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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

A fruitful vine

Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house....

Psalm 128:3a

It is rather strange, if not ironic, that an annual “Mother’s Day” is so widely observed in our times. When we examine current trends and projections for the future, we see that for many—both men and women—marriage and family simply are not considered the way to the so-called “good life.” We see more and more people deciding against marriage, as social pressures to wed diminish and women find it easier to achieve economic independence. We see continuing high levels of divorce, low birth rates, smaller families. Children are frequently considered a burden, economic liabilities.

For more than fifty years our culture has prioritized mothers’ wage-labor outside the home over their work inside the home. Financially, things are so much easier with a two-income family. Public policy and regulation have promoted and advanced that attitude. Welfare reform providing subsidized day care and preschool for children and revision of the U.S. tax code providing various tax breaks for two-income couples are among policies intended to get more mothers away from their home and children and into the paid workforce. Many economists insist that the gross domestic product of our country demands it. And there is growing concern that the coronavirus pandemic, which has closed day cares and schools, has made it necessary, especially for women, to return home to care for the children. Many fear that women’s independence will be a silent victim of the pandemic.

How utterly foreign then is the teaching of Scripture concerning the blessedness of marriage in the Lord, motherhood, and family life. How thankful we must be to our covenant God that in the midst of His faithful church may be seen families, many children, wives and mothers who are happy, content, richly blessed as they labor in the home. Truly, “thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house.”

Here in Psalm 128 we see the blessedness of family

life in the fear of the Lord. That is the key, of course, the fear of Jehovah! “Blessed is everyone that feareth the LORD “ (v. 1a). It is not by having a two-income household, not by having a wife who can feel “fulfilled” with a career outside the home, not by avoiding children so that your desired lifestyle is not hindered that you will be happy. It is fearing Jehovah, walking in His ways that brings blessedness—true happiness. For God will surely provide our daily bread. “For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee” (v. 2). Yes, there may be times of financial struggle, times when many sacrifices must be made, as may well be the case during a time of a pandemic. But God will surely provide us with that which we need for our lives as we fear Him and seek first His kingdom.

And, in the fear of the Lord, there is the remarkably rich blessing of having wife and children. This is not to say that the blessing of God is not upon the house of the godly couple who have been given no children, and upon the house of those saints whom the Lord leads in the way of single life. They will be richly blessed in the special place and calling He has for them in His church and kingdom. But the general rule is that God gives children unto husband and wife. Here the description we have of the wife of the God-fearing man is very beautiful and to the point: “as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house.”

The figure used here is not difficult to understand. A fruitful vine is a very pleasant, beautiful, and thriving plant. Our reaction to the godly wife should be: what a beautiful and noble creature she is! She has a certain glory about her. She differs from the women of the world as beauty differs from ugliness. She has a genuine beauty and true adornment. It is not “that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel,” of which Peter warns, but “the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price” (I Pet. 3:3, 4). Her beauty is not found in a fancy hairdo, expensive jewelry, or designer fashions. It is a spiritual beauty that causes her

children to rise up and call her blessed and her husband to praise her (Prov. 31:28).

In addition, a vine is an emblem of dependence; a vine needs support. The God-fearing wife is not compared to a mighty oak tree, but to a tender vine! This speaks to husbands as well as wives. Husbands must support and defend their wives. Husbands ought to behave toward their wives patiently and prudently. As we read in I Peter 3:7, husbands are to give honor unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel. The wife is the weaker vessel because this is what God made her as a woman, a female. That is her unique, distinctive relation to the man that God established in the beginning.

God ordained the position of the wife in marriage to be one of submission and dependence. She is the vine, the weaker vessel in marriage, and that is part of her God-given glory as a woman. Being aware of this, the husband will treat his wife with gentleness and kindness. A vine may be healthy and strong, but it is, nevertheless, fragile. It needs support. The godly husband will treat her with tenderness. He will nourish and cherish her.

She is a *fruitful* vine—fruitful in so many ways. It was not good in the beginning for man to be alone. He needed a help meet for him. He who finds a wife, finds a good thing (Prov. 18:22a). The godly wife is fruitful in love, in kindness, in thrift, in helpfulness, in affection, in comfort.

But, clearly the chief fruit of the godly wife is frequently children: “thy children like olive plants round about thy table” (v. 3b). Olive plants are indicative of richness and blessing. The figure was very familiar in Israel. For around the parent olive tree spring up numerous shoots. So children and young people spring up around their parents. What a blessing! As we read in the previous Psalm, Psalm 127, “Lo, children are an heritage of the LORD: and the fruit of the womb is his reward.” The richly blessed man of God often has children, and they are especially in evidence as they gather around the table at mealtime.

Notice too, that she is a fruitful vine “by the sides of thine house.” Literally, the word “sides” may signify the rooms or apartments of a house where she may be busy with her household duties. The point is that the normal sphere of the wife and mother is the house. How utterly strange that sounds to most people today. But the godly wife must be busy making the house a home, a covenant home. If you wish to find the godly wife and mother, she is most often to be found within the house. Her activity and labor center about and within her home.

Consider the virtuous woman of Proverbs 31—all of her many gifts and abilities are being used for her home,

for the welfare of her husband and children. Solomon says that “she will do him good and not evil all the days of her life” (Prov. 31:12). She is willing to sacrifice for them, to live for them, realizing that in that way she shall also be truly blessed, happy, fulfilled. Proverbs 31:27 states, “She looketh well to the ways of her household....”

The wise woman of Proverbs 31 is busy providing clothing, preparing food, even purchasing a field where she could have a garden and vineyard to supply food and drink for the table. She is industrious, making crafts and goods to sell and barter with the merchants. What a help she is to her husband and family, what a blessing and benefit to many others! Truly, she is a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house.

This needs emphasis as never before. It is the Word of God that says that the calling of the godly wife and mother is to be a keeper at home (Tit. 2:5). There may be exceptions to this, of course, but generally speaking, it is not the calling of the fruitful vine to labor in the world in the sweat of her face. And always home and family must come first! Paul writes to Timothy concerning the young widows of the church in I Timothy 5:14, 15 that they are to seek the normal life of a young woman of the church, which is that they “marry, bear children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully. For some are already turned aside after Satan.” Mind you, the apostle equates the despising of that calling to faithful labor in the home with going after Satan! Clearly, it is generally God’s purpose that godly women be saved in the way of childbearing and child-rearing, not by laboring in the world (I Tim. 2:15).

This certainly does not harmonize at all with the image the unbelieving world would hold before us of a happy, successful, fulfilled woman. The world paints a very different picture of beauty in the glamorous career woman. Do not dare compare her with a fruitful vine—she is sturdy as steel, independent, an equal with her husband, certainly not his helper. She has her own career, her own bank accounts and investments, her own circle of friends, her own social life. The foolish women of the world strive for mastery over their husbands in rebellion against God. Solomon calls such “odious women.” They bring shame upon their households. He says that such a wife is rottenness in the bones of her husband. For such a life is a denial of the very foundation of marriage and blasphemes the Word of God!

Many would describe the life of the fruitful vine as drudgery, an intolerable bore, a waste of gifts and talents. What a demeaning role, taking care of a husband’s needs, and those of children! And, make no mis-

take, it is not an easy life. It is especially not easy in recent months with the drastic changes necessary with the pandemic. Mothers are assisting with the education of the children and young people since the schools are closed. They could easily be struggling to manage the household budget with less money available, especially if dad is home, unable to work, perhaps laid off from his job. From our perspective, our wives and mothers

have gone above and beyond the call of duty, by the grace of God! Let us rise up and call them blessed!

It is not the glamorous career woman seeking self-fulfillment who is the honorable woman in God's sight. It is the fruitful vine, made such by His grace, that He declares to be more precious than rubies. She shall one day hear the Lord say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."



Editorial

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

Synod 2020 preview: More protests and more pain

In May of 2017, the editorial reviewing Synod 2017 was entitled, "The Pain and Profit of Protests." I called attention to the reality that although protests and appeals are very painful, their presence and proper treatment are indications "that the churches are healthy and well." Members who believe to have been wronged by a decision of an assembly have the right to object to the decision. Believers who are aggrieved by an action of a consistory, classis, or synod, have the right to show that the action ought to be discontinued or declared improper. The office of believer gives all church members the right to such a protest, as long as the protest is grounded in Scripture, the confessions, and the Church Order. Because no assembly is infallible and every ecclesiastical body must be willing to be corrected, the assemblies are bound to hear and treat objections to their decisions, painful as it may be to hear and judge the merits of the protests. Not to grant the right of protest and appeal would be contrary to the Church Order, historic Reformed Christianity, and a sign of something seriously amiss in the church.

At a certain point, protests and appeals become more painful than profitable. Thankfully, the delegates at the PRCA Synod of 2020 (to convene June 9, at Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI, if God wills) will not need to make that judgment, because they are called to judge only the merit or demerit, the legality or illegality of any document that comes before it. But they must deal with hundreds of pages of protests and appeals with supporting documentation. And that is painful.

To say that, at a certain point, protests become more

painful than profitable is not to say that synod ought not treat protests, or that treatment will not be profitable. In fact, the greater the pain of treating protests becomes, the louder the caution must be issued to all the delegates, "Do not allow the pain to bring you to impatience and therefore to bad or careless decisions." This is a caution that this editor, who is required by synod each year to attend as advisor, needs to hear. The documents must be considered, both as to legality and, if legal, as to the merit of their content. And whatever synod decides, legal or illegal, with merit or without it, the churches profit insofar as the *reasons* synod provides are sound.

