# Editor's Notes

This issue of our journal contains articles that will undoubtedly be helpful to ministers, elders, and seminary professors and students. We hope as well that those who do not find themselves at the moment in any of these categories, but who account themselves "ordinary believers," will also be instructed and edified. In the end, this is the great office in the church, the office of all believer. Each of us, by God's grace, occupies this office.

We express thanks to Prof. Douglas Kuiper and Dr. H. David Schuringa for their contribution, "Prayer of Balthasar Lydius." If this is not a name that you immediately recognize, it is one that you will not soon forget after reading his prayer. It is the prayer that Lydius offered immediately prior to the opening session of the Synod of Dordt. So far as we know, our brothers are the first to translate this prayer into English. Though the synod was a Dutch Reformed Synod, the prayer was offered up in Latin—still at that time the language of scholarship and theology. It is a moving prayer by the pastor of the Reformed church of Dordtrecht where the synod was held. The prayer breathes the language of Scripture and the deeply held convictions of the Reformed faith on the part of this servant of God.

Prof. Kuiper has another contribution. It is a continuation of the bibliography of one of the founding fathers of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the Rev. George M. Ophoff, fondly referred to even today as "GMO." The bibliography contains explanations of the different types of works produced by one of the original faculty members of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, as well as an analysis of the enduring value of that which Ophoff produced in a form in which it could be preserved for future generations. Ophoff was indeed one of those men who wrote for the ages.

Prof. Barrett Gritters contributes two articles for this issue of PRTJ. The first is a continuation of his article in the previous issue that demonstrates the competency of pastors and elders to care for and counsel those suffering from depression. Both pastors and elders will be encouraged, as well as motivated, to carry out their calling with

respect to those who find themselves "in the depths." His second contribution concerns the time-honored practice of family visitation, a practice that is often threatened and in many churches has been abandoned. Prof. Gritters' plea on behalf of family visitation calls special attention to the positive fruits of this practice in congregations where pastor and elders take this work seriously.

The undersigned contributes the next-to-the-last section in his "John Calvin Research Bibliography." Included in this contribution are the sections entitled, "Calvin's Doctrine of the Means of Grace, Preaching, and Baptism," "Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper," and "Calvin's Doctrine of Human Government and the State." The two remaining sections, which we hope to publish in the April 2019 issue, conclude the bibliography with "Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things," and "Calvin's View of Worship." We hope that this research bibliography will be a helpful resource to all who are interested in research regarding aspects of Calvin's life, work, and teachings.

And, of course, what some would regard as the best for last—the book reviews. Once again, we have a number of book reviews that summarize and analyze recent publications that may be of interest especially to ministers, professors, and students, as well as to the informed lay person. If there is ever a recently published book that our readers would like to be reviewed in our journal, do not hesitate to send an email request to the editor at: cammenga@prca.org. We are always open to the suggestions of our readers.

Now, take up, read, and enjoy!

*Soli Deo Gloria!*

-RLC

# Prayer of Balthasar Lydius

Douglas J. Kuiper and H. David Schuringa

Balthasar Lydius was a Reformed minister in Dordrecht from 1602-1629, and was delegated by the particular Synod of South Holland to attend the national Synod of Dordt.[1] As the local pastor, two honors fell to him on November 13, 1618: that of preaching a Dutch sermon in the morning before the synod opened, and that of opening the first session of the synod with prayer. He prayed in Latin, in which language all of the business of the Synod was conducted until the foreign delegates were dismissed. Two partial English translations of the prayer have been available for centuries, one of which is based on the memory of some in the audience.[2] What follows is a new and complete translation, based on the Dutch translