

The Standard Bearer

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Jonah, the run-away prophet

Rev. Dennis Lee

The covenant and Dordt— Reprobation

Prof. Russell Dykstra

The story of Epaphras

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Wisdom for young men in dating

Rev. Joshua Engelsma

Training our children in the discipline of reading

Rev. Justin Smidstra



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Meditation

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

Jonah, the run-away prophet

But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

Jonah 1:3

The biblical narrative of Jonah sets forth some of the most wondrous attributes of God: His absolute sovereignty and might, His great love and mercy, and His amazing grace shown to undeserving sinners. And it does so in some very striking ways. Accordingly, this prophecy has many important spiritual lessons to which we do well to take heed.

Jonah was a son of one called Amittai (1:1). Jonah was a citizen in the northern kingdom of Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II, who, like his predecessors, did evil in the sight of the Lord. Most importantly, Jonah was a prophet—not a false prophet, but a true prophet of God. We know that because we are told that “the word of the LORD came unto Jonah.” God spoke directly to him and gave him the words to preach. What a great privilege it was to be given this calling to be God’s mouthpiece!

But Jonah ran away from God. The occasion for this was that God Himself commissioned him to bring His word to the city of Nineveh. “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their wickedness is come up before me,” said God to Jonah; but Jonah refused to obey. Instead, he went to Joppa, boarded a ship manned by pagan sailors, and went with them in the opposite direction, to Tarshish.

Jonah did so in order to flee from “the presence of the LORD.” To be sure, this does not refer to the everywhere presence of God. We have no reason to doubt that Jonah, being a prophet of God, knew and understood the very simple but powerful truth of the omnipresence of God. He knew that there was absolutely nowhere he could go to hide from the LORD, and surely knew

what the psalmist confessed, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there” (Ps. 139:7-8). Rather, “the presence of the LORD” speaks of the *intimate, special communing* presence of God and, therefore, refers to the precious places, ways, or means through which God has fellowship and communion with His children. See this in how it is said that our first parents, Adam and Eve, hid themselves from “the presence of the LORD” when God had called out to them with His voice and approached them in the cool of the garden. They sought to flee from the intimate communion and sweet fellowship they had with God because they knew they were guilty of disobeying Him! So also was Jonah doing that when he tried to run away “from the presence of the LORD” by boarding that ship going to Tarshish, in the exact opposite direction of Nineveh.

Dear reader, could you be doing that? Are you fleeing from the presence of the LORD? There are so many ways to do this! Directly, we could be absenting ourselves from worship—whether it be at church, at the dining table where family devotions are held, or in our own private “closets” where we pray and read our Bibles. And indirectly, we could be physically present at these places but our hearts very far from, even against, God. We could be fast asleep during the sermon or “tuned off” when the good word addressing our sins is being brought to us. And though we could be diligently listening to the sermon and taking detailed notes, our intent is to use them against others and hurt them. When we do such things, we are, like Jonah, running away from the sweet, intimate, and communing presence of the LORD!

That leads us to ask the question, “Why?” Why was Jonah running away from the presence of his God?

Could it have been because of the difficulty of the task that God had called him to? After all, we are told that Nineveh was a “great city.” It took three days to cross, had 120,000 infants and thus likely had about

600,000 people living in it. Such information should not surprise us because it was the capital city of Assyria, the most powerful kingdom on earth in its day! So, what could one man do? Who would listen to Jonah when he got there? Or could the reason have been the danger involved in going to Nineveh? For it was a very wicked city (1:2), in fact, a city of great violence and murder (Nah. 3:1-4). If either or both of these were the reasons for Jonah to run away from God and His appointed mission, we might be sympathetic and somewhat understanding towards him.

But that was not the case.

Rather, the reason is given by Jonah himself later on in chapter four after God had shown mercy to a repentant Nineveh. In his anger and displeasure against God, Jonah said to Him, “Was this not my saying, when I was in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness...” (Jonah 4:2). In other words, Jonah was angry that God showed His graciousness by working repentance in the hearts of Nineveh’s elect citizens. While Jonah desired the salvation of his own people and willingly brought the gospel of grace and salvation in Christ alone to them, he did not want the Ninevites to be saved—saved through his gospel labors! At bottom, this was because Jonah had a powerful, sinful attitude of prejudice and hatred towards the people of Nineveh.

There are precious spiritual lessons we can learn from all of this.

The first lesson is that we should *never* underestimate the attitude of hatred in the sinful human heart. Hatred, when left unchecked and not diligently identified and put away from us, can develop into defiant anger that does great violence against God and our neighbor. This is what happened to Jonah, a fearless, tireless, true prophet of God who labored faithfully for the Lord. Such was the deep-seated, raging anger and hatred within Jonah that he would rather serve the sin of prejudice than live in the sweet communion of and joyful obedience to his Lord! We should know that, if it happened to him, it can also happen to us! Is there someone, or a group or ethnicity of people you despise? Is there someone who abused you so badly and in so many ways that you want to do the same or worse to him? Have you determined to harbor hatred forever in your heart against that person and never forgive him? If we are doing these things, we should know that though we may be physically present at worship, we could not be farther away from God. May God grant us grace

to repent of our hatred and be watchful over our own hearts so that we might be actively “casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (II Cor. 10:5).

Second, God’s providence may never be set in conflict against His clear word of command and instruction. Looking at the circumstances in Jonah’s life when he went on board that ship, we can see how one might argue that Jonah was being “led” by God, in His providential arrangements, to do just that. In the providence of God, there was a ship at Joppa going to Tarshish. In the providence of God, the ship was manned by a group of ungodly sailors who certainly would not give Jonah a hard time for his disobedience to God. In the providence of God, Jonah also had sufficient money to pay his fare for the trip. But was it the case that Jonah was being “led by God” to Tarshish? Certainly not! For God’s clear word to Jonah was to “arise and go to Nineveh and cry against it” (1:2). Dear reader, could you be setting the providence of God in conflict against the clear Word of God? It may seem that God is opening the way for us to do something like Jonah when he went on board that ship to Tarshish. But we may not attempt to justify and cling to any thoughts, words, or actions that we may really desire when they are in conflict with the clear and good instruction of God’s Word!

Third, the prophet’s blatant defiance of and disobedience against God reminds us never to put our trust in man. No, not even saints whom we have the highest esteem for, be they our parents, elders, or pastor! For even the holiest of the saints have but a small beginning of the life of new obedience! They are what they are only by the grace of God.

If we were to conclude this meditation by fixing our eyes on Jonah, we are left only with a sad and sinking feeling in our souls. Rather, Jonah’s sin reminds us that we need to look up and fix our eyes on our great God. Because Jonah is a child of God, God never lets him go. The Lord would go through great lengths in order to recover His errant servant. He did so because of His great mercy and love for Jonah. For indeed, such is the love of God that He gave the unspeakable gift of His dear Son in order to save us, a sinful people who only have hatred in our hearts. If He did that for us, what good would He, the almighty and faithful God, not do for us?



Editorial

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

The covenant and Dordt (5) Reprobation

The Reformed theology of God's everlasting covenant of grace must be in harmony with the doctrines of grace set forth in the Canons of Dordt. That is the premise of these editorials. That the covenant and salvation are inseparable is admitted even by those who teach that the covenant is a conditional relationship with every baptized child, for they insist that God promises salvation to each of these children (conditionally). We have shown that God established His covenant with Christ and those chosen eternally in Him. This is the teaching of both Scripture and the Canons. Since the covenant is a relationship of love, God saves His elect people and in this way brings them infallibly into His covenant life of fellowship. The covenant itself then must not be out of harmony with the doctrines of saving grace.

This is true also of the doctrine of predestination, *double* predestination. The doctrine of the covenant governed by election maintains that Christ is both the Mediator and the Head of the covenant, which both Scripture and the Canons teach. But what about the other side of predestination—reprobation? The doctrine of the covenant must also harmonize with reprobation. To this we turn.

Reprobation in the Canons

The Canons refer to reprobation in Head I, Articles 6, 15, 18, and Rejection of Errors 8. A brief overview of this doctrine in the Canons follows.

Article 6 teaches first that God has one decree of predestination with two sides—election and reprobation. This decree is eternal, and this eternal decree determines what happens in time. According to that eternal decree, in time God “graciously softens the hearts of the elect...and inclines them to believe.” Also according to that decree, God “leaves the non-elect...to their own wickedness and obduracy.”

Article 15 contains the Canon's main teaching on reprobation, and therefore we quote it.

What peculiarly tends to illustrate and recommend to

us the eternal and unmerited grace of election is the express testimony of sacred Scripture that not all, but some only, are elected, while others are passed by in the eternal election of God; whom God, out of His sovereign, most just, irreprehensible, and unchangeable good pleasure, hath decreed to leave in the common misery into which they have wilfully plunged themselves, and not to bestow upon them saving faith and the grace of conversion; but leaving them in His just judgment to follow their own ways, at last for the declaration of His justice, to condemn and punish them forever, not only on account of their unbelief, but also for all their other sins. And this is the decree of reprobation which by no means makes God the author of sin (the very thought of which is blasphemy), but declares Him to be an awful, irreprehensible, and righteous judge and avenger thereof.

To understand the teaching of the Canons, it is important to bear in mind what the Arminians were teaching. The Arminians taught a *conditional* predestination. According to them, election is conditional, based on God foreseeing who would believe and obey. Reprobation likewise is conditional, based on God foreseeing who will not believe and obey. There is no eternal, absolute decree of God that determines who are elect and will go to heaven, and who are reprobate and will eternally be damned.

The Canons reject this theology of a conditional predestination. Election is not based on man fulfilling the condition of faith and obedience. Likewise, reprobation is not conditional.

Accordingly, Article 15 teaches concerning reprobation that God decreed three things. God decreed, first, to leave the reprobate in their misery of sin. Second, God decreed not to give them saving faith and the grace of conversion. Third, God eternally decreed to condemn the reprobate and punish them forever.