But at some point, patience wears thin.

The reason for that, this year, is not that this is the fourth or fifth year in a row that material comes on the same few subjects. It may well be that certain weighty matters take some years to work through. The issues before us these past few years are weighty: they regard doctrine (the place of works in the Christian life) and worship (what the church will sing). On account of doctrine and worship—worship, according to Calvin, being the most basic of the two—God brought about the sixteenth century Reformation of the church. Our churches have not engaged in emotional and difficult debate for trivial matters.

The reasons, rather, have to do with the form of the documents and the goals to which they aim. If a protest's form makes it difficult to understand, the delegates expend so much time and energy before they do the actual work of treating the document that their treatment

is badly delayed and even hurt. The cumulative effect of many such documents means that synodical delegates can hardly endure.

I remind the readers what this editorial said three years ago about the wisdom of getting help to write a document that will demand the attention of the synod.

One other rule is not written but ought to be considered. I call it the rule of common sense: “Get help.” That is, a protestant should get advice from others before submitting a protest or appeal. I have seen enough objections to assemblies fail miserably or falter badly, at least in part because of the obvious blind spots of their authors. Sometimes pride, or isolationism, drives a protestant to write a protest without getting someone else’s objective opinion.... [M]aybe there are other reasons some have not to get advice for their protest. But they ought to.

Although a written rule cannot be added to those already adopted: “You must seek advice,” it certainly would help avoid some glaring problems in protests and appeals. Embarrassing jumps in logic, unwarranted assumptions, bold and unproven assertions..., unclear sentences or paragraphs—sometimes not even understandable after three readings—are all enough to tempt even the most patient and reasonable delegate to dismiss the protest or appeal out of hand. Add to the mix that a document might be interminably long, and you could probably be convinced that synod should say more about length, more, that is, than the soft reminder that brevity is “in the best interests” of all involved. The counsel of the “multitude of counselors,” through whom is wisdom, should be sought before coming to the assembly. Even the most capable has a blind spot, or two.

Most writers abide by the rule that they will print *nothing* for the public eye except at least two others have read and reviewed it. If the peer-reviewer has even a *question* about the meaning of something, it must be changed to make it clear. Documents must be written as much as possible in such a way that there are no questions. If this rule is wisdom for a magazine article, it is even more important for a document that will require the devoted attention of twenty-five men at the broadest assembly of the churches.

In Synod 2020’s agenda is one protest totaling about 250 pages. The protest appeals 13 separate classical decisions which takes 28 pages to quote. It includes a 3-page summary of the case with 38 dates. The appeal itself is actually 6 separate appeals. Supporting documents are over 200 pages.

At the top of one protest is only a date, but no identi-

fication of the author or those to whom it is addressed. The protest never gets to citing the article of the assembly to which objection is brought.

One document does not identify itself. Is it a protest or an appeal? The author is aggrieved and asks synod to adjudicate, but synod needs to know what the document is. There are different rules that apply to different kinds of objections.

Another protestant objects to Synod 2019 declaring his protest “not legally before synod,” but does not object to 2019’s grounds, in fact does not even quote the grounds used to declare his protest illegal.

This editorial does not make judgment on the legality of any of the documents. But it does make the judgment that figuring them out should not be so difficult.

Most weaknesses in protests could be remedied by the careful review of the document by a capable friend, an elder, or a pastor, even if (and maybe *especially* if) the reviewer does not share the viewpoint of the protestant. Iron sharpens iron.

Of course, synods must be cautious not to dismiss protests and appeals because of “technicalities.” The people will lose confidence in the assemblies. At the same time, the assemblies have rules for the sake of good order and these rules must be followed. The assemblies must not be so fearful of criticisms that they treat what ought firmly and decisively to be dismissed.

No protestant or appellant ought to be offended at this. Instead, let them be strongly encouraged to find wisdom in some good counselors before burdening the assemblies with difficult-to-treat material. Besides, poor presentation is an unnecessary hindrance to the cause one is attempting to promote.

The other work of synod

Synod must also treat all the reports of its standing committees. Recommendations from the Board of Trustees (BOT) include adopting a document entitled “Affirmations Regarding Marriage, Sexuality, and Gender Identity.” Last year, Hull, Iowa, PRC overtured Synod to construct such a statement and to recommend policies “for greater legal protection in this matter.” Synod approved the overture and gave the assignment to the BOT.

The Catechism Book Committee recommends adopting a new memory work schedule for the Bible History books for Juniors and Seniors. This should be a good improvement to our catechism curriculum.

Probably the longest report is from our Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC). The length of the report indicates the massive amount of work these brothers do for our churches. Promotion and mainte-

nance of our sister relations with the churches in Northern Ireland, the Philippines, and Singapore; corresponding relations with the EPC in Australia; informal but important fellowship with many other churches or groups of believers in Germany, Namibia, South Africa, South Korea, Mexico, and elsewhere. And all this is only part of what the CC is involved with. The CC reports on a meeting with URCNA representatives at the URC's request. They discussed Federal Vision theology (mostly) and the problem of money in missions (partly). The URC's representatives encouraged the PRCA to become a 'member' of NAPARC, rather than mere 'observer,' in order to be a witness against the Federal Vision at that forum. Some years ago synod also gave the work of Psalter revision to the CC, so their report includes progress on this important project too.

The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) reports on the work of our home missionary and the attempts to establish a specific field of labor for him. Included in the work of the DMC is the oversight of the denominational website and the partial support the denomination gives to the radio work of First PRC, the Reformed Witness Hour.

The Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) reports on the extensive work being done in the Philippines by our three missionaries, sent by our Doon, Iowa, PRC. There are reports from the missionaries themselves and from the Doon consistory. The work of the missionaries focuses on seminary training, advising a small, young denomination, and pastoring established churches, rather than what one might think when he hears 'foreign mission work.' The FMC also reports of offering help to Hope PRC (Grand Rapids, MI) in their work in Myanmar, and Georgetown PRC (Hudsonville, MI) in their work in India. Significantly, also the FMC wrestles with the question of distribution of money on the mission field. Synod 2018 mandated the FMC to present guidelines for this to Synod 2019. To date, their work is progressing, but waiting for the fruits of a paper being written by one of our missionaries.

The Emeritus Committee reports approving 18 requests for financial support of retired ministers or their widows. The PRCA has 37 active ministers, and supports almost half that many retired ministers or widows. We may be thankful for the foresight of wise elders some years ago who advised laying up in store sufficient monies to provide for the needs of those who deserve ('emeritus' is 'from merit') the churches' lifelong support.

Not insignificant is the Theological School Committee's report of the activities of our seminary. Synod will consider the advice of the TSC to admit two new stu-

dents who would join the six men currently preparing for the gospel ministry. Prof. D. Kuiper and Prof. B. Huizinga make good progress in preparations for teaching full time.

Both Classis East and Classis West report on approving the examination of newly elected pastors. They submit requests for financial subsidy for needy churches in their classis, totaling almost one half million dollars. And both classes report the release of a minister in their classis, one under article 11 and another under article 12 of the Church Order. The deputies appointed by synod to concur with or dissent from these decisions both report their concurrence. Synod must yet approve.

But will Synod 2020 even meet?

With the various state governments' restrictions on meetings, it is still a question at the time of this writing (April 26) whether our synod may convene on June 12. Michigan has one of the highest incidents of COVID-19 cases and deaths in the U.S., and one of the more aggressively restrictive governors. I have heard men on various committees wondering among themselves whether they were in a position to initiate the question of postponing Synod 2020 to later in the summer.

With a little research I was able to learn that the following denominations have either delayed or canceled their annual synod scheduled for this summer: Christian Reformed Church, Reformed Church in America, Free Reformed Churches, United Reformed Churches in North America, Orthodox Presbyterian Church, Presbyterian Church in America, Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church, and the Reformed Church in the United States ("German Reformed"). If the PRCA Synod 2020 meets, it may be one of the only synods that does. If it does (and I pray we can), the difference may be that it is one of the smallest gatherings of denominational synods. Because of the church polity of our denomination, the PRCA has only 20 delegates and 5 advisors, whereas other denominations, with different view of what constitutes a synod, often have hundreds. "Social distancing" for us may be possible.

May the work of Christ among us and by us continue.



All around us

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

Surveillance

Since taking on the role of contributor to the “All Around Us” rubric for the *Standard Bearer*, I have regularly taken notice of articles in the media on the subject of the government’s surveillance of its citizenry. It is on this topic that I write, and for reasons that will be laid out at the end of the article, this is a subject well worth our reflection upon as Christians.

I begin with developments in China. China is by far the world leader in the surveillance of its citizens. Eight of the ten most surveilled cities in the world are in China, a calculation based upon the number of cameras per residents in the city (the two other top cities being London and Atlanta, Georgia).¹ As reported in a late 2018 article in *The Atlantic*, the Chinese national police force in 2015 called for a “omnipresent, completely connected, always on and fully controllable” system of national surveillance.² That call in 2015 is becoming a present reality, enabling the Chinese government soon to roll out a nation-wide Social Credit System, a program that has been piloted in several major cities throughout China in the past few years. The purpose of complete surveillance in China is not only the safety and protection of its citizenry, but chiefly the absolute control of every citizen so as to ensure complete devotion to the Communist Party of the Chinese government.

