

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

## Announcements

### Resolution of sympathy

The Men's Society of Trinity PRC express our sympathy to Henry Bergman in the sudden death of his son **Daniel**. May the God of all comfort hold up the Bergman family in their time of grief, and assure them that through this also He is working their salvation. “For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens,” II Corinthians 5:1.

Prof. Douglas Kuiper, Pres.

Paul Vink, Sec'y.

### Reformed Witness Hour

#### Rev. Rodney Kleyn

- Mar. 3 “Love Is Not Proud”  
I Corinthians 13:4
- Mar. 10 “Love Does Not Act Inappropriately”  
I Corinthians 13:5
- Mar. 17 “Love Is Not Self-Seeking”  
I Corinthians 13:5
- Mar. 24 “Love Is Not Easily Provoked”  
I Corinthians 13:5
- Mar. 31 “Love Keeps No Record of Wrong”  
I Corinthians 13:5

## Call to aspirants to the ministry

All young men desiring to begin studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in the 2019-2020 academic year should make application at the March 21, 2019 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's Consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the Seminary's website (prcts.org).

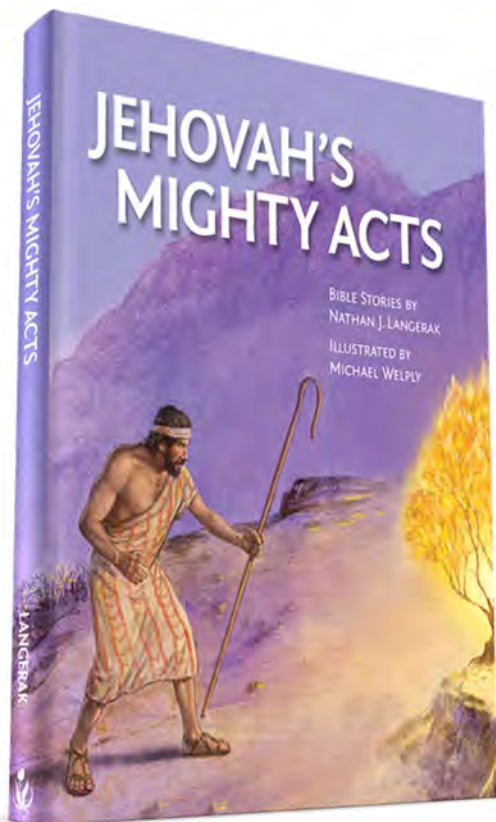
All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 21 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee, 4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW, Wyoming, MI 49418.

Bob Drnek, Secretary

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



Coming soon!

### **Bible stories by Rev. Nathan J. Langerak Illustrated by Michael Welply**

*Jehovah's Mighty Acts* is a collection of 31 Old Testament Bible stories, including the creation of the world, the worldwide flood, God raising up Moses to deliver Israel from Egypt, and the Jews' return home after seventy years of captivity. Each story relays the theme of Jehovah's mighty salvation of his covenant people in the Old Testament and each points to the mightiest act of all—salvation in Christ.

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## Announcements continued

### Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed 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](mailto:gr.tolsma@gmail.com) / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at [s\\_r\\_ferguson@hotmail.com](mailto:s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com).

### Teacher needed

Faith Christian School of Randolph, WI is seeking one full-time teacher for a high school position in 2019-2020. There is the possibility of teaching some 7th & 8th grade classes depending on the applicant's abilities and preferences. All interested individuals should contact Jack Regnerus ([jackbuiltregs@gmail.com](mailto:jackbuiltregs@gmail.com) or 920-296-3529) or Mike Vander Veen ([mvanderveen@randolphfcs.org](mailto:mvanderveen@randolphfcs.org) or 920-296-4406) for more information or to apply.



## DORDT 400

Safe-guarding the Reformed tradition

### A three-day conference sponsored by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary



#### Illustrating and Recommending the Grace of Election—Dordt's Doctrine of Reprobation

**PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA** served four congregations in the PRCA before his appointment in 2005 as the professor of Reformed Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



#### Assurance: Sovereign Grace's Speech to the Heart

**PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS** served two congregations in the PRCA before his appointment in 2003 as the professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



#### Warring a Good Warfare with the Canons

**REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA** has been the pastor at Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California since 2011.



#### The Doctrine of the Covenant in the Canons

**PROF. DOUGLAS KUIPER** served as the pastor in three congregations. He was appointed by Synod 2017 as the professor of Church History and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary.



#### The Polity of Dordt: Om Goede Orde in de Gemeente Christi te Onderhouden (Maintaining Good Order in the Church of Christ)

**REV. WILLIAM LANGERAK** has been the pastor at Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan since 2003.



#### The Call of the Gospel

**REV. MARK SHAND** was ordained in 2001 as a minister in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, and from 2009 to the present he has been the minister of the Launceston congregation.



#### The Canons as the Original "Five points"

**REV. ANGUS STEWART** is the pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church (CPRC) in N. Ireland and chairman of the British Reformed Fellowship.

Held at Trinity PRC April 25–27, 2019 | [dordt400.org](http://dordt400.org)