Article 15 adds that this decree is righteous and unchangeable. It is perfectly righteous in the way in which God deals with the reprobate, condemning them for their sins. That it is unchangeable is significant—none

are added to the reprobate nor taken away in time. In addition, this decree is according to God's good pleasure. This is what God determined is good. Finally, that decree of God is irreprehensible, which is to say, God is not to be blamed. The natural reaction of man is to find fault with God for this decree. But the Canons will have none of that. God is righteous and good, and He is sovereign.

At this point it is good to return to Article 6, which reminds us that this decree of God is a "profound... discrimination between men equally involved in ruin." Predestination is profound. It is deep. It is certainly true that all God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts (Is. 55:9), and all His "ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). But we must not discuss this decree without contemplating that it is profound, deep, and far beyond our comprehension. God, in His mind, eternally predestined the eternal destiny of all men and angels, as well as the path to their eternal destiny. Stop and consider what this means. And then think on reprobation. Reprobation is not something to be discussed casually. It is God's eternal plan that some people, even the majority of those whom He creates, are predestined for hell.

Profound. Sobering. Words cannot capture the depth. But at the least, let us acknowledge that we ought never to talk about reprobation in a casual manner. And this editorial does not. To paraphrase a Protestant Reformed minister's sermon from the 1950s, "I can talk about reprobation and tell you what it is. But when I think that one of my grandchildren might be reprobate, I tremble."

The Covenant and reprobation

But what does reprobation have to do with God's everlasting covenant of grace? It brings us to the reality that God determined that non-elect children would be born in covenant families.

Do you see the issue? God establishes His covenant with Christ and those who are chosen in Christ. Yet God promises Abraham that He will establish His covenant with Abraham's seed in their generations, to be a God unto Abraham and to his seed after him (Gen. 17:7). The covenant is established in the line of continued generations. We rightly confess that God establishes His covenant with believers and their children. Even

though we have seen that God establishes His covenant with the *elect* children of believers, the question still arises, what must be said of the reprobate children of believers?

Specifically, does God establish His covenant with these non-elect children of believers? Does God promise to be their God? Does God promise that they are His people? Does God promise forgiveness and eternal life to these children?

Some in the Reformed camp answer all those questions with a resounding, Yes! This is the teaching of a covenant theology that maintains that all the children of believers are equally covenant children. God gives the same promises to every child at baptism.

To put it differently, this is the teaching of any covenant theology that refuses to allow the covenant to be determined by election. It is quite natural, then, that such a theology will not find a place for reprobation in the doctrine of the covenant.

This theology of the covenant is the teaching of Klaas Schilder. In his work criticizing the Declaration of Principles adopted by the Protestant Reformed Churches, Schilder makes it plain that the promise at baptism is conditional: "Thus, within the circle of

God's *speaking*, the promised goods are bound to the *condition* of accepting those goods."¹ Then he insists that this promise is to every baptized child, on the condition of faith. He maintains that in baptism, the promise is not "a general message" proclaimed "over our heads.... No, [God] comes down from the pulpit, stands right next to us and says, 'Mary, name and surname,' 'Cornelius, so and so, I baptize you.'"² Thus, every baptized child receives the conditional promise. As Schilder interprets the Reformed Baptism Form, the promise is that the "Father *will* provide you all good..." and the "Spirit *will* impart to you all that we have in Christ," provided the child believes.³

Accordingly, Schilder wrote that "the promise of the gospel is not an oath that God will lead all the elect to

But we must not discuss this decree without contemplating that it is profound, deep, and far beyond our comprehension. God, in His mind, eternally predestined the eternal destiny of all men and angels, as well as the path to their eternal destiny. Stop and consider what this means. And then think on reprobation.

1 *Extra-Scriptural Binding—A New Danger in American Secession Theologians on Covenant and Baptism*, Jelle Faber. (Neerlandia, AB: Inheritance Publishers, 1996). 133. Emphasis in the original.

2 Schilder, *Extra-Scriptural Binding*, 142.

3 Schilder, 145. Emphasis in the original.

a destination (although this is all true) but an oath *to* a specific person, that he wants to lead this specific person, *called* by name, to the final salvation.”⁴

It is astounding, in light of God’s eternal decree of reprobation, to maintain that God promises these blessings of salvation to every baptized child, also the non-elect child. That God “wants to lead this specific person, *called* by name, to the final salvation” is contrary to the good pleasure of God, according to which He decreed to reprobate some of these baptized children.

The promoters of the Federal Vision go a step beyond Schilder. Perhaps recognizing that it is foolish to speak of God making such promises to *non-elect* baptized children, these theologians teach that every baptized child is *elect*. Then they go even farther, insisting that every baptized child is engrafted into Christ, which even grants justification to that child! Their explanation of election is very different from the Canons, obviously. Their “election” is a conditional election, one that the baptized child loses when he fails to fill the condition

of faith and obedience. We will not take the time to demonstrate their teaching with quotations but encourage all to read Prof. D. Engelsma’s *Gospel Truth of Justification* on this point.⁵

Conditional covenant theology contradicts the Canons’ teaching on reprobation. God decreed to leave the reprobate in their misery of sin, not to give them saving faith and the grace of conversion, and to condemn the reprobate and punish them forever. That is God’s eternal good pleasure. It is simply wrong to teach that, in time, God promises to these same individuals forgiveness of sins and eternal life. It cannot be maintained that God promised Esau, “I am your God, you are my child, I claim you as my own and promise you eternal life...if you believe.”

Other questions must be faced in regard to the covenant and reprobation, the chief one being: Why does God determine that reprobate children will be born and grow up in covenant families?

More on reprobation and the covenant next time.

⁴ Schilder, 146. Emphasis in the original.

⁵ Published by the RFP in 2017 (rfpa.org.) See especially pp. 464-474.



All around us

Rev. Nathan Decker, pastor of the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan

Protect young eyes on capitol hill

Chairman Graham, Senator Blumenthal, and members of the Committee, thank you for allowing all of us to speak today. I cannot think of a more noble cause for all of us to be spending our time on today than the safety and protection of our children. I began Protect Young Eyes five years ago because the internet is complex and even diligent parents are overwhelmed by the digital choices their children are facing. Through thousands of hours of research, hundreds of presentations at schools around the country, and dozens of articles examining digital trends, we have witnessed both the wonderful potential and the troubling and pervasive darkness that exists in the pockets of millions of young people today. I’m certain that in the course of today’s discussion, we will hear difficult stories. I wish they were uncommon.¹

The above is the opening statement of Mr. Chris

McKenna before the Senate Judiciary Committee on July 9, 2019. Though not a highly publicized event that took place at our nation’s capitol, it is nevertheless one worthy of our attention and examination. McKenna is the founder of Protect Young Eyes, an organization that provides resources for parents and leaders to create safe digital environments for children and youth. The opportunity to appear before United States senators at a hearing entitled “Protecting Innocence in a Digital World” arose out of Protect Young Eyes’ involvement in a campaign called #fixappratings. Apps for purchase and download on phones and tablets include age-appropriate ratings that are assigned by the app-makers themselves. Currently, however, there is no accountability for the technology companies to ensure that the ratings are accurate, the result of which is that users may be deceived about the potential danger found in the apps. In order to address this issue along with, more generally, the protection of children on the Internet, McKenna

¹ <https://protectyoungeyes.com/my-statement-to-the-senate-judiciary-committee-protecting-innocence-in-a-digital-world>.

with four other experts in this field, were given opportunity to interact with U.S. senators at the aforementioned hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee.

McKenna's testimony is sobering. In it he specifically addressed Snapchat and Instagram, by far two of the most widely used apps among youth, both in the world and in the church. Concerning Instagram, Mr. McKenna said,

A recent poll of 2,000 teens found that nearly 75% of them had received pornographic direct messages from strangers, even if they had a private account. But you won't find any warnings in the app store descriptions for Instagram that mention anything about sexual predators, direct message risks, sex trafficking, or hardcore pornography. Instagram's defaults are not set for child safety or data privacy even though Instagram is rated 12+ by Apple and 13+ by Google.

Regarding Snapchat, McKenna commented, "Snapchat is where explicit content on Pornhub lives just seconds away from every user through backdoors within the app. The app knowingly allows a well-documented list of porn performers to make thousands of dollars daily through their premium Snap account." And later, "But again, you won't find anything in Snapchat's app store descriptions that warn parents about premium Snapchat accounts, predator risks of using Snap Maps, or the hyper-sexualized content in Discover news. Snapchat is rated 12+ by Apple and 13+ by Google."

In light of the above, I offer the following three considerations. First, we are reminded as Christians that the standard that governs our use of apps and social media is the infallible Word of God. McKenna's calling attention to this issue is noteworthy and helpful. However, we readily recognize the limitations of app ratings, though in certain instances we may consult them as a helpful guide. Whether this campaign produces any changes in the app rating system or not, the responsibility that falls upon all believers, especially Christian parents, remains the same, namely, to base the use or non-use of digital platforms solely on the wisdom and truth found in God's Word. Does this app compromise an antithetical and holy walk? Does this app open the door to strong temptations to defile the heart and mind with sexual filth? These and many other similar questions we are to ask before we download and use any app on our devices.

In the second place, I encourage the readers of the *Standard Bearer* to familiarize themselves with Protect Young Eyes, the services they provide and the content they produce. One of my purposes in writing about McKenna's testimony to the Senate Judiciary Commit-

tee is the opportunity it affords to introduce the organization he founded. Many who are reading this article are already familiar with Protect Young Eyes. But if you are not, may this article serve the purpose of leading you to become acquainted with this invaluable resource for navigating the ever-changing technological world of devices, apps, games, and social media. To keep abreast of the current trends that undoubtedly influence our youth and families is certainly challenging. But in the face of that struggle, may the response of the Christian parent not be a throwing up of our hands in despair saying, "It is impossible to stay on top of what is going on, so why even bother trying!" No, the responsibility of parents is to understand the times and to be aware of what is taking place all around us in this digital world. The current technology inundates the lives of our youth and families, and will always be used as a tool in the hands of the Devil to hurt the church of Jesus Christ. Herein lies the usefulness of Protect Young Eyes, a wonderful resource to keep Christians up to date on the landscape of digital technology as we seek to raise our children and guide our youth in this evil age.