The *Washington Times*, in an article entitled “‘Social Credit Score’: China Set to Roll Out ‘Orwellian’ Mass Surveillance Tool,” introduced the subject this way:

China is developing a new high-tech system of mass surveillance and coercion aimed at suppressing political dissent among its 1.4 billion people, while forcing American and Western businesses to conform to the government’s communist policies if they want to operate there.

The system that critics call an Orwellian national-level control system has been dubbed the Social Credit System (SCS) and was set for launch in the coming year,

although recent reports from China now say the rollout could be delayed until 2021.

The massive system has been tested in several major Chinese cities and uses millions of surveillance cameras linked to supercomputers containing massive databases. Face and voice recognition technology then identifies and monitors people with the goal of controlling behaviors that range from dissident political activity to jaywalking, ostensibly as part of a financial credit monitoring system similar to those used in the West.

Vice President Mike Pence called out the program in a recent speech, warning that China’s surveillance state is “growing more expansive and intrusive—often with the help of U.S. technology.”

“By 2020, China’s rulers aim to implement an Orwellian system premised on controlling virtually every facet of human life—the so-called social credit score,” Mr. Pence said. “In the words of that program’s official blueprint, it will ‘allow the trustworthy to roam everywhere under heaven, while making it hard for the discredited to take a single step.’”³

The basic idea of the Social Credit System is simple: the government rates all behavior, rewarding what it prescribes as good and punishing what it determines is bad. A good social credit score comes with privileges: favorable treatment in securing jobs or discounted tuition, for example. A lower social credit score results in hardships: citizens are required to pay fines, are barred from buying airline tickets, or are banned from traveling by high speed train. What was hypothetically described in George Orwell’s *1984*, today because of the developments of technology—facial recognition cameras, 5g connectivity, super computers allowing complete inter-connectivity—is materializing in China: Big Brother sees, knows, and controls all.

Albert Mohler in his daily podcast *The Briefing* called attention to a further development of the Chinese government’s surveillance of its citizenry from an article in the *Financial Times*: emotion recognition. That is

1 <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2019/dec/02/big-brother-is-watching-chinese-city-with-26m-cameras-is-worlds-most-heavily-surveilled>.

2 <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/02/china-surveillance/552203>.

3 <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2019/dec/9/social-credit-system-china-mass-surveillance-tool>.

correct: The Chinese government is in the beginning stages of employing cameras and technology that not only have the ability to recognize identity but also, supposedly, to identify emotions. Technology experts in China claim that emotion recognition, already being used in airports and subways, gives the ability to scan crowds and analyze mental states to prevent crime before it may take place. While initially being employed in the service of safety and crime prevention, it is not difficult to see how such technology would be used in the future. Mohler's analysis is on point:

But Christians need to gain a little distance here and understand that when you have the totalitarian government of China using what is defined as emotion recognition software and analyzing people with this kind of software application, then how long is it before they decide, 'Okay, here's a pious person. We can identify that person now. Here's an individual we can detect, perhaps even in the middle of the crowd, who is demonstrating an emotion that does not serve the interest of the Chinese Communist Party.'⁴

Most readers of the *Standard Bearer* do not live under a communist regime like the Chinese government, and therefore may be tempted to think that the above-described circumstances in China do not apply to our current context. And for the most part, that is correct. Surveillance by the government for the purpose of a social credit system is not on the near horizon for citizens in the U.S. However, the infrastructure for complete surveillance is more and more being put in place in the U.S. A December 6, 2019 *Wall Street Journal* article reported that by the end of 2021 there would be more than 1 billion surveillance cameras in use the world over, 85 million of which in the U.S.⁵ Already now, while China is out front with one camera per 4.1 citizens, the U.S. is right behind with one camera for every 4.6 citizens (the U.K. is at one camera per 6.5 citizens; Singapore at one camera per 7.1 citizens).⁶ Most of these cameras are in use for safety in a commercial and school setting. However, what is taking place in Atlanta, Georgia could become a trend throughout the country, namely, that companies and citizens give the government access to private cameras to prevent and fight crime, which is why Atlanta ranks as one of the top ten most surveilled cities in the world.⁷ The point

is that the infrastructure is present in the U.S. for complete surveillance, if the government were ever to demand such access to the cameras from its citizens.

There are several reasons this is a noteworthy subject to reflect on as Christians. In the first place, it clearly reveals how the way is being paved for the coming of the anti-Christian kingdom and the oppression of the church of Jesus Christ. It is striking how the language that is used to describe the surveillance of the Chinese people is language that should be reserved for God alone. The above quotations spoke of an "omnipresent" surveillance network and of technology that is able to recognize "emotions." God alone is truly omnipresent and God alone knows the heart. But man seeks to dethrone God and enthrone himself, the most supreme example to come being Antichrist himself. And he most likely will use these technologies to unite kingdoms under his rule and exercise complete control over men, all with an eye on the destruction of the church. The present-day reality in China demonstrates how easily the oppression can be inflicted upon Christians when a government has the ability to know and see all that one does in public through surveillance cameras and in private through the surveillance of Internet, email, and social media activity. Any association with Jesus Christ may lead to the loss of rights, the inability to buy and sell, fines and imprisonment, and even death. But knowing this, we do not go forth in fear or dismay, but in the hope of the final victory when Jesus returns.

In the second place and closely related, let this be a reminder for us of the importance to remember in prayer God's people the world over as they presently experience persecution. The purpose of this article was not to explain the current Christian persecution in China under her Communist Party. We know that such is the case today for followers of Jesus Christ in China. However, the fact is that the above-described surveillance to ensure complete devotion to the government will only serve the end of the further persecution of God's people in China, whose absolute allegiance is never to a man or government party, but to the Lord Jesus Christ. May God continue to uphold His persecuted church with the confidence that though she is the church persecuted today, one day she will be the church triumphant in glory.

In the third place, the subject of surveillance must lead us to reflect upon the truth that there is only One who truly sees and knows all. It is impossible, even with the most sophisticated technology, for any government to see all and know all. And certainly it is impossible

4 <https://albertmohler.com/2019/11/05/briefing-11-5-19>.

5 <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-billion-surveillance-cameras-forecast-to-be-watching-within-two-years-11575565402>.

6 <https://www.theverge.com/2019/12/9/21002515/surveillance-cameras-globally-us-china-amount-citizens>.

7 <https://www.ajc.com/news/local/real-time-crimefighting-around-000-cameras-watch-over-atlanta/q1F76c7sgdwBvtIa3l-uX8H>.

around-000-cameras-watch-over-atlanta/q1F76c7sgdwBvtIa3l-uX8H.

ever to think that technology can identify the emotions of the mind and heart. But there is One who can and does: Jehovah God, whose eyes “are in every place, beholding the evil and the good” (Prov. 15:3). Reflection upon privacy, security, and surveillance should cause us to remember that we stand before an all-seeing and all-knowing God. He sees and knows what we do in public on the streets and in private in our homes. Noth-

ing escapes Him. And in His righteousness He will execute exacting judgment upon all.

As we reflect upon our lives in this highly surveilled world, may it not be the camera above the traffic lights or the hard drives that can be accessed and searched that determines our behavior, but the fact that we are to walk before the face of God, motivated by thanks for the victory and hope that we have in Jesus Christ alone.



A word fitly spoken

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan

Hereby—In this

Most of us know the seven “I am” passages of John (the Bread of life; the Light of the world; the Door; the Good Shepherd; the Vine; the Resurrection and the Life; the Way, the Truth, and the Life), and even that there are ten if you include “I am,” “I am he,” and “I am in the Father.” But do you know the “hereby” passages of John, their significance, or how many there are? We should. For they are as profound as the “I am” texts, and the Spirit similarly calls attention to them. One way is this: “Hereby” is used only nine times in the New Testament; by no coincidence, eight of them occur in one book, the first epistle of John. Hereby, the Spirit calls us to take notice.

Although uses of “hereby” are rare, it translates a Greek phrase, *en toutoo*, that occurs some 30 times (half in I John). Literally, *en toutoo* means “in this.” So we read: *in this* we groan (II Cor. 5:2). It is also translated variously: “by this”—“*by this* shall all men know that ye are my disciples” (John 13:35); “herein”—“*herein* is my Father glorified” (John 15:8); “therein”—“*I therein* do rejoice” (Phi. 1:18); and, as mentioned, “hereby”—“For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not *hereby* justified” (I Cor. 4:4, the one time outside I John *en toutoo* is translated “hereby”).

The fact “hereby” is used for *en toutoo* almost exclusively in I John indicates the translators saw a pattern whereby the Spirit not only caught their attention but pointed to a unified thought. Good thing. For *en toutoo* can have vastly different meanings. Generally, the phrase occurs before a verb and “this” refers to some clause that presents the sphere “in” which the verbal action occurs; but, depending on various factors, this

sphere could be almost anything. For example, the meaning of Philippians 1:18 is “in this (circumstance) I rejoice: whenever Christ is preached”; Luke 10:20 means “In this (fact) rejoice: that your names are written in heaven.”

With few exceptions, the pattern in I John briefly is this: 1) “In this” begins the sentence; 2) “In this” refers to a clause that follows, not one that precedes; 3) “In this” is used with a verb that refers to knowledge; 4) the nature of this knowledge is spiritual and experiential, and consists of intimate, mutual fellowship of love—either God living *in* us in love, or we living *in* Him (and each other) in love; 5) each “in this” construction presents a sphere of manner or way in which that fellowship is known; or fact, instance or proof of that fellowship; and together they are intended by the Spirit further to explain each other regarding the covenant relationship.

There are eight “hereby” passages in I John; twelve, with all similar uses of *en toutoo*. They are as follows (for continuity and clarity, I translated *en toutoo* literally as “in this,” put the KJV in parenthesis and italicized the main verb; for brevity I edited some clauses):

1. In this (hereby) we *know* that we know Him: if we keep His commandments (2:3).
2. In this (hereby) we *know* that we are in Him: if we keep His commandments (2:5).¹
3. In this (hereby) *are manifest* the children of God

¹ This is one of two instances where “in this” refers back to an antecedent; in this case, according to H. Hoeksema, it refers back to verse 3. The other instance is 3:19 where the “in this” refers back to verse 18.

and the children of the devil: whosoever does not righteousness or loves not his brother is not of God (3:10).

4. In this (hereby) we *perceive* the love of God: because He laid down His life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (3:16).

5. In this (hereby) we *know* that we are of the truth and *shall assure* our hearts before Him: when we love not in word or tongue, but in deed and in truth (3:19).

6. In this (hereby) we *know* that He abides in us: by the Spirit which He has given us (3:24).²

7. In this (hereby) ye *know* the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God (4:2).

8. In this *was manifested* the love of God toward

us: because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him (4:9).³

9. In this (herein) *is* love: not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins (4:10).

10. In this (hereby) we *know* that we dwell in Him and He dwells in us: because He has given us of His Spirit (4:13).

11. In this (herein) our love *is made perfect* that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as He is, so are we in this world (4:17).

12. In this (by this) we *know* that we love the children of God: when we love God and keep His commandments (5:2).

² The word “by,” as in “*by the Spirit*” gives this proof causal-instrumental force: The fact God has given us His Spirit is proof that He abides in us; also by the Spirit God abides in us and causes us to know this.

³ This proof also has causal-instrumental force due to the word “because.” The fact God sent His only begotten Son into the world is proof the love of God was manifested toward us, and it is also the reason, cause, and means by which that love of God was manifested toward us. See also 3:16 and 4:13.



Believing and confessing

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Taming the tongue

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 43

Q. 112. What is required in the ninth commandment?

A. That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.

A close-knit church community is a wonderful blessing, especially in times of trial; but it can also be a hotbed for chatter about the name of others, resulting in bitter division between brothers and sisters in Christ without them ever speaking to one another.

“That I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard.” Such would be “a proper work of the devil” and would “bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God.”

And yet, all too frequently when we get together, we

find ourselves talking about others. When it is trivial information (about dating, pregnancy, marriage, moving house), we discuss it that way, as trivia, in a mild and disinterested way. But, when it begins to involve what we might judge as “sin” or, in the case of a minister, “false doctrine” or “error,” suddenly the interest is piqued, the conversation becomes intense, and names are thrown around, judged, labeled and condemned... rashly and unheard.

And because the “sin” or “error” is so serious, we

think the way of Matthew 18 does not apply. After all, this is public knowledge.

Not just minister's names. It starts with what we say about the name of any brother or sister in Christ. This is a very real danger in a close-knit church community—what James calls “wars and fighting among you” (James 4:1), or what Paul speaks of this way: “ye bite and devour one another” with the warning, “take heed that ye be not consumed one of another” (Gal. 5:15).

Whereas Jesus, speaking from the perspective of seeking peace and preserving love between believers (read I Cor. 13:4-7), says, “go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone” (Matt. 18:15).

Would we bring down upon ourselves “the heavy wrath of God?” Have we already done this?

Biblical and doctrinal truth is important, but so is the truth about the name, honor, and character of the neighbor, especially when that neighbor is a fellow member of the body of Christ, and even more especially, when that neighbor holds office in the church of Christ.

A necessary command

How necessary is this commandment!

First, because words are powerful, and can be especially destructive when the motive behind them is something other than love.

In James 3, to illustrate the destructive power of words, James compares the tongue to things very small that have massive impact. A bit in the mouth of a strong horse to turn its whole body. A small rudder that turns a massive ship into the driving wind at sea. A match-sized flame that can start an inferno. “So is the tongue among our members...it is an unruly evil” (James 3:3-8). In some cases, a few words have turned the course of history.

And now, attach that little weapon with such potential to a sinful heart and it becomes a weapon of mass destruction! James says that you can tame every kind of beast—bird, snake, and sea creature—but no man can tame the tongue. It is full of deadly poison (a source of destruction); it defiles the whole body (it produces a whole variety of other sins); and it is set on fire of hell (the source of its evil is hell).

The book of Proverbs also speaks of the ruin that words can bring. The one who repeats a matter separates close friends (Prov. 17:9). The words of a gossip are deep wounds (Prov. 18:8). Death and life are in the power of the tongue (Prov. 18:21).

Behind this commandment stands the fact, the reality, that with our words we can so hate our neighbor that we destroy his spirit and ruin his desire to live.

The commandment is showing us something deeper,

our sin. Lies and deceit, gossip and slander, evil and destructive words, which come across our lips, come from a depraved heart. “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matt. 12:34). We do not become evil because of what we say, but we say what we do because we are evil.

We are forced to look inward. Why do we slander and gossip? Why are we so intensely interested in what others have done or said? Why so ready to exaggerate the faults of others? The source is an evil heart that hates others and is filled with self-love.

Romans 3 demonstrates the universal depravity of man—“there is none that doeth good, no, not one”—by calling attention to our words. “Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness” (Rom. 3:13-14).

How necessary is this commandment! How important the taming of the tongue!

An urgent calling

Just as we would cage a wild animal or put out a fire, so we are called to restrain our speech.

“Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile” (Ps. 34:13).

“Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3).

“He that refraineth his lips is wise” (Prov. 10:19).

There are two aspects to the taming of the tongue. We must deal with our words, yes, but first the *heart* must be addressed.

Here the commandment brings us to the Savior. By our words we are condemned as haters of God and the neighbor. The commandment brings us to Christ in repentance, seeking forgiveness and sanctification. Jesus Christ, who tells us that God would bring into judgment every idle word spoken, died to pay the price for my sinful words. By His Spirit He sanctifies the source of our words by filling us with love for God and the neighbor. Aware of sinful and selfish thoughts, we engage in a war with our words; we put off slander and evil speaking; and we put on love with words that edify, words of truth, blessing, and encouragement.

Very practically, this war with words, or we could call it the taming of the tongue, involves three areas of awareness and intentionality: 1) I watch my thoughts about others; 2) I guard my lips when I speak of others; and 3) I use my tongue in a positive way for good when I speak of others. This is one we fight on three fronts.

Thoughts are the source of words. When I blurt out something about another, that does not come from nowhere, or from a lack of forethought; no, it comes from

my thoughts. We do a lot of thinking about others. We compare, judge, admire, envy, despise, smile, or are in pain because a name brought to mind drags up old wounds.

The biblical rule or principle for thinking of others is set down in Philippians chapters 2 and 4: “Let each esteem other better than themselves;” and, in thinking of others, “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Phil. 2:3; 4:8). Our thinking should lead to praying: “Love your enemies, pray for them” (Matt. 5:44). Before we open our mouth to say something about another, open our mind to God in prayer for them. When you are praying for someone, it is very difficult to speak evil of that person.

Taming the tongue includes having proper thoughts about God. There is not a word in our mouths or thought in our minds that God does not know (Ps. 139:2, 4). Scripture tells us that the Lord hates “a lying tongue, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations [about others], a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren” (Prov. 6:16-19). God *hates* such! The Bible also warns us that by “corrupt communication,” that is, evil words about others, we “grieve” the Holy Spirit of God (Eph. 4:29, 30).

The first line of defense for the tongue is our thinking about others and about God.

But also, our *words* themselves need to be watched. How easily we permit sinful words to slip out. One of the Puritans said that God has placed teeth and lips as a “double sentry” to guard the tongue. Both our lips need to be opened and our teeth unclenched before our tongue can speak. “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards” (Prov. 29:11). In the control of lips, teeth, tongue, and jaw, we show wisdom. There is wisdom in pondering, in waiting to speak, and in silence. “In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise” (Prov. 10:19). Pray this prayer before you speak: “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth: keep the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3).

We do well to watch our words with these three questions concerning what we would say about another.

1. *Is it true?* Do I know it is true, or is it something I have just heard through the ‘grapevine’? Isn’t this the source of so many destructive and divisive rumors? Someone who does not know and who should not be involved, starts talking. Does what I say reflect that God is a God of truth?

2. *Is it necessary?* It may be true, but does it need to be said? Will my words be useful, edifying, beneficial to the one whose name I raise? Too often our words are not only a waste of breath but would be better not said.

3. *Is it loving?* Am I speaking about this person because I love him and in love for him? Do I speak to protect his name and reputation or to damage it? This question really gets to the heart of the ninth commandment. We must “speak the truth in love” (Eph. 4:15).

If we would run our words through the screening process of those three questions, so much destruction of names and division between believers could be deterred. “Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth” (Prov. 26:20).

Third, we tame our tongue by using it as God originally intended it, for His glory and the love of the neighbor. Putting off evil speaking, we put on the new man and speak “that which is good to the use of edifying” (Eph. 4:29). Words themselves are not evil, and as much potential as there is in the tongue for evil, so much potential is there in the tongue for good.