Third, an easy way to do just this is by receiving the Protect Young Eyes weekly newsletter, entitled "PYE Digital Trends," by way of email. I encourage readers to subscribe. In a day when our email inboxes are flooded with worthless junk, here is a free resource worth pursuing on a weekly basis. The weekly newsletter is a curated list of articles addressing up-to-date trends in the digital world. For example, one of the more recent newsletters included a link to an article concerning the recent updates to Snapchat, an app (as made clear by the above quote) that is so very dangerous if its use is not monitored closely and regulated carefully. The article gives parents all the information they would need to make informed and wise decisions concerning their children's use or lack thereof of Snapchat. This is just one example of many that could be given to illustrate the newsletter's value. And if possible, I encourage readers to attend in person a Protect Young Eyes presentation. I am thankful several schools and churches have hosted such a talk. I hope more will follow suit. Much of the content of the presentation can be learned through the website and blog of Protect Young Eyes. However, there is still tremendous value in believers coming together to learn about and discuss this important subject.

In conclusion, I set before parents and leaders the sacred calling to guide and protect their children as they live in a digital age. Should parents simply say, "We trust our son or daughter to use their phone and apps wisely," and leave it at that? I would argue that much more is required. It is well and good that parents have

a certain trust of their children. But healthy trust never eliminates the absolute necessity of exercising wisdom through pointed conversations and accountability. I remind you of the aforementioned testimony of an expert in this field, the sinful natures that cling to each one of us and our children, and the depravity of the world in which we live. The ease with which vile wickedness can be accessed, no matter the level of trust that may be present, demands helpful boundaries and accountability.

To impress the necessity of this upon you, I ask you to translate in your mind the digital world into an analog or physical world. Unrestricted and unaccountable use of the Internet or Snapchat or Instagram allows access to pornography through only a few clicks. That reality is no different than having stacks of pornographic magazines behind the books on your shelves at home. To access the magazines requires the simple action of pulling the books in front of them off the shelves. No Christian parent, of course, would ever allow their chil-

dren or youth to live in such an environment where such evil could be so easily accessed. But unfiltered and unaccountable use of the Internet and certain apps is essentially no different.

May God give us wisdom to guide, but also to protect our children as best we are able. The previously quoted testimony must be taken seriously. The statistics of teenage girls being preyed on sexually as reported above are shockingly high. And that, out of love for the daughters of Christ, should lead every father and mother to be resolved to protect them and equip them with the knowledge and wisdom to live in this depraved and corrupt world. Herein lies the value of reading current events such as the one mentioned at the beginning of this article. Such reports impress upon us the need for wisdom in the raising our children in this age of digital technology. May God grant us such wisdom, and may He be pleased to preserve our children and youth in these last days.



Search the Scriptures

Mr. Kyle Bruinooge teaches New Testament at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, Michigan

The story of Epaphras

“Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”

Colossians 4:12

The apostle Paul is regarded as the greatest missionary of all time. His boldness, diligence, and courage are demonstrated by his ability through the power of God to establish churches in hostile cities under difficult circumstances. He was not alone, however. No great theologian or missionary ever is. There is always a support system—an individual or network of people who stand by their side—who are used to carry out the same goal. This was certainly true for the apostle Paul.

Of the apostles in the New Testament story after the death of Christ, Paul is one of the main characters. He is the main preacher, teacher, and writer, one whose letters make up half of the New Testament books. But scattered throughout the pages of his epistles are the

names of minor characters, lesser known men and women, whose names are mentioned a handful of times and whose place in the development of the churches during the Apostolic Age may seem insignificant to us readers. A beautiful truth flowing out of the infallibility of Scripture is that every part of the Bible has meaning and purpose; no part of the Bible is insignificant. The Holy Spirit gave great purpose to all that was written down for the church of all ages. These men and women, while not receiving the same narrative as Paul, are nonetheless significant in their support and labor on behalf of Paul and the churches. A man who fits this description is Epaphras, and this article will tell his story.

Epaphras' name is mentioned three times in the Bible (Col. 1:7; 4:12; Phile. 23). Just a few brief descriptors are given in these verses to one who appears to have been an obscure companion of the apostle Paul. This is all the Spirit gives us, and yet it is enough to give us a small glimpse into Epaphras' faith and character. While his story involves some connections and conjecture, the

truth about his spiritual character remains based on the truth of God's Word.

The story perhaps started when Epaphras, a native of the city of Colossae, traveled to Ephesus during Paul's third missionary journey during the mid-50s A.D. During Paul's long stay in Ephesus, the gospel went forth throughout Asia Minor (Acts 19:10), and during this time the gospel most likely would have spread to Colossae, located in the Lycus River Valley, some 100 miles inland from Ephesus. It seems likely that Epaphras was converted during Paul's time in Ephesus, and then traveled to his native Colossae to bring the gospel. Epaphras, not Paul, became the founder of the church at Colossae (Col. 1:7). Interestingly, the narrative of Acts gives no record of Paul traveling to Colossae on any of his journeys. He had never been there before writing to them (Col. 2:1) but, in addition to the guiding hand of the Spirit leading him during the journeys, the reason for this absence may be found in the city's history.

With this in mind, understanding Colossae will be important for us in understanding the story of Epaphras. In Greek and early Roman history, Colossae was once a great and mighty city, located in a beautiful river valley with its neighbors Laodicea and Hierapolis nearby (Col. 4:13). In the centuries leading to the time of Paul's journeys, Laodicea and Hierapolis slowly surpassed Colossae in significance and population, leaving Colossae out of the main trade loop that connected the east and west. Politically speaking, Colossae represents one of the most insignificant cities to which Paul wrote a letter. But significance is never found in numbers, as Epaphras would no doubt testify.

There is an important lesson for us here, too. What defines a true church for us? What criteria determine whether the pastor is faithful? We know a true church has the marks laid out in the Reformed confessions. And we know a faithful pastor is a man called by God who preaches the gospel found in God's Word. What Epaphras brought back to Colossae was the true gospel, and he knew that God was able to work mightily in the hearts of those living in this small, "out-of-the-way" city to form a true church.

Maybe you can imagine Epaphras making this long journey back to Colossae during the mid-50s A.D. He traveled difficult terrain, but no doubt had a spring in his step, for he was a new man, renewed in his heart by the power of the cross that Paul had preached to him! We can imagine the excitement, but also the anxiousness he must have had for sharing that good news with those whom he knew and loved. He may have wondered if his native Colossae would be led to receive this gospel message, but, by the work of the Spirit through

this man of faith, a Christian community was born. Interestingly, Philemon, a wealthy resident of Colossae, benefited either directly from the work of Paul in Ephesus or indirectly through Epaphras as he brought the gospel message to him in Colossae (Phile. 19).

Although a true church in Colossae was born, there may still have lingered in Epaphras' mind whether this newly established church would be free of the temptations of the surrounding false worship of that day. Unfortunately, a few years after the church was established, Colossae developed a mysterious heresy that was a melting pot of various religious influences—Judaism and superstition (Col. 2:16). According to Paul's letter to the Colossians, the worship of angels was also mixed into this heresy (Col. 2:18), and an early form of Gnosticism developed, which taught that material things are evil (Col. 2:23).

So troubling to Epaphras was this influence-turned-heresy, that he left his fellow saints in Colossae and traveled to Rome to seek advice from Paul while he was under house arrest awaiting trial before Nero in the early 60s A.D. Now Epaphras, some five years or so after being converted in Ephesus, comes to Paul in Rome to give him a positive report of the church's faith, love, and hope (Col. 1:4-5), but also troubling news about the Colossian heresy (Phile. 23; Col. 2:8). He arrives, elated to be reunited with Paul, yet saddened by the purpose of his visit to Rome. As the seasoned missionary listened to the young pastor, Paul put the words of instruction and advice on paper, being inspired by the Holy Spirit to write a letter to this Christian community in Colossae, of which he was not the primary founder. As Paul deals with the Colossian heresy with the truth of the supremacy of Christ over the whole universe (Col. 1:16-17), his letter to them would be one of his more personal letters.

With regard to Epaphras, however, we can see remarkable commitment to the gospel message! Leaving his Christian community in their infancy and in an age of time-consuming travel, Epaphras seeks out the great apostle for his advice and instruction. He was seeking truth, and risked his life for it, ultimately ending in imprisonment in Rome. The words of Colossians 1:7 may then have more meaning for us as Epaphras is described as a "dear fellowservant, who is for you [the Colossians] a faithful minister of Christ." What spiritual courage this man possessed!

Furthermore, in the continued dialogue between Paul and Epaphras in the early 60s A.D., we see another spiritual characteristic of Epaphras: he was a man of prayer. Paul expresses in his letter to the Colossians that Epaphras was fervent in prayer for them (Col. 4:12). Paul wanted the Colossians to know that their beloved

pastor was concerned for their spiritual well-being, continually praying on their behalf. Is this not something we often say to those who are in a difficult way?—“*I’m praying for you.*” In this case, Paul is telling the Colossians that their faithful pastor is diligently praying for them while he is away. What added comfort for these new Christians!

But now the story of Epaphras comes to an end. As the letter to the Colossians is penned by Paul, it was time for delivery to this local church in Asia Minor. What better candidate to be the letter-carrier of this inspired letter of Paul to the Colossians than Epaphras himself. Sadly, this was not to be the will of God, for as was stated earlier, Epaphras, like Paul, became a prisoner in Rome (Phile. 23). And what became of Epaphras?