Think for a moment of the way that God powerfully uses words and language. He speaks the saving gospel into our lives by using words. He speaks truth, and it transforms us and sets us free. Similarly, He equips us to use our words in powerful ways for good. That begins, very simply, with speaking God’s own Word into the lives of others both by witnessing with words and giving biblical counsel with words.

One of the main reasons that God calls us together as believers is that we might minister His Word to one another. Hebrews 10:24-25 not only says that we should gather together, but also that we ought to “consider one another” and “exhort” and “provoke one another to love and good works.” Because life is difficult, we need words of encouragement, gratitude, sympathy, praise, and kindness from one another. “The tongue of the wise is health,” and “A word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Prov. 12:18; 15:23).

Do you think about the positive use of your words? Not insincerity and flattery, but life-giving, invigorating words, rather than demeaning and hurtful words. “Let your speech be alway with grace, seasoned with salt” (Col. 4:6).

Do you love truth and do you love the God of truth? Are you loving God and truth by loving your neighbor with your words?

Questions for discussion

1. How does Jesus' rule of Matthew 18:15 relate to this commandment? Should we be talking about others when we have not first talked to them?
2. Discuss and give examples of how the words of others can crush a person's psyche and self-esteem. Does the fact that we should not live for the esteem of others excuse hurtful words?
3. What proper biblical things should we be thinking about God before we open our mouths about others?
4. To what is the Catechism referring when it speaks of "proper works of the devil?" What does it mean that Satan is the "father of the lie?" Whose reputation did Satan attack in the garden of Eden? What does it mean that he is the "accuser of the brethren?"
5. List five or six specific sins forbidden in this commandment and discuss/explain them.
6. What is God's attitude toward the sin of the ninth commandment? Why? (Ps. 5:6; Prov. 6:16-19; Rev. 22:15)
7. How should we speak about others? Why is it so difficult for us to speak good things about others?
8. How does the resolve of Psalm 101:7 help us in keeping this commandment? (See also Prov. 26:20.)
9. How does Proverbs 31:26 describe the mouth of the virtuous woman? What can we learn from this?
10. How do we guard our lips and tame our tongue? Discuss what was proposed in this article. How is this helpful?
11. What are some positive ways to use our words to edify or build up others? Is it wrong to praise or appreciate others? Do you do this often enough?
12. What is the happy result of keeping this commandment?



Previous article in this series: February 15 2020, p. 229.

Taking heed to the doctrine

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As to our good works (5) Relating good works and justification (a)

Having examined the *nature* of the believer's good works, we now turn our attention to the historically contentious subject of the *function* of good works. We know what good works are as the fruits that proceed from the good root of faith, but what function do these works serve in the life of the child of God?

We begin with an examination of the relation between good works and justification. We begin with justification because in the daily consciousness of the believer, justification is of first rank among all the saving acts of God. To any sinner imbued with an awareness of his own guiltiness and wretchedness before the

thrice holy God, nothing presses more deeply upon his consciousness than his desperate need for righteousness. Moreover, we begin with justification because contending for the faith must always be done most earnestly over this doctrine. If we get the relation between good works and justification wrong and maintain our error, we not only end up promoting a false gospel worthy of anathematization (Gal. 1:8-9), but the entire cause of truth is doomed. Martin Luther once put it this way, "In short, without this article of faith that we are justified and saved only through Christ and that apart from him everything is damned, there is no defense or re-

straint, no boundary or limit for every heresy and error, every sect and faction, with everyone thinking up and broadcasting some peculiar idea of his own.”¹

As we shall see later in our series, good works certainly have many positive, God-ordained functions in the life of the believer. Nevertheless, the relation between good works and justification is one of absolute exclusion in that good works “are of no account towards our justification” (Belgic Confession, Art. 24).

Justification

By justification we refer to that saving work of God whereby He, through the gospel, speaks to the guilty elect sinner in his consciousness and declares, “As touching my law, I find no fault in you, for I have imputed the guilt of all your sins to Christ my Son who bore your punishment. I behold you as righteous, as if you have perfectly fulfilled all that obedience which my law requires, for I have imputed to you the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ my Son. The light and favor of my countenance shines upon you. You have the right to every spiritual blessing stored up in Jesus Christ.” Grafted into the living Savior by an inseparable union, the believing sinner consciously appropriates to himself the righteousness of Christ. Not by any of the works he has done, but by faith in Jesus Christ and His perfect work the sinner has a right standing before the Holy God. This is justification.

Theologians commonly explicate the concept of justification by making various distinctions. Some speak of an *eternal* justification (think: counsel) whereby God eternally pronounces His elect people righteous in Christ. There is an *objective* justification (think: cross) which refers to the redemptive work of the crucified and risen Christ to secure the justification we enjoy. There is justification in the *subjective* sense (think: consciousness) which is the declaration of God in the gospel that the believer personally receives and enjoys by faith. And, there is a *final* justification (think: court of heaven) when God, at the end of history, pronounces His people righteous before the whole world of men and angels. The third sense (subjective) is what the Bible means by justification by faith and it is this concept we intend by our use of the term justification. There is yet another distinction within that third sense above, and that is between (1) the *state* of justification entered into when one first believes—an everlasting and unlosable status that cannot be forfeited or undone even in mel-

ancholy falls when the justified believer is unconscious of his status (see Canons V, 6), and (2) the justification that is the *continuing and oft-repeated pronouncement* of God as He takes His people who come crying to Him for mercy and acquits them so that they, like the publican, go down to their house justified (Luke 18:14).²

With studied appeals to the Old Testament, the apostle Paul forcefully impressed upon the apostolic churches the truth that our good works are of no account towards our justification, for justification is by faith alone. “For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness,” (Rom. 4:3-5; see also Rom. 3:28; 5:1; Gal. 2:16).

The believer does not stand before the tribunal of God and look to his good works as the ground on which he expects to be declared righteous. Without any hesitation, the believer confesses—personally confesses regarding his own good works—that his good works are of no account towards his justification, so much so, that he with fervency of spirit renounces every good work he has ever performed. Justification is by faith alone, not by works. This confession belongs to the ABC’s of the Reformed faith.

The assurance of justification

Neither is the *assurance* of justification attained or maintained by our good works. The assurance of justification is by faith alone. It is erroneous to teach that justification is by faith alone but the assurance of justification is by works or by faith and works.

First of all, the Scriptures do not distinguish between justification and the assurance of justification as if they are two essentially different things, and as if it were possible to receive God’s pronouncement by faith but have no assurance of that justification. The assurance of justification is intrinsic to justification by faith, so much so, that if the sinner does not have assurance of his justification, it is because he does not exercise faith in the One who justifies the ungodly. According to Jesus’ doctrine of justification by faith alone taught in the well known parable of Luke 18:9-14, which concludes, “I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other,” there are not various ways to go

1 Martin Luther, “The Sermon on the Mount” in *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan, American ed., vol. 21 (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), 59.

2 The clearest and most helpful presentation of this one-time/repeated distinction can be found in David J. Engelsma, *Gospel Truth of Justification* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017), 224-242.

home justified. One either goes home justified or he does not. According to the parable, the proud, self-righteous Pharisee who trusted in his works instead of Christ did not go home justified, while the humble publican who disdained all his works and sought God's merciful provision of a sacrifice did go home justified. For a believer to go home justified is for a believer to go home *assured* that he is justified.

Secondly, Scripture teaches very plainly that justification is *by faith*. According to Lord's Day 7 of the Heidelberg Catechism, for me to hear the promise of the gospel and believe *by faith* that I am justified on account of the merits of Christ is not only for me to have a *certain knowledge* that God has remitted all my sins, declared me righteous, and given me the right to eternal life, but it is for me to be *confidently assured* of these things. According to Lord's Day 23, when I belong to Christ and receive Him by a true and living faith, God "grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, even so, as if I never had had nor committed any sin, yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me." If justification is by faith, and assurance is an essential element of that faith, then what more could my works add to reassure me that I am right with God as I receive by faith the whole Christ in all His perfect works?

We might be plagued by doubts about our justification as our conscience testifies against us. A believer might go home from church with a soul paralyzed in terror at the thought of the impending judgment of God. Nevertheless, that doubt is owing to no infirmity in the pure gospel and its power to give assurance. Neither is that doubt owing to any inherent inadequacy in faith as such, as if a living, conscious faith is insufficient for assurance of justification. Nor does that doubt suggest the believer has lost the principle of faith or the unlosable status of justification enjoyed when he first believed. Rather, those doubts and fears are to be explained by sins, as well as the powerful assaults and temptations of Satan, and the carnal flesh of unbelief that as an old man hates the gospel and strives tirelessly against the new man of faith. In the bitter struggle of the spiritual man, sometimes faith grows dim. But God the Spirit, through the gospel, will bring a richer season of grace and fan that waning flame of faith so that the believer looks again to the Lamb of God slain for him and his salvation.

The practical solution to the doubting believer who fears God's impending wrath and the prospect of going to hell is not, "Look to your works to regain assurance that you are righteous." To the trembling sinner, the

call of the gospel is not "Get to work!" or "Look to your works to help find assurance!" but "Believe! Stop dwelling on your sins. Behold, the Lamb of God!" Should we stand before God's tribunal and look to our works, those works condemn us, fill our conscience with fear, terror, and dread, cause us to tremble, and alas consume us (see Belgic Confession, Art. 23). Justification, which is the assurance of justification, is by faith alone.

The experience of justification

Neither is the *experience* of justification derived from our good works. The experience of justification is by faith alone. It is erroneous to teach that justification is by faith alone but the experience of justification is by works or by faith and works.

The experience of justification is the certain blessedness that the believer experiences when God's verdict is sounded and effectually carried by the Spirit into the believer's heart, awakening him in the forum of his consciousness to the reality of his righteousness. Like David, the justified believer is blessed (Ps. 32:1), and blessedness was not only an objective reality to be stated *about* David, but a real experience of happiness *in* David. The apostle Paul further defines this experience as "peace" in Romans 5:1, so that to be justified is to enjoy blessed relief as the sweet gospel sounds of the Savior's "Peace Be Still" blow over the turbulent waters of the guilt-stricken soul and bring great calm. In the teaching of Jesus, the experience of justification was enjoyed when the publican "went down to his house justified" (Luke 18:14). That seemingly nondescript statement concerning the justified publican comes to life when contrasted with the earlier statements in Luke 18:13 describing that vexed sinner's bitter experience in the temple as he was smiting his breast in agony, covering his eyes in humiliation, and crying out to God for mercy. When the publican went home justified, his inner turmoil was gone and surely he was happily looking heavenward and praising God in the loftiest strains. Blessed experience!

According to the Scriptures, this experience of blessedness comes by faith, not works. In Psalm 32:1-2 David exclaims, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity...." Then the apostle Paul appeals to those words of David as a biblical ground for his doctrine of justification by faith alone, teaching in Romans 4:6-8, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, saying, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will

not impute sin.” Inspired by the Spirit, Paul interprets and expounds David’s words in Ps. 32:1-2 to mean that the man who is blessed is the man to whom God imputeth righteousness *without works*. When God imputes righteousness, bringing His gracious verdict into the believing sinner’s consciousness through the instrument of faith, God brings happiness. Furthermore, in Romans 5:1 Paul returns to the experience of the justified sinner and teaches that we do not enjoy peace through our good works but through our Lord Jesus Christ whom we embrace by faith, “Therefore being

justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

The believer performs good works. Who would be so foolish to deny it? Faith is always fruitful. Nevertheless, when it comes to the concept or category of justification and our legal standing before God, there is absolutely no place for our good works. Justification is by faith alone.

Next time, we will enter the divine courtroom where the legal act of justification occurs and even plainer will the truth of justification by faith alone become.



Strength of youth

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

The man of the house

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2020, p. 210.

Not all godly men will be husbands, and not all godly men will be fathers. But, ordinarily, God’s will is that a man marry and have children. He must know, then, what it means to be a faithful husband and father. The previous article in this series on biblical manhood focused on what it means to be a godly man in marriage. This article addresses how a godly man is to conduct himself as a father. I realize that you young men who are reading this are not yet fathers, but there is profit in knowing what you will soon be called to, God willing.

There is much that could be (and has been) written about the calling of fathers, but I want to focus especially on what God says to fathers in Ephesians 6:4: “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

Fatherly position

Take note of the fact that this calling is addressed specifically to fathers: “And, ye *fathers*....”

The point of addressing fathers is not to exclude mothers. In Ephesians 5 husbands and wives are said to be one flesh, so to speak of fathers is to speak also of mothers. In addition, Ephesians 6:1 says that children are to obey their parents (plural), and verse 2 says that they are to honor both father and mother. What is said here to fathers also applies to mothers.

In fact, mothers have an essential place in the work

of childrearing (cf. I Tim. 2:15; Tit. 2:5). To mothers falls the lion’s share of the work of rearing covenant children. They are home with the children throughout the day, caring for their needs and instructing them in the ways of the Lord. In the end, mothers will spend more time with the children and have more of a hand in their rearing than fathers.

The main reason why fathers are addressed specifically here is that fathers are the heads of their homes, and the *responsibility* for the rearing of the children falls first of all to them. In Ephesians 5 the husband is called to be the head of his wife, and by implication he is also the head of his children and of the entire home. The father will have to answer before God for how his children were reared.

It is important that future fathers take this to heart. There is a wrong idea among some that fathers do not have to be involved in the rearing of the children but can leave this to the mothers. There is a danger that fathers are gone out of the house too much for work, for recreations (for example: golf, hunting), or even for the work of the church. There is also the danger that, while home, fathers are essentially “checked out,” because they are playing video games, watching TV, tinkering in the garage, or taking a nap. And meanwhile the poor mothers are at their wit’s end trying to rear the children alone. This is a shirking of fatherly duty. Fathers must be home with their wives and children and, when home, must be actively involved in the nurture of the children.

Fathers have been given the weighty responsibility to be models to their children of the Fatherhood of God (cf. Ps. 103:13). God is the perfect, loving Father, and earthly fathers must strive to imitate Him as the spiritual heads of their homes.¹

The fundamental calling that God gives to fathers as heads of their homes is that they “bring [their children] up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.”

The word translated “bring up” means “to nourish, promote health and strength.” The idea is similar to that of caring for a plant. When caring for a plant, you have to be careful to give it the right balance of water, light, and fertilizer. Your goal is to promote the healthy growth of that plant so that it bears good fruit.

Our homes must be greenhouses where our children can be brought up as healthy “olive plants” (Ps. 128:3). The goal of our parenting is that our children are brought to spiritual maturity. We labor that they might grow physically, mentally, emotionally, relationally, and spiritually as strong, healthy sons and daughters of God. Children ordinarily cannot grow to maturity on their own, just as a plant ordinarily cannot grow without care and attention. God is pleased to bring children to maturity by the careful oversight, direction, and guidance of parents.

Fathers “bring up” their children by means of “nurture.” The word “nurture” is a comprehensive word that refers to the whole process of training or instructing the child, but the word can also refer specifically to the discipline of our children (as it is used in Heb. 12:7).

In order to bring up a child, parents must give more than positive instruction. Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child, and the way to drive it out of him is by means of the rod of discipline (cf. Prov. 22:15). In order for our children to grow into spiritual maturity, they must learn to turn from the way of sin, and that comes through discipline. Fathers especially must be involved here. As the head and protector of his children, his greatest concern is to protect them from sin. Fathers must not only encourage the weary mother who disciplines the children all day while he is at work, but he must relieve his wife of this responsibility when he is home.

Fathers also “bring up” their children by “admoni-

tion.” This word means literally “to put something into the mind of another, to counsel and teach.” When we hear the word admonition, we often think of the negative, of telling someone they are doing something wrong (which is part of what is meant here). But the word also carries with it the idea of positive instruction and encouragement.

Children need this as well. For them to be brought up, they need more than just correction and discipline. They need to be taught positively the Word of God. We must teach our children about salvation from sin in Jesus Christ, which is their deepest and most fundamental need. We must teach them to view every aspect of earthly life through the lens of Scripture. And we must teach them positively how to live a holy, godly life. Again, fathers must take the lead here. As the heads of their homes, fathers must be spiritual leaders who are actively involved in the instruction of their children.

Serving God’s precious, covenant children in this way is a tremendous privilege for a father, but it is also a weighty responsibility! Our best efforts are required as fathers!

Fatherly provocation

There is a great danger that we fathers face in the rearing of our children. Ephesians 6:4 addresses this when it says, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath...” To provoke our children to wrath means that by our sinful actions we make our children angry and bitter.

This does not mean that fathers may never do anything that upsets their children. There are some who view parenting that way. The moment their child pouts, daddy and mommy run to fix the problem by giving their little baby whatever he/she wants. But this is not the way we are to parent. There are times in the course of our faithful parenting that we are going to make our children upset and irritated. There are times when they are not going to get their way, when they have to do things they do not like, when they need to be admonished and disciplined. The explanation for their anger then is not sin on our part as fathers, but a sinful response on the part of the children.

What Ephesians 6 is talking about is provoking our children to anger by our sins as fathers. By our sins as fathers we can do tremendous spiritual harm to our children. We provoke them to wrath. Because of our sins the children can become discouraged and angry with us and lose respect for us, which in turn may be the occasion for them to rebel against us. But not only do the children come to resent their fathers, they may come to resent everything that fathers stand for. They

¹ The idea that fathers (and mothers) are to be imitators of the heavenly Father in the rearing of their children is the subject of a little pamphlet by David J. Engelsma, “As a Father Pitieth His Children” (Grand Rapids: Evangelism Committee of First Protestant Reformed Church, 1998). If I could make all new parents read just one thing on parenting, this would be it. More than anything else, this work has aided me in my own parenting, and I keep going back to it again and again.

resent the faith their fathers confess and the church their fathers attend. In the end, they may become bitter and angry toward the God of their fathers. This does not excuse the sin of the children in responding this way, but it simply shows the disastrous effects of our sins as fathers.

The parallel in Colossians 3:21 also says that the result of our fatherly sins is that the children become “discouraged,” which carries the idea of being broken in spirit. Our sins can so harm our children that they become broken down, disheartened, and hopeless.

Consider the following ways in which fathers can provoke their children to wrath:

1. We can provoke our children to wrath by abusing our authority, by being severe, by being angry and impatient with them. We can discipline them in anger, lose our temper and shout at them when they do something wrong, and generally be distant and unloving.

2. We can provoke our children to wrath by being unjust, unreasonable, and inconsistent. We might be unfair in the rules that we set or in the discipline that we administer. Or we might be inconsistent, saying one thing at one moment and another thing at another moment.