We do not know his future, whether he was released from prison or died for the cause of Christ; but we do know that Epaphras risked his life for the gospel, traveling long distances to seek advice and instruction for the sake of truth in the church.

Therefore, we know that the story *doesn’t* end here. For even as our understanding and knowledge of Epaphras’ earthly future ends, we know that his story continued. For, like each of God’s chosen and faithful saints, there was laid up for Epaphras a crown of righteousness given to him by the righteous Judge, from whom he heard the words of his Savior to him, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”



I believe

Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan

How do we know the Bible is the Word of God? (1) The Scriptures are self-authenticating

Facing attacks

“You believe that a snake talked, and a man walked on water?! The Bible is just a collection of myths, fables, and stories. I don’t know how any thinking person could believe that stuff in this day and age!” Perhaps you have heard things like this before. Maybe in a college classroom. Maybe from someone with whom you work. Or perhaps you saw a suggested video on the sidebar on YouTube, “Proof the Bible is not the Word of God,” and you clicked.

God’s people face rhetoric and arguments against the inspiration and authority of the Bible in this day much more often than they faced such things even a generation ago. How do we handle these attacks? Some of God’s children struggle for a time in deep doubt after hearing these things. For others, a bit of nagging doubt lingers for years, causing a limp in an otherwise regular Christian walk.

It would be nice if we all had the confidence of Calvin, who said, “If I were struggling against the most crafty sort of despisers of God, who seek to appear shrewd and witty in disparaging Scripture, I am confident it would not be difficult for me to silence their

clamorous voices.”¹ Easy for him to say; he’s Calvin! But at least what Calvin says here shows us that God’s people have always faced the same kinds of challenges to the authority of the Word of God, even if we hear them more often than in years past. And at least this is not all Calvin says, for he goes on to help us have his confidence as he treats the doctrine of Scripture in the first part of the *Institutes*.

The internal testimony of the Holy Spirit

Calvin reminds us that the power that initiated, formed, and now maintains our belief in Scripture as the inspired Word of God is not human, but divine. “The Word will not find acceptance in men’s hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets, must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.”² The Spirit alone convicts men of the

1 *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1960) 1.7.4, 79.

2 *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

divine authority of Scripture. And the Spirit always maintains the work He has begun all the way to the end. This is why the apostle did not pray that God would give the Ephesians merely a list of arguments that might convince them they can trust the Scriptures, but rather “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit [Spirit!] of wisdom and *revelation* in the knowledge of him: *the eyes of your understanding being enlightened*; that ye may *know...*” (Eph 1:17-18).

The relation between Scripture and the one who believes Scripture is the same as the relation between light and the eye. The Scriptures are the light of God’s revelation. Whether anyone sees that or believes that does not change the fact of it, just as whether or not anyone sees physical light has no effect on whether or not light is there. If no one believed the Bible was the Word of God, it would still be. But the Spirit who inspired the book also gives God’s people the eye of faith that they might see its light. It is not simply, then, that believing or not believing depends upon our intelligence or lack thereof, or emotional connection to the Bible, or lack thereof. Seeing Scripture’s light depends on the Spirit giving spiritual eyesight. And because that is so, when He gives it, we may be confident that He will also preserve that sight of faith. For God will not take the Holy Spirit from His child, even if that child sees some YouTube videos that give him doubts.

The Spirit works through the Word

The way the Spirit gives this conviction about the Word of God, and maintains it, is not by putting an inexplicable glow around the Bible that only some people can see. Rather, even here, the Spirit works through the Word itself. As the believer reads and studies the Word personally, and listens to the Word preached faithfully, the Spirit deepens and maintains this conviction. By this we come face to face with God Himself revealed in the Bible, which is the key. “The highest proof of Scripture derives in general from the fact that God in person speaks in it.”³ This means that Scripture itself is the power in the hands of the Spirit to convince God’s people of its own divine authority. Calvin described this as the self-authenticating nature of the Bible.⁴ The ground for the Scriptures’

authenticity is not outside of the Scriptures but in the Scriptures themselves.

How could it be otherwise? If the Word of God truly is the Word of God, on what basis other than itself could it claim to be what it is? The Scriptures themselves tell us that everyone and everything in this world, have been affected by sin and the curse. It tells us that even man’s mind, whereby he perceives truth, has been affected by the Fall. For the Scriptures then to base their authority on anything outside of themselves would be for them to set themselves before a jury, the authority of which it has already denied!

But, in order to gain recognition and dominion, it asks for no one’s assistance. It does not need the strong arm of the government. It does not need the support of the church and does not conscript anyone’s sword and inquisition. It does not desire to rule by coercion and violence but seeks free and willing recognition. For that reason it brings about its own recognition by the workings of the Holy Spirit. Scripture guards its own authority.⁵

The dignity of Scripture in its self-attestation

This is why the Scriptures simply assert their divinity and authority, and do not really spend time trying to prove it. They explain *how* it is so that they are divine and authoritative (II Tim. 3:16; II Pet. 1:21, etc.). They incidentally end up proving it (this is what we will talk about in the next number of articles). But they do not waste words attempting to convince men to believe they are divine. That would be beneath the dignity expected of a divine word. It would be like a president, instead of *being* president, and *doing* presidential things, spending his entire presidency trying to convince the public that he is the president.

On the other hand, if someone were dropped into the United States in the middle of a president’s term, what would show that person that the president was indeed the president? It would be the very business of the president in carrying out the office. So too, the very business of the Scriptures in carrying out their divine purpose is what helps us see they are in fact divine.

This is still part of the Scriptures’ self-authenticity. That the Bible is self-authenticating is not *only* that it claims to be the Word of God, though that is certainly part of it. Neither is it *only* that in the Bible we meet God, though this is the climactic point. But the self-authenticating nature of the Scriptures is *also* that

³ *Institutes*, 1.7.4.

⁴ “Let this point therefore stand: that those whom the Holy Spirit has inwardly taught truly rest upon Scripture, and that Scripture indeed is self-authenticated; hence, it is not right to subject it to proof and reasoning. And the certainty it deserves with us, attains by the testimony of the Spirit,” *Institutes*, 1.7.5.

⁵ Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 1. Ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 465.

the Scriptures *show* themselves to be the Word of God *as they do their work*. Just as the creation itself, while doing what it was made to do, reveals it is from God by its majesty and complexity (Ps. 19; Rom. 1:20), so the Scriptures, doing what they were made to do, reveal that they are from God by their majesty, unity, power, and other attributes. By this they defend themselves from all detractors and distinguish themselves from all competitors.

This is why Calvin goes on in the *Institutes* to explain the internal qualities of the Bible that give evidence of its divine origin.⁶ Certainly, as Calvin says, if we use these things, “to *prove* [emphasis added] to unbelievers that Scripture is the word of God, [we] are acting foolishly,

⁶ Chapter 8 of the *Institutes*. See also Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, vol 1. Ed. James T. Dennison (Phillipsburg, PA, P&R Publishers, 1992), 89.

for only by faith can this be known.”⁷ You can give evidence of light and color to a blind man, but he still cannot see unless his blindness is dealt with. Nonetheless, Calvin adds, “If godly men take these things to heart, they will be abundantly equipped to restrain the barking of ungodly men; for this is a proof too clear to be open to any subtle speculation.”⁸ Ah, just what we were looking for. The Scriptures themselves give evidence for what they claim about themselves. And so clearly so, says Calvin, it is not a matter of speculation. Just what you would expect from a divine word.⁹ Some of “these things” that Calvin is referring to in the above quote, I hope to consider in the following articles.

⁷ *Institutes*, 1.8.14.

⁸ *Institutes*, 1.8.8.

⁹ The Belgic Confession, Article 5: “The Holy Ghost witnesseth in our hearts that they are from God, whereof they carry the evidence in themselves.”



Strength of youth

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

Wisdom for young men in dating

Previous article in this series: July 2019, p. 432.

In the previous article in this series on biblical manhood, we looked at the calling of men with regard to their sexuality. Related is the subject of this article: the calling of Christian young men in a dating relationship. Much could be said about the subject of dating in general, but here I want to focus only on how young men are to behave in dating.

The world exerts a powerful pressure upon young men with respect to how they should act in a dating relationship. The world’s idea of a young man in such a relationship is quite simple: he’s interested in self. He’s not really interested in his girlfriend or in the direction of their relationship. Everything he does is directed toward the goal of his own satisfaction (often his own *sexual* satisfaction). He will be funny, charming, respectful toward her parents, sensitive, and affectionate, but he does it all to manipulate his girlfriend into serving him.

Obviously, the Christian young man dates in a very different way. He is “not conformed to this world” but

is “transformed by the renewing of [his] mind” (Rom. 12:2), specifically with regard to how he is to act as a Christian young man toward the Christian young woman in whom he has a romantic interest.

The basics

To understand something about the calling of a young man in dating, we need to understand a few basic truths about dating.

The most fundamental truth is that *dating is for marriage*. Everything that is done in dating must have marriage as its ultimate goal. This does not mean that you have to know you are going to marry someone before you even start dating them, but it does mean that your dating is intended to see if you can marry that person eventually.

Part of your calling as a young man, then, is to find someone that you could marry. The essential thing is that she be a believer. If we are to marry “only in the

Lord” (I Cor. 7:39), then we may date only in the Lord. In addition to her being a believer, there are other things that you will want to look for in a woman whom you could eventually have as your wife. To give just one example out of many, she must be adorned with the inner beauty of “a meek and quiet spirit” (I Pet. 3:3, 4).

A brief word of caution at this point: don’t be overly picky. It can happen that a young man comes up with a long list of requirements that he must have in a wife, only to find out that no such woman has ever existed since the Fall.

But not only does the principle of dating for marriage mean that you get to know a young woman to see if she could be your wife, it also means that you must be the kind of man that could be her husband one day. Even more important than *finding* the right person to marry is *being* the right person that someone else would want to marry.

What this means for a young man is that he must show in his dating that he can one day serve as a faithful husband. He must give evidence of possessing the qualities that God demands in a husband. Since God calls a husband to be the loving head of his wife (Eph. 5:23, 25), a young man must display *loving leadership* toward the young woman he is dating.

Some specifics

Let’s flesh out what exactly that looks like in the following three points:

1. *As a future husband, a young man must show himself in dating to be a wise leader, initiator, and decision-maker.*

In calling a husband to be the head of his wife, God is calling him to be the leader of his wife, to be the initiator in the relationship, and to serve as the ultimate decision-maker (always taking into account his wife’s input, of course). This means that a Christian young man must give evidence of these same traits at every stage of the dating relationship.

He must take the lead at the beginning of the relationship. He ought to be the one to initiate a conversation with the young woman in whom he is interested, and he ought to be the one to ask her on a date. Too often young men are tempted to cowardice already at this point. We might fear rejection or struggle with insecurity, and leave it to the young woman to initiate the relationship. This ought not to be. Young man, if you are interested in a young woman, step up and ask her out!

This does not mean that young women have no say in the initiation of a relationship. Rev. C. Hanko put

it well: “This does not mean that she sits quietly at home waiting for a phone call for her first date. If my observations do not deceive me, most girls have the natural ability to attract the attention of the young man who interests them. ...[H]er winsome ways and pleasant smile can do much to attract the boy’s attention.” Oftentimes, young men need all the help they can get. Young women can help with this, in subtle ways letting the young men know that they are interested.

Having initiated the relationship, the young man must continue to guide the relationship as it progresses and develops. This includes such things as planning what to do on dates, initiating conversations about spiritual things and other important subjects to be covered prior to marriage, and even leading in brief prayers together.

The young man is also responsible to take the lead in where the relationship heads. This might mean that it ends in a breakup. It might be the case that both realize that the relationship will not last and that they ought not marry one another. Rather than weakly waiting for the young woman to make the first difficult move, the young man must gently initiate the breakup of the relationship. Obviously, if the young man wants to continue but the young woman does not, she ought to be the one to initiate the breakup rather than waiting for him finally to get the hint. But, as much as possible, the young man ought to lead.

Not only does he lead in the sad necessity of a breakup, but he also is responsible to lead to the happy goal of engagement and marriage. He is the one who talks to his girlfriend’s parents to ask for their daughter’s hand in marriage and their blessing upon the union. And he is the one who ought to propose marriage to the young woman. Even this simple point is corrupted in the world, where it is not uncommon for a brazen young woman to drop to a knee and ask her boyfriend to marry her. Young man, be a man and take the lead!

2. *As a future husband, a young man must show himself in dating to be an honorable guardian and protector.*

As the Bridegroom of the church, Christ is the refuge, fortress, and shield of His people. As imitator of Christ, the Christian husband is called to exercise his headship of his wife by guarding and protecting her. By extension, a young man must guard and protect the young woman he is dating.

Obviously this means that if his girlfriend is attacked or threatened in any physical sense he must come to her defense. But there is more to his protection of her than fending off potential attackers.

The Christian young man must also protect the young woman emotionally. God has wonderfully made women to be emotional beings, usually more emotional than men. Recognizing this, the young man must be careful not to play with her emotions, manipulate her emotions, or stir up her emotions toward him prematurely.

Another way he guards her emotionally is by assuming the “risk” in the relationship. Rather than waiting for her to initiate the relationship, he assumes the emotional “risk” by asking her out. Rather than waiting for her to put herself out there in advancing the relationship, he assumes the emotional “risk” by seeing that the relationship progresses. Rather than waiting for her to express love for him, he assumes the emotional “risk” by first confessing love for her.

The Christian young man also has the responsibility to protect his date sexually. Rather than acting like a man of this world and being driven by his own unholy lusts, he guards his girlfriend (and himself) from all sexual sin. He is conscious of protecting her honor, preserving her reputation, guarding her virginity, and upholding her good conscience before the Lord. And he is mindful not only of his obligations to her, but also to her parents who have entrusted her into his care. He is also conscious of his obligations to her future husband. That might be he, but it also might be another man, if the two eventually break up. Will you be able to look that other man in the eye some day, perhaps as members of the same church, and assure him that you did nothing to undermine the purity of his wife?

What is helpful in this regard is to consider your girlfriend as your sister in Christ. Paul instructs young man Timothy to deal with “the elder women as mothers, the younger as sisters, with all purity” (I Tim. 5:2). What you would be comfortable doing with an actual, blood sister is about all that you should be comfortable doing with your girlfriend.

3. As a future husband, a young man must show himself in dating to be a loving servant.

As the Bridegroom of the church, Christ loves His beautiful bride. And He showed His love in that He “gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). So God calls the be-

lieving husband to love his wife and to give himself for her. By extension, this means that a believing young man must show himself to be a loving servant in dating.

In many ways this encapsulates all the responsibilities of the young man in dating. The danger in dating is that he seeks self and serves his own wants, desires, supposed needs, etc. But, with his eye on Christ, the Christian young man is temperate, self-controlled, and self-denying. In genuine love for the one he is dating (not selfish lust), he serves her and seeks her wellbeing.

Balance

I want to conclude by encouraging young men to be balanced in their dating and in how they view their role in the relationship. Being balanced they will avoid two unhealthy extremes.

One extreme is that a young man has a lazy, thoughtless, self-centered view of dating. He does not act like a

man and take the lead in the relationship, but rather is content to be passive or to let the young woman take the lead. This danger we have largely addressed in what we’ve considered already in this article. The young man who takes seriously the responsibilities we’ve discussed above will avoid this danger.

But there is another extreme that must be avoided as well. That extreme is

when a young man is overbearing, controlling, and even sinfully domineering in the relationship. He acts as if the young woman he is dating is already his wife and he is her husband. He might think that all decisions in her life have to be made by him. He might think that he has to manage her time, her money, her appearance, and her friendships with others.

It is important for such a young man to be reminded that although the goal of dating is marriage, while you are dating you are not yet married. You are not her husband, and she is not your wife. Earlier I argued that the calling of a husband toward his wife informs the responsibilities of a boyfriend to his girlfriend, but this does not mean that the callings are one and the same. In dating you must show that you can assume the responsibilities of a husband in the future, but that does not mean that those responsibilities are yours now.

Be balanced.

In many ways this encapsulates all the responsibilities of the young man in dating. The danger in dating is that he seeks self and serves his own wants, desires, supposed needs, etc. But, with his eye on Christ, the Christian young man is temperate, self-controlled, and self-denying. In genuine love for the one he is dating (not selfish lust), he serves her and seeks her wellbeing.



RFPA Annual meeting (speech)

Rev. Justin Smidstra, pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan

Training our children in the discipline of reading

The reading of good, spiritually edifying literature is a subject that has been addressed a number of times at the RFPA's annual meeting. Over the course of past six years, several speeches have been given on the topic of reading. There are good reasons for that. The RFPA's mission is to publish sound Reformed literature for the Reformed believer. The reading of good, spiritually edifying books is important for the spiritual wellbeing of our homes and churches. We also need encouragement to read. There is an observable decline in reading today. This continues to be a concern to the RFPA. Opportunity to revisit the topic of reading in a fresh way is afforded by the RFPA's new children's book division. This is an exciting continuation and expansion of the RFPA's mission to bring solid Reformed literature to God's people. Now, with the publication of children's books, the RFPA is providing valuable resources for covenant parents to use in the upbringing of their children. We ought to make use of these resources. One of the most important disciplines our covenant children learn is the discipline of reading. Parents must train their children to read. That is the topic we consider briefly.

The importance of training our children to read

Training our children in the discipline of reading is important. To begin, I want to set forth three foundational truths showing the importance of training our children to read. The first is the bedrock truth that our God is a God of the Word. He is a God who speaks. The Word God speaks is reality-determining power. What was God's first work outside Himself? God spoke! And God's Word brought the universe into existence! His Word determines reality! God's Word is also His saving self-revelation. Through His Word, God imparts true saving knowledge of Himself to His elect people. In the deepest sense, the Word God speaks is not a thing but a Person, the eternal Word Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the full saving revelation of God (Heb. 1:1-2). Christ is revealed in God's written Word, the Holy Scriptures. From a special care for us and for our salvation, God has committed His reality-determining, self-revealing Word to writing, and given it to us, to be

preached, to be read, to be hidden in our hearts, to be our only rule for faith and life.

Second, God uses His written Word as the means by which He saves His people and builds up their faith in Jesus Christ. God, of course, begins His work of salvation without the use of means. The Holy Spirit implants the new life of Christ in the heart of the elect sinner, creates the spiritual bond with Christ, and infuses the faculty of faith. But hereafter the Spirit uses the Word of God. Through the Word preached the Spirit calls the child of God to conscious, active faith, so that the believer knows, trusts, embraces Christ, and appropriates all His benefits. God's Word is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believes. This establishes the absolute importance of the written Word of God for every believer. The Word is the means of grace, the means of faith, the means of growth and maturation in the Christian life. We must hear the Word preached, but we must also read and meditate upon the Word. The reading of the Word is one of the most important spiritual disciplines of the Christian life.

That leads us to the third truth. God calls believing parents to train their children in the ways of His covenant. Believing parents have the awesome responsibility of raising God's own children for their heavenly Father. Our children are not our own. They are God's. We bring them up for their eternal Father. For this calling, God equips parents with His Word. The reality-determining, Christ-revealing, salvation-working Word of God is the means that God gives covenant parents to train His children in the ways of His covenant. Parents must teach their children the content of the Word of God. But they must do more. They must also do everything in their power to train their children in the skills and disciplines that will enable their children to read and understand the Word themselves. An essential part of covenant instruction is training our children in the spiritual disciplines—the spiritual life skills—that maintain a healthy Christian life. For example, the father that wants to train his sixteen-year-old son to care for his new car will do more than teach him about the different parts of the car and how they work. He will

train his son to change the oil, check the tire pressure, perhaps even do a brake job. The father trains his son in life skills that will help him be a responsible car owner. So it is with the spiritual lives of our children. Parents must train their children in spiritual life skills that equip them for the Christian life.