3. We can provoke our children to wrath by our discouragement of them. We can be always negative, telling them that they did something wrong, pointing out their mistakes, and never positively encouraging them for the good that they do. We might even put them down in front of other adults in our children’s presence.

4. We can provoke our children to wrath by playing favorites. Think about the damage to Isaac’s home when he favored Esau. Think about the damage to Jacob’s home when he favored Joseph. We do the same damage when we do not love and treat our children equally.

5. We can provoke our children to wrath by our hypocrisy. We confess to love Christ and to be faithful members of the church, but in private we show the opposite by our constant criticism of the church. We

tell our children not to love the things of the world, but our own life shows a love for the world. We tell our children to flee the sinful entertainment of the world, and we ourselves indulge in it. Our children are not ignorant; they can tell when we are being hypocritical.

6. We can provoke our children to wrath by our neglect of them. We simply do not spend much time with our children. We hand them off to others to care for. We plop them in front of the screen to babysit them. We are so busy with our own interests and pursuits that we neglect them. Maybe we salve our conscience by thinking that we can take them on a vacation and spend time with them, but the rest of the time neglect them.

7. We can provoke our children to wrath by making the home a miserable place to live. When husband and wife do not love one another but are constantly arguing and fighting, there is great damage done to the children. One of the most important things we can do as fathers for our children is love their mother, speak highly of her, and support her in her work.

There are other ways in which fathers can provoke their children to wrath, but

these are some of the more common.² Fathers must be so careful to guard against this danger and do nothing to stunt the spiritual growth of their children.

Fatherly prayer

Recognizing the weighty position into which they have been placed and confessing their many sins and shortcomings, fathers will be men of prayer. They will nurture their children from their knees, knowing that God alone can work in the hearts of their children and give the increase.

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it...” (Ps. 127:1).

We can provoke our children to wrath by our hypocrisy. We confess to love Christ and to be faithful members of the church, but in private we show the opposite by our constant criticism of the church. We tell our children not to love the things of the world, but our own life shows a love for the world. We tell our children to flee the sinful entertainment of the world, and we ourselves indulge in it. Our children are not ignorant; they can tell when we are being hypocritical.

² Cf. the list of twenty-five ways that parents provoke their children to wrath given in Lou Priolo, *The Heart of Anger* (Amityville, NY: Calvary Press, 1997).



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Daniel Kleyn, missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, Philippines

Reformed versus Arminian missions (2) Different goals

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

In our previous article we noted that the significant doctrinal differences between Reformed and Arminian churches result in differences in their mission work. The overarching difference is that while the Arminian approach is individualistic, the Reformed approach is covenantal. This accounts for a difference with regard to the *objects* of mission work. In general, the objects of Arminian mission work are individuals, whereas the objects of Reformed mission work are families. Why? Because God, who is Himself a family God, has revealed to us that He wills to save and ordinarily does save His people as families (believers and their seed).

But the doctrinal differences between the Reformed and Arminians also account for differences in at least two other areas: their *goals* and their *methods*. We now turn our attention to the differences with regard to *goals*.

The main goal of Arminian missions (and witnessing) is to bring an individual into a personal relationship with Christ. That is basically all. Very little or no thought is given to having that individual join a church and remain an active member in it. The latter is not that important. What matters most (if not exclusively) is that one is brought to exercise his supposed free will and to accept Christ as his Savior.

That this is the case is evident from the following “mission statements” of various Arminian churches: “Helping lost, broken people become passionate, devoted followers of Jesus Christ”; “Rescuing one another to follow Jesus every day”; “To present the gospel of Jesus Christ in such a way that it turns non-Christians into converts, converts into disciples, and disciplines into mature, fruitful leaders, who will in turn go into the world and reach others for Christ.”¹

That the goal of Arminianism is conversion is also evident from what traveling evangelists usually do at their crusades. Their desire is to have people come forward to accept Christ and to commit their lives to Him.

Toward the end of their services they issue an altar call. Everything that precedes the altar call is done with a view to that altar call. In fact, if no one comes forward, or too few do, the service often continues until the audience responds. And what usually happens is that if an individual does come forward to “give his life to Christ,” that is the end of it. Little is done with regard to having that person join a church. The new convert is left without a means to be spiritually nourished and to grow in faith. Having “converted” these people, the evangelist and his team consider their work done. They pack up their tent, their stage, bands, choirs, and all their other “tools of trade,” and move on, boasting of how many souls they have saved. Meanwhile, the one who has supposedly been saved is left (for the most part) to fend for himself. And as a result, often these new “converts” end up falling back into an ungodly life.

The goal of Reformed missions, however, is to bring the elect of God, with their families, into covenant fellowship with God and Christ, and with the people of God within an instituted church. That is, the goal of Reformed mission work is not simply the salvation of God’s people, but also their church membership. For the believer needs to be a member of a church institute. All who are saved are “bound to join and unite themselves” to a true church of Christ on this earth (Belgic Confession, Art. 28).

That this is a Reformed goal is seen, for example, from the language used in the Constitutions of some of our denomination’s Evangelism Committees. One such Constitution states the following: “In obedience to the command of Christ to preach the gospel to every creature, the church must bring the whole counsel of God to all men, in order to lead them into fellowship with Christ and His church.”

Church membership is and must be our goal, first of all, because it is in the church where the truth of the gospel is preached that one finds Christ. Christ is there in the preaching. The saved sinner, therefore, needs that preaching. He needs it because He needs Christ. There

¹ These mission statements were gathered from the Internet and belong to various Baptist and non-denominational (“community”) churches in the USA.

is no other way of salvation (Acts 4:12). He needs to hear Christ so that he comes to a saving knowledge of God and of his Savior (John 17:3). He needs to hear Christ in order to receive continued assurance of forgiveness and life eternal. He needs to hear the gospel because only then will he be preserved in his faith and grow in his spiritual life (Rom. 1:16; II Pet. 3:18). Without the preaching, one's faith weakens and one's spiritual life suffers and declines.

Another reason why church membership needs to be a goal of Reformed missions is that participation in worship is the means by which one enjoys covenant fellowship with Christ and with God. We enjoy this in the church service through God speaking to us and we speaking to Him. At the heart of God's speech to us is the forgiveness of our sins. Without that forgiveness, fellowship with God would be impossible (Is. 59:2). We need to be forgiven, and to know that we are. And Christ alone can provide that forgiveness. By means of preaching He says to the sinner, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28). The rest that He gives (and which is worked in our hearts by the Spirit) is that of knowing we are forgiven, we are at peace with God, and therefore we can enjoy covenant fellowship with Him. For this reason, too, it is crucial that church membership be a goal of mission work.

Another significant reason why Reformed mission work involves bringing new believers into the church is the blessing of the communion of saints. God's people need each other. They are members together of the body of Christ, and their experience of belonging to that body and to each other does not wait until heaven but is meant to be enjoyed already in the church on earth. Through that fellowship with each other, the members of Christ edify one another. They comfort those who are sorrowing. They lift up those who are weak. They bear one another's burdens. They encourage each other in life's difficulties. They restore each other when they fall into sin. They help and encourage each other to walk together on the straight and narrow way that leads to life eternal. The newly converted sinner needs all this too, and thus needs to become a member of a true church.

But there is still more. The covenantal goal of missions has in view that the covenant pervades the life of those who are saved. They are not only brought into the covenant fellowship of God and of His people in the church, but flowing out of that, the covenant life is established within their homes and daily lives. They know God's friendship. They experience the reality that they are walking through life with their sovereign

Friend at their side. He walks with them through the valleys. He is with them at work, in school, and in every area of life. And He establishes His covenant in their homes and families, sovereignly fulfilling His promise to save believers and their seed. There are exceptions, of course, but we know that that is the ordinary way God works. In order to experience and enjoy the covenant in his home life, a new believer needs to become a member of a faithful church that preaches and teaches all these truths concerning the covenant.

All of this means that the goal of missions is to establish churches. This is exactly what the apostles did, as recorded in the book of Acts. Where the preaching resulted in a gathering of believers, churches were established. The apostles understood that the people of God needed to become members in instituted churches so that they could feast spiritually each Lord's Day. The apostles, therefore, worked diligently to establish congregations that had their own officebearers and that could be called "churches."

By the grace of God, that has been and continues to be our goal in mission work, too. Prof. D. Engelsma puts it this way: "Evangelism does not end with 'getting someone saved,' but continues in their being taught to confess the truth in the true church. ...For this reason it is also essential in the work of evangelism that those brought to the saving knowledge of the truth be directed to join a true church, a soundly Reformed church. No Reformed missionary could say to a convert, 'Now join the church of your choice.'"²

The person who has expressed an interest in and love for the truth of God needs to come to and eventually join the church where the truth is faithfully maintained, for there alone will he hear the voice of Christ. By means of that faithful preaching, Christ works in the hearts of His elect to give them the blessed experience of the riches of His grace and of His covenant.

All of this means that an essential element of Reformed mission work is the establishment of indigenous Reformed churches. This is pointed out by the missiologist, John M. L. Young, in his definition of missions: "Missions is the work of the Triune God, through His Church, of sending Christ's ambassadors to all nations to proclaim His whole Word for the salvation of lost men, the establishment of indigenous churches, and the coming of God's kingdom, all for the glory of God."³

2 David J. Engelsma, "Evangelism and the Reformed Faith" (South Holland, IL: Evangelism Committee of the Protestant Reformed Church, 1994), 12.