The manner of training our children to read

Having laid the theological foundations for the importance of training our children to read, we now face the question: how do we train our children to read? There are three simple, practical ways parents can train their children to be readers from a young age. The first is foundational. Covenant parents must make it a habit to read to their children regularly. If we want our children to grow up to be readers, it starts in the home. It starts with us reading to our children. It is well documented that one of the most beneficial things parents can do for their children is to read to them regularly. That is why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that parents read daily to their children, starting as early as six months. Reading to young children stimulates the part of the brain connected with understanding the written and spoken word. Here is the great benefit we are concerned about. We are a people of The Book. Our faith is Word-based. We want to do everything we can to help our children develop the skills necessary to read and understand God's written Word. Our children must be trained to read!

There are a couple of ways we can read regularly to our children in the home. One is the treasured Reformed practice of family worship, when the whole family comes together around God's Word. Family worship is a prime opportunity to read the Word to our children, explain it to them, and apply it to their lives. Family worship is not the only time to read to our children. It is also important for parents to set aside a designated time to read good books to our children. Read to them regularly and consistently, not occasionally. Make a designated reading time a fixture of your family life. The children will come to expect and look forward to it. This will afford parents special bonding time and teaching moments. It need not be long. Fifteen minutes to a half an hour can be enough for younger children. The important thing is that we do it consistently. It can be challenging to find good, spiritually edifying children's books. Why not start with the RFPA's children's books? The RFPA's children's division is publishing excellent children's books for various ages. The RFPA is providing wonderful resources for covenant parents. Let us make use of these resources that God has providentially made available to us! Reading starts in the

home. Train your children to read by reading to them!

Second, parents train their children to read by being disciplined readers themselves. It is hard to train our children to read if we parents do not read. It is difficult to foster a love for reading in our children, if we do not appreciate reading ourselves. Parents, you train your children as much by your example as by your words. Your life is the textbook from which your children learn to live their lives. It is not enough merely to urge them to read; you must model the discipline of reading for them by being a reader in your home. Read in front of your children. Talk about what you read. Let your children see that you enjoy reading. Perhaps you are not much of a reader and you are not sure how to start. Reading requires self-discipline. Begin by establishing a regular routine of personal reading and stick to it. Disciplining yourself to be a reader is like athletic training. You do not just get up and run a 5k race. You have to build up to it by consistent training and exercise. Exercise regularly by reading for a short time each day. Start small. Pick a good book and read a chapter. Read fifteen minutes a day. As you become more "conditioned" as a reader, it will come more easily and you will find it more enjoyable. Little by little you will develop a habit of reading. Those big volumes that looked impossible to get through will not be imposing anymore. Discipline yourself to read so that you may train your children to read.

Third, parents train their children to read by fostering a reading-friendly atmosphere in the home. Create a home environment that is reading-friendly and encourages interest in reading. This starts with having a positive attitude toward reading. What is the prevailing attitude towards reading in your home? Maybe there is no attitude because there is very little reading. Maybe the attitude is "reading is boring; it is a good sleep aid, a good way to start off the Sunday nap." The message sent is that reading is not important and not worth the time and effort. If we want our children to be readers, we have to have a positive attitude toward reading. Talk about reading with your children. Show interest in what they are reading. One very concrete way to foster a reading-friendly atmosphere in the home is to have a designated time for the whole family to read together. It might be for an hour on Sunday afternoon. The whole family sits in the living room and reads a good book. Everyone participates, dad, mom, and the children. Reading can be a profitable family activity! This is an effective way to train young children to read, keep older children reading, and keep yourself reading too.

Challenges we face in training our children to read

There are numerous challenges that we face in our

day. I call your attention to three challenges. One challenge is simply the busyness of our lives. We have so much going on in our lives. It is hard to find the time to read ourselves or read to our children. The hard-working man who puts in long hours each week to provide for his family, pay the church budget, and pay the school tuition, when does he have time to read? The hard-working mother caring for children, keeping the home, cooking meals, carting the children to and from school—and a host of other tasks—when will she find time to read? The hard-working covenant student with homework, sports practice, and a job on the side, when will he find the time to read? We are busy. Some of it cannot be helped. Some of it can. Our busyness easily has a negative effect on our spiritual lives because it crowds out more important things, such as family worship, personal devotions, time in prayer, and reading. How do we overcome the challenge of busyness? It is a matter of commitment to what is truly important. In our busy lives it is not likely we will just find time to read. We have to *make* time to read. We make time for the things that are important to us. Let us make time for our family worship and for reading.

A second challenge we face in training our children to read is disinterest in reading. This can be disinterest on the part of parents or disinterest on the part of the child. One of the factors that stands behind the general slump in reading today is disinterest in the activity of reading itself. We have probably heard this disinterest expressed in various ways: “I know reading is good, but it’s just not my thing. I’m not wired to be a reader. I’d rather do other things. It just puts me to sleep.” Now, it must be granted that God gives people different personalities and aptitudes. That needs to be taken into account. Some children struggle with reading. Some adults find it more difficult than others. Not everyone will be an avid reader, but everyone *can* and *should be a reader*.

How do we overcome this challenge? For one thing, we have to take seriously the importance of reading for ourselves and reading to our children. It is not a take-it or leave-it suggestion; this is something covenant parents must do! We are a people of The Book. Training our children to read is part of training them in the ways of God’s covenant. That means discipline! The way to overcome disinterest is disciplining ourselves to read and read to our children. Discipline goes against the grain of our feel-good culture. Discipline means consistently doing something we do not like to do. It is hard. But we do it in other areas of life. We discipline ourselves to get up when that alarm clock goes off. We can discipline ourselves to read. Discipline is a powerful

God-given tool for working change in our lives. Do you feel you are not wired to be a reader? The good news is that we are not hard-wired, we can be rewired. Discipline rewires us through the formation of new good habits. Through consistent discipline a man who did not like reading can learn not only to be good at it, but also really to enjoy it. Discipline yourself to read! Read a little bit every day. Read to your children a little while every night. What initially may seem burdensome will become easier and more enjoyable. Stick with it!

But there is another form of disinterest. This is not disinterest in reading itself, but disinterest in reading good, spiritually edifying books. A person may read a lot, but gain very little from what he reads, because most of it is fluff and entertainment. It goes without saying that we may not be reading overtly sinful books, books that promote, glorify, or entice to sin. But there are many books, though not sinful in themselves, that have very little substance or value. It is not wrong to read some of these books; but it is a problem if the majority of what we read is this kind of fluff. The way to overcome this challenge is to discipline ourselves to read widely and train our children to read widely. Let spiritually edifying Reformed books be the hearty meat of your reading diet. Read the books produced by the RFPA. They are written for the believer in the pew. Read sound books that build you up in your Christian life. As you train your children to read, train them to have a taste for a variety of books, especially sound books.

A third challenge that we face in training our children to read is the challenge of digital technology. This is one of the biggest challenges we face, and it is only growing, as technology develops in leaps and bounds. We do not have to look far to see that digital devices are taking over and reshaping our lives. The smartphone has become man’s best friend and constant companion. It is now socially acceptable for people to look at their phones just about anywhere. Whenever there is a free moment, a lull in conversation, out come the phones! We need to be aware of how our usage of digital technology affects our family lives and our spiritual lives. Of particular concern is the way digital technology affects our children and the raising of our children. On a whole, children are spending more time in front of screens and less time reading or having books read to them. We must beware of the serious negative effects overuse of digital technology has. The evidence is substantial and alarming. Numerous books have been written on the influence that usage of digital devices has in shaping the brain. Our brains adapt and rewire to reinforce the skills we use the most. The very way these devic-

es convey information—rapid fire, constantly shifting images, etc.—shapes the way our brains think. Digital technology encourages quick scanning, not deep reading; shallow, scattered thinking instead of the focused, critical thinking involved in reading. Our children have minds that are malleable and developing. As they grow up surrounded by screens and using these devices at increasingly young ages, the question has to be faced: what is this doing to the minds of our children? Are the minds of our children being shaped in such a way that hinders them from reading and understanding the Word of God? This is a serious challenge we face: digital distractions are distancing us from the written Word of God, detracting from our ability to delve into it, and the skills necessary for focused, active, and sustained study of God's Word. As reading becomes a thing of the past in our digital age, it is all the more important that we read and train our children to read.

How do we overcome this challenge? The answer is not completely getting rid of digital technology. These things are not evil in themselves. They can be put to good use. But we must be responsible and careful in our use of technology, and we must exercise an extra measure of care when it comes to our children. Parents, teach your children the dangers of digital technology. Teach them to use it responsibly. Establish proper boundaries in your home. We do not have to be on our phones 24/7! Counteract this trend by reading! Counteract this trend by training your children to read!

We are a people of the Word, the Word written, and the Word preached. We will be a people of the book until the Lord comes again. Let us be resolved to let nothing hinder us and our children from reading, understanding, and delighting in the Word of God. Let us train our children in the discipline of reading!

RFPA Annual meeting (secretary's report)

Mr. Nathan Price, a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church

2019 secretary's report

The Board of the Reformed Free Publishing Association has kept very busy over the past year. In this report we update you regarding our activities. This is not an exhaustive account of our activities; rather, we bring you some highlights of our work along with a few of the more significant actions we have taken.

One of the most significant changes that the Board has made in the past year is giving oversight of the children's book division to the Finance and Operations Committee. This was originally the responsibility of the Book and *Standard Bearer* Committee but, because of growth, the children's books became too much for the B&SB Committee to handle. An additional change was made to add the president of the Board to the children's book division. This means that four men are now directly overseeing the work of the children's division.

As you know, the RFPA has recently published the Bible storybook by Rev. Nathan Langerak, *Jehovah's Mighty Acts*. We think that this is a fantastic book and trust that you do as well. One additional children's book was published in the year past: Kathleen DeJong's *His Mercy Endureth Forever*. There are also many children's books in development at the RFPA, including *Letters from Katy Luther*, a novel by Shirley Casemier, and Rev. Joshua Engelsma's *Dating Differently*, which was released in October of this year.

In addition to the children's book division, the Finance and Operations Committee continues to oversee the monies of the RFPA. (This report will not treat the finances of the RFPA, as they are reviewed in the treasurer's report.) The F&O Committee has seen to it that the maintenance of the building and grounds of the RFPA is carried out. Additionally, F&O has kept our insurance policies up to date.

The Book & *Standard Bearer* Committee has been working diligently in the year past. We have published the commentary on Micah by Rev. M. McGeown, *Walking in the Way of Love*, volume 2 by Rev. N. Langerak, and volume 2 of Prof. Engelsma's commentary on the Belgic Confession. We also assisted the Philippine PRC churches in their translation of *Come, Ye Children* into Tagalog. In the upcoming fiscal year, we plan to publish a book on the nativity of Jesus by Rev. McGeown, a developed compilation of the speeches from the PRC Seminary's Canons of Dordt conference [which is now available—*For God's Glory and the Church's Consolation*], and *Unfolding Covenant History*, volume 6 by Prof. D. Engelsma. Also in our publishing lineup for the coming year is the church history book by Prof. H. Hanko, *Christ's Church through the Ages*. This book is progressing well and the committee is eager to publish it.

The B&SB Committee, along with the RFPA staff, has overseen the publication of the *Standard Bearer*, ensuring that the issues get mailed out on time. The committee meets with the editors of the *SB* once a year to discuss this publication and to share ideas.

Along with these publishing projects, both the B&SB Committee and the Board have received and responded to a significant number of letters. The Board encourages the members of the RFPA to communicate with us; it helps us in our representation of the association.

The Membership and Marketing Committee has been faithfully carrying out their responsibilities as well. This committee has promoted and advertised our publications. They have obtained and published many book reviews, worked with the other committees to determine which books to reprint, and planned events for the association and book club members. Recently they have also begun the work of surveying parents and teenagers to provide feedback that will guide future children's and youth book projects.

The M&M Committee is also responsible for the oversight of the RFPA blog. On the blog you will find brand new articles, information on upcoming book releases, *SB* preview articles, and *SB* reprint articles. Visit rfpa.org and subscribe to the blog to receive the posts as soon as they are available.

One of the most significant projects the M&M Committee has been working on is the complete revamp of

the *SB* online archives. Most people who have used the search function on the old website will have to admit that it is sub-optimal. This overhaul is necessary because the format of the *SB* online archives is no longer supported, and the archives would continue to deteriorate if they were left as is. We hope to have this project completed by the end of 2019. At \$17,500, this is an expensive project to undertake, necessitating a subscription rate increase of \$2 for the upcoming year. Though we do not like to increase the subscription cost, we believe that the preservation and maintenance of the online archive is beneficial for subscribers and necessary in this digital age.

We are thankful for the faithful labors of the office staff. Without Alex, Miriam, and Paula carrying out the day-to-day work of our association, we would have been hard-pressed to publish one book during this last fiscal year, let alone seven or more. We are thankful for the God-given gifts of our editors and for their careful work. Most of all, we give thanks to God for the faithful men and women who have authored so many God-glorifying books and articles.

In conclusion, we are thankful for the privilege of serving God by serving you as board members of our association. We covet your prayers as we go forward in the year to come. Pray that your publications—your books and your *Standard Bearer*—might continue to sound forth the truth of God's sovereign grace and unconditional covenant as a witness in this world.

Report of Classis West

November 5, 2019

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met in a reconvened session on November 5, 2019, in Calvary PRC (Hull, IA). Rev. Ryan Barnhill again chaired the meeting. The reconvened session was due to the fact that Classis was not able to finish its agenda in September and more time was needed by a committee of pre-advice to prepare its advice.

Classis had before it a request from a consistory for the concurrence of Classis in deposing its minister according to Articles 79-80 of the Church Order for his teachings on providence and sanctification, and an appeal of the consistory's decision to do so. Classis sustained the appeal and declared that the consistory erred in seeking the deposition of its minister.

Classis also took a decision to advise the consistory to lift the suspension of its minister with regards to his teaching on providence, since Classis had already judged in September that suspension was not the proper way to address the minister's error, that the minister

demonstrated he understood the error and was repentant of it, and that the minister's submitted confession on providence is orthodox.

Classis also advised the consistory to lift the suspension of the minister with regards to his teaching on sanctification. Classis judged that in some instances the consistory had wrongly charged the minister with error. In addition, Classis judged that, although the consistory rightly identified erroneous statements made by the minister, suspension was not the proper way to address the matter. Classis stated that, in order to suspend a man for teaching false doctrine or heresy, it must be demonstrated that a man's teaching is characterized by *consciousness* and *deliberateness* as well as *persistence* after having been admonished, which was not true of the minister.

The March 2019 meeting of Classis had appointed a special committee to assist the consistory as they worked through these matters, and the committee reported to this Classis on its labors over the last months. Classis acknowledged the work of the committee in im-

plementing its decisions from March, although Classis has now declared those decisions to be in error. Classis also noted several aspects of the special committee's labors that it did not approve. Classis appointed a new special committee to assist the pastor, consistory, and congregation, should the consistory request such help.

Classis also treated an appeal against the consistory's initial suspension of the minister without seeking the advice of a neighboring consistory. The consistory believed that the advice of the March Classis to suspend served in the place of a neighboring consistory's concur-

rence. The appellant argued this was not proper. Classis upheld the appeal, citing the plain reading of Article 79 as well as the fact that the concurrence of another body is required *after* the decision of the consistory to suspend, not *before*.

The expenses of this part of the meeting totaled \$11,965.97.

Classis will meet next in Peace PRC (Dyer, IN) on March 4, 2020, the Lord willing.

Rev. Joshua Engelsma, Stated Clerk, Classis West



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar/archivist at the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary



Dating Differently: A Guide to Reformed Dating, by Rev. Joshua Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2019. 160 pages, softcover. \$16.95. [Reviewed by Rev. Cory Griess]

The message of this wonderful little book is that if one is going to be Reformed (that is biblical), then all of life will be re-formed according to the Word of God. Dating too will be done differently. Rev. Engelsma covers this topic in nine chapters, each titled as a question. The first, "Is There Help?" establishes the need for help in dating and identifies the source of that help as the Word of God. The second chapter, "Where's This Headed?" sets out the end from the beginning, explaining marriage and commending it as the biblical purpose for dating. The third chapter, entitled, "When Should I Start?" covers the age and maturity necessary to begin dating. The fourth chapter explains the biblical principles that answer the question, "Who's the One" that I should begin dating? Chapter five takes up the very practical question, "What's There to Do on Dates?" along the way covering the related question of dating versus courtship. In chapter six, Rev. Engelsma guides young people to date differently by answering the question, "What's the Place of My Parents and Others?" The seventh chapter answers the question, "What About Sex?" Rev. Engelsma does not shy away from this important question, giving forthright, biblical, and practical instruction and advice. The eighth chapter asks, "What If I'm Single All My Life?" Recognizing not only that many young people have this

question when the topic of dating comes up, but also that the question is asked with some trepidation, Rev. Engelsma takes up the good, God-given place of singlehood. The pastor sensitively applies the spiritual dignity Scripture gives to the single life while calling singles to holiness. Finally, the ninth chapter answers the question, "When Do I Get Married?" giving helpful advice in this regard and calling especially young men to get serious about moving things forward in dating and getting married.

The book is an enjoyable and easy read. The reason is not because it is simplistic or dumbed down. It is because Rev. Engelsma is a good writer. And it is because the approach and style the pastor takes in writing this book is fit for its intended audience. It reads as I imagine a conversation on these topics would go with a wise older brother who happened to be a pastor.

Another quality that makes the book a good read, especially for young people, is that Rev. Engelsma does a good job "getting into the head" of a young person. As the titles of his chapters foreshadow, Rev. Engelsma spends himself in the book asking and answering questions he believes young people have about dating. Repeatedly, paragraphs begin with phrases like, "Maybe you find yourself saying" or, "Maybe you are wondering," or, "Maybe you are thinking." On page 81 the pastor puts a string of thoughts into the mind of a dating couple. Young people will find that more often than not he is right; they were thinking just that.

With regard to writing in a way appropriate to youth of the covenant, I also appreciated that Rev. Engelsma often

used direct address in the book. In addition to the quotations above that display this, the book is full of phrases such as, “My general advice...is that *you* should be careful not to start dating too young.” “If *you* are fifteen or sixteen...” “In turn, ladies, if a young man asks *you* out...” (emphasis mine). The older brother who happens to be a pastor is having a conversation with the youth directly.

I judge the book to be balanced and biblical guidance. Some books on dating are legalistic. Others go into the other ditch, too afraid to apply the clear teaching of Scripture forthrightly. The book avoids both ditches. In the preface, in the conclusion, and again a couple of times in between, the author states that in some points his advice is the way he deems it wise to apply biblical principles, admitting that the specifics may be open for discussion and even disagreement. At points where he is applying scriptural commands that leave no room for discussion, he applies the commands that way without apology. The tone of the book carries the same balance. Rev. Engelsma writes with humility, speaking of his own weaknesses looking back on his younger self. But he also writes with strength, speaking with a firm tone when appropriate. The book also has a good balance of biblical exposition and practical advice that the young people will appreciate.