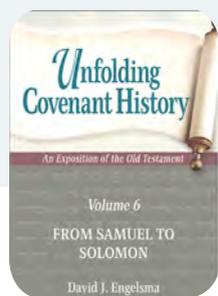
3 John M. L. Young, *Missions: The Biblical Motive and Aim* (Pittsburgh: Crown and Covenant Publications, 2007), 3.

The establishment of such churches must be our goal so that those who are brought to faith in Christ can join themselves to those churches and receive the means of grace there.

Acts 2:47 confirms what we have been saying. There we read, “And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.” God’s people were added “to the church.” The reference is to the church as an institute. This passage does not refer to the church as the universal body of Christ, for the elect believers were already members of that church and had been from eternity.

Those who were brought to faith in Christ were added to the church as an institute, there to hear the gospel, to enjoy fellowship with God by means of His Word and Spirit, and to live in fellowship with the people of God.

That is the biblical and Reformed goal of missions. We must keep it always in view. And whenever this goal is attained, we thank the Lord for His goodness and for His sovereign hand in establishing new Reformed churches and bringing new believers to be members of such instituted churches on this earth.



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

Unfolding Covenant History: From Samuel to Solomon (vol. 6), by David J. Engelsma. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2020. \$28.95. 224 pages, hardcover. [Reviewed by Rev. David Noorman, pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.]

As any reader of the first five volumes of the *Unfolding Covenant History* series would expect, volume six lives up to its name as a treatment of Old Testament history from a covenantal perspective. The latest volume, *From Samuel to Solomon*, covers an important and exciting development in the history of God’s covenant: the manifestation of God’s covenant in the structure and glory of a king and his kingdom.

The history of this volume is expansive, covering the life and ministry of Samuel, the rise and fall of Saul, and the glorious, yet imperfect, reigns of David and Solomon. The pages of holy Scripture that pertain to this epoch of history are expansive as well, and thus the reader will appreciate the author’s efforts to bring it all together in a way that is both thorough and succinct, both insightful and readable.

The aim of the series is to demonstrate that Old Testament history is covenant history; the burden of this volume, *From Samuel to Solomon*, is to demonstrate that kingdom history *is* covenant history. That kings and kingdoms are front and center in this history in no wise detracts or distracts from God’s covenant, but rather it enables God’s people to see the covenant of grace in a new light. In the author’s introductory words, “Covenant and kingdom are not rivals. They are two aspects of one and the same saving relationship of God in Christ with his elect people. The covenant is a royal covenant; the kingdom is a covenantal

kingdom. Jesus Christ is both a sovereign friend and a friendly sovereign” (xv).

The reader will enjoy the sound and edifying treatment of familiar and favorite Bible stories, and along the way the reader will be introduced to or reminded of other stories that are sometimes overlooked or misunderstood. When difficult questions of interpretation are faced, the author is careful to make his case from the word itself, and thus he helps the reader to face his own questions in the same way. This approach was much appreciated.

From beginning to end, the history from Samuel to Solomon is treated as our Lord Jesus Christ intended it to be, as the inspired revelation of Himself as the royal Mediator of the covenant. The history covers highs and lows, successes and failures, but in both extremes the reader is directed to Jesus Christ as our true Mediator and eternal King. As a result, the reader will be edified, not only by exciting chapters like the chapter covering David’s victorious warfare, but also by sobering chapters, such as the treatment of David’s lamentable fall into sin and the divine chastisement that followed it.

Unfolding Covenant History continues to be a valuable series for Reformed students of the Word. I am thankful that Professor Engelsma and the RFPA have continued to the publication of this volume, and I heartily recommend it to all. I sincerely hope that a seventh volume might not be out of the realm of possibility.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

There are a number of Protestant Reformed ministers who have passed on to their eternal home, leaving dear widowed wives behind to await the time of their homecoming while they continue to serve the Lord and His people. Do you know how many of these wives remain? Answer later in this column.

Congregational activities

Let's just say that at the time of this writing congregational activities are few, and mostly due to the advancement of the novel COVID-19 (coronavirus) in our country. Many or most of our churches have canceled or postponed all activities, including Bible studies, catechism, and worship services. Most of us have never seen the like. What follows is an interesting quote from Martin Luther concerning a deadly plague in his time. We include this background note: "In 1527 a case of the bubonic plague was found in Wittenberg, the small town where Luther lived and where the Reformer had nailed his 95 theses to the Castle Church. During that time, he wrote these wise words that can help inform the way we approach things happening in our world at this time."

...I shall ask God mercifully to protect us. Then I shall fumigate, help purify the air, administer medicine and take it. I shall avoid places and persons where my presence is not needed in order not to become contaminated and thus perchance inflict and pollute others and so cause their death as a result of my negligence. If God should wish to take me, he will surely find me and I have done what he has expected of me and so I am not responsible for either my own death or the death of others. If my neighbor needs me however I shall not avoid place or person but will go freely as stated above. See this is such a God-fearing faith because it is neither brash nor foolhardy and does not tempt God ("Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague" in *Luther's Works*, vol. 43, pp. 13-32).

Mission activities

The government of the Philippines has continued restricting travel inside the country. This limits the work our missionaries are able to do in areas outside their immediate vicinity. The Luzon lockdown continued through April 30. The Holsteges and Smits are schooling their children at home. We remain confident that in spite of this "the

word of God is not bound" (II Tim. 2:9). May that word yet go forth in these uncertain times to the saving and strengthening of His people, and to the glory of His name.

Minister activities

Rev. Martin McGeown (Limerick, Ireland) announced his acceptance of the call extended to him by the congregation of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI. And certainly it was in God's providence that Rev. McGeown received this call at this time. May God bless Rev. McGeown as he prepares to move and serve the congregation there.

First Edmonton PRC formed a new trio of Revs. J. Engelsma, J. Laning, and M. Vanderwal. From this trio their call was extended to Rev. J. Laning, pastor in Hull, IA PRC, who declined this call on April 19.

Grandville, MI PRC has a new trio for minister-on-loan to Singapore: Revs. G. Eriks, E. Guichelaar, and R. Kleyn.

Unity PRC of Grand Rapids, MI formed a new trio of Revs. E. Guichelaar, J. Mahtani, and C. Spronk. On April 15 they issued a call to Rev. J. Mahtani.

Hope PRC of Walker, MI called Rev. J. Mahtani on April 14 from a trio that also included Revs. C. Griess and C. Spronk.

Kalamazoo, MI also called Rev. J. Mahtani from her trio that also had on it Revs. C. Haak and M. McGeown.

Young adult activities

COLORADO RETREAT: Save the date August 3-6, 2020 for a young adults retreat in Colorado! Did you know that Colorado is called the "Centennial State" because it became a state in 1876, one hundred years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence?

Trivia answer

As far as we are aware, there are five widowed wives of deceased Protestant Reformed ministers who continue to serve God's purpose and await their call to glory. They are: Mrs. Phyllis Bekkering, Mrs. Pauline Breen, Mrs. Velerie Kuiper, Mrs. Wilmina Lanting, and Mrs. Clara Van Baren. We are thankful to these godly women who shared their husbands for the good of God's people as ministers in the churches.

"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 Loveland PRC, Loveland, Colorado extend our sympathies to Mel and JoAnne Weimeister, whose daughter **Carol** passed away early Sunday morning, April 5, at the age of 61. She is survived by her husband and two children. In these times when families are unable even to gather together in times of sorrow, it is important for us to remember that “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.... The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge” (Psalm 46:1, 11).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Eric Solanyk, Clerk

Wedding anniversary

With thanksgiving, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **Perry and Char Van Egdome**, who will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on May 28, 2020. We praise God for their years of marriage, lasting love, dedication to church, school, and family, and for their Christ-centered home that has been a blessing to so many. “But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children; to such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them” (Psalm 103:17, 18).

Paul and Erin DeJong
Jenna, Evan, Luke, Kara, Ryan, Mary, Hannah
Benjamin and Sarah Mowery
Leah, Willem, Marie, Nathan, Eli, Sean,
James, Naomi
Joel and Michelle Van Egdome
Levi, Kate, Moriah, Tyler, Jesse, Joelle, Logan
Jeff and Bethany TeSlaa
Joseph and Sherry Mantel
Calvin, Charlie, Davis
Kurt and Valen DeJong
Bennet
Dean and Anna Brummel
Liam
Jerron Van Egdome
Doon, Iowa

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC, Loveland, Colorado, extend our sympathies to John and Lara Moore and family, and to their daughter Molly and Eric Hanko of the Lynden PRC in Lynden, WA. Our merciful heavenly Father took Eric and Molly’s infant daughter, **Clara Lou**, to Himself just before birth. May God sustain these young grieving parents, and the Moore family, in this time of their sorrow, and comfort them with the promise of the gospel in Isaiah 40:11, “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

Rev. Steven Key, President
Eric Solanyk, Clerk

Reminder

Remember that the *Standard Bearer* is published only once during the summer months: June, July, and August.

Call to Synod!!

Synod 2019 appointed Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI the calling church for the 2020 Synod.

The Consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2020 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 9, 2020 at 8:00 A.M., in the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church, Hudsonville, MI.

The pre-synodical service will be held on Monday evening, June 8, at 7:30 P.M. Rev. G. Eriks, president of the 2019 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the Consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Terry Dykstra, 7543 Brewer Dr., Hudsonville, MI. Phone: (616) 797-9734.

Consistory of Trinity PRC
Terry Dykstra, Clerk