The book is not Reformed in its title only. There are quotations from the Reformed and Presbyterian creeds, the Reformed Marriage Form, and other Reformed writers. The book holds high the good gift of marriage, taking the view of marriage that it is a bond breakable only by the death of one of the members of that marriage. This is the good, biblical atmosphere in which the rest of the material lives.

I have one criticism. While I appreciate Rev. Engelsma’s careful approach to the role of parents in dating, that is, one where the parents are not authoritarian nor on the other

hand negligent nor absentminded, I would have appreciated a clear statement affirming the parents’ right unequivocally to say “yes” or “no” in regards to whom their young person wants to *begin* dating. So far as I can tell, the closest the book comes to stating this is on page 73, “Your father might step in if you, his sixteen-year-old daughter, are asked out by a twenty-five year old man, or he might tell you to put an end to your relationship with an unbelieving girl.” But in this reviewer’s opinion there is still lack of a clear statement telling the young people that their parents have the God-given authority to say, “Yes, son/daughter you may,” or “No, son/daughter, you may not” before day one. Even if the parents choose not to take that authority up (deeming it wise to take a different approach in particular cases), to my mind the young people should be instructed in a book on this topic that this is their parents’ God-given right (especially when they are younger; I realize things get more complex as the young person gets older).

The book includes discussion questions after each chapter that make it helpful for parents and their young people, young peoples’ societies, or even a few friends, to read and discuss together. My one criticism in no way dampens my enthusiasm at the prospect of reading and discussing this book with my own children. I just cannot believe how close it is for the time when such reading and discussion needs to take place. Do not let the window close on your time to use this book with your own children!

The Lord willing, this is the first of a good number of excellent books to come from the pen of Rev. Engelsma. As a pastor and as a parent, I give my personal and sincere thanks to him for writing an excellent and helpful book on a vitally important topic. Thanks, too, to the RFPA for requesting and publishing this type of material. The church of Christ needs it.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

When was the first “News from Our Churches” published? Answer later in this column.

Minister activities

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor at Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA was led by God to decline the call extended to him by Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB. We are thankful for

a clear indication of God’s will and continue to pray for the congregation at Lacombe in their vacancy.

On November 3, Rev. Jon Mahtani accepted the call to be minister-on-loan to the CERC of Singapore. We rejoice with our sister in Singapore in God’s provision of a pastor again.

Prof. Russell Dykstra traveled to Spokane, WA on November 1 to give a lecture on the subject “Blessed Assurance: Reaffirmed by the Canons of Dort.”

Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB announced a new trio of ministers from which to call their next pastor, Revs. R. Barnhill (Peace PRC, IN) H. Bleyenbergh (Providence PRC, MI) and M. VanderWal (Wingham PRC, ON). Immanuel called Rev. Rarnhill on November 3. We pray with Immanuel that God will soon send them a minister.

Congregational activities

The girls' group at Providence PRC sold caramel apples recently to raise funds for the Grace Foster Home in India. You could purchase plain caramel, deluxe with crushed pretzel and chocolate drizzle, or deluxe with crushed nuts and chocolate drizzle. I like them plain...one of my favorite treats!

Georgetown PRC invited those in the area to join their 25th anniversary celebration with two special services on Sunday, October 27, under the theme, "Thanking God for Our Treasured Heritage." Rev. R. Van Overloop (former pastor) preached on Psalm 16:5-6 for the A.M. service and Rev. Haak (current pastor) on verses 8-9 in the P.M. service. Photos, a powerpoint, and various other memorabilia were displayed. We join with Georgetown in thanking God for His gracious care these past 25 years! God is faithful!

There was an interesting occurrence at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI recently. On October 27 Rev. Clayton Spronk had the privilege to baptize four babies in one service. That is reason enough to rejoice! But here's more: all four of the babies are girls; all four babies are twin girls; all four of the babies are related to each other. You see, that happens when sisters both give birth to twin daughters. And the happy grandparents, Larry and Pat Koole, have lots of reasons to smile!

School activities

The Covenant Christian (Grand Rapids, MI) Craft Show and Bake Sale took place recently with over 100 booths of handmade items for purchase, delicious baked items, and delightful breakfast and lunch menus!

The Eastside Christian School held their Stop & Shop in November. They excitedly announced some do-it-yourself classes—everything from designing stainless steel tumblers, little girls' hair classes, jewelry making, and card making classes. Sounds like the place to obtain gifts for special occasions!

Heritage Christian School Foundation's Evening of Praise was scheduled for November 30, with another wonderful variety of music planned.

In Wingham, ON the PRSW Fundraising Committee really went to work! First they undertook a new activity they named "Meatball Mania!" Apparently this had to do with making and selling meatballs, with proceeds going to the school. Then they featured their annual Chocolate Letter Sale, making and selling Dutch milk chocolate letters. You

know...tasty meatballs with a milk chocolate letter for dessert! It doesn't get much better than that! I wonder if they can be shipped?

By God's grace the Sioux Falls School Society recently approved a motion to begin a grade school (initially grades K-4) for the 2020-2021 school year. In that light, the Sioux Falls Protestant Reformed Christian School is seeking applicants for an administrator and a teacher. The Board is willing to work together in curriculum development. Interested applicants or inquirers can contact Brian Brummel, (assocpre-dusf@gmail.com or 605-370-2317). This is an exciting time for the parents of Heritage PRC!

Sister-church activities

The Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore held a Reformation Day Conference on November 9. Rev. A. den Hartog spoke on the Theme "Personal, Practical, Profitable: The Other Work of the Synod of Dort." All were invited to come and hear about the great Reformation of the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Coming to celebrate the Reformation Day Conference with them were missionary-pastor Emmanuel Singh and his wife Sonali. They planned to spend one Lord's Day in Singapore before returning to Kolkata.

The Classis of the PRC of the Philippines took place on October 31 in Provident PRC, Marikina City. Rev. Vernon Ibe led opening devotions and then Rev. John Flores chaired the meeting (by rotation). Three delegates were present from each of the three churches in the PRCP. Classis decided to appoint two new standing committees so that the work of the denomination is now divided up among four committees instead of two. Classis updated its "Rules of Order" with regard to the length of classis meetings and the guidelines for advisors to the classis. Classis clarified the role of the missionaries, deciding that all three could serve as advisors at each classis meeting and that each missionary would serve as an advisor to at least one of the standing committees of the PRCP. Classis had a large, lengthy agenda and was not able to complete its work; therefore, it decided to recess and to meet again on Saturday, November 30 (a public holiday in the Philippines). We are thankful to God for His care of the churches there. May His Word continue to go forth and His church gathered in all parts of His vineyard!

Trivia answer

From all appearances the very first "News from Our Churches" was dated September 22, 1958 and found on the pages of the October 1, 1958 issue of the *Standard Bearer*. Penned by Mr. John M. Faber, the column hoped to serve as a "means to reach out to the far-off outposts of Redlands, Lynden, and Loveland, drawing them into a closer circle with the rest of our churches, binding us closer in the bonds of love; yea, let it be a means to embrace one another in the

communion of the saints.” Later in the column the author states “Everyone is interested in all the activities of all our churches, so, if you want to be in the news, send us the news.” Over 60 years later news is still being made!

There have been some interested responses to the request to submit a profile of the individual churches. Stay tuned.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hudsonville PRC express our Christian sympathy to fellow officebearer Gary and wife Pat Lanning in the death of their son-in-law, **Josh De Gram**. We also express sympathy to their daughter, Kerri, and her three daughters in the passing away of her husband. May they find comfort in the words found in Deuteronomy 33:27a: “The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

Rev. G. Eriks, President
Rich Feenstra, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their sincere sympathy to members Bill and Jennie Den Besten in the death of Bill’s sister, **Henrietta Kamminga**. May comfort be rooted in the Christian confession, “For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord’s” (Romans 14:8).

Rev. J Engelsma, President
Perry Van Egdome, Clerk

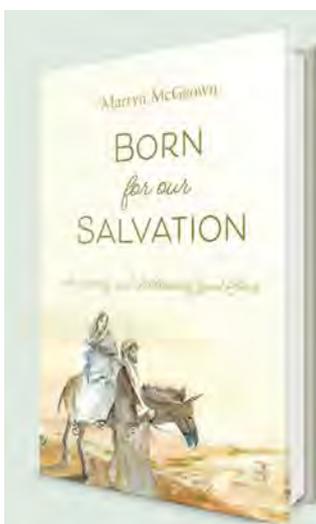
Teacher needed

The **Edmonton PR Christian School** is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2020–2021 school year. The school will be starting with grades 1–5 minus grade 4. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780.

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. W. Bruinsma

- December 1—“Ruth’s Vow”
Ruth 1:16, 17
- December 8—“Hannah’s Prayer for a Son”
I Samuel 1:9-18
- December 15—“Abigail Pleads with David”
I Samuel 25:28-31
- December 22—“Elizabeth’s Inspired Revelation”
Luke 1:39-45
- December 29—“God’s Faithfulness”
I Thessalonians 5:24



Coming December 2019

The nativity story is the message of salvation, for in the words of the Nicene Creed, “Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God...for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.” *Jesus was born for our salvation!*

Follow the inspired evangelists, Matthew and Luke, as they relate the wonderful events that surround the birth and early childhood of Jesus Christ. Marvel at the announcement of the angel Gabriel. Rejoice with Mary, Elizabeth, the unborn John, and Joseph. Trace the steps of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem, where the Savior is born. Listen to the heavenly song of the angelic host as they announce the gospel to lowly shepherds. Meet patient Simeon and aged Anna in the temple, and hear Simeon’s mysterious prophecy of the Savior’s rejection. Make the long trek from the east with the wise men who eagerly seek him that is born King of the Jews. Enter the palace of ruthless King Herod and witness his satanic enmity against the newborn Savior. Flee with Mary, Joseph, and Jesus to Egypt to escape the king’s wrath. Observe Jesus’ childhood development in Nazareth, and, finally, accompany Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem in his twelfth year, where he must be about his Father’s business.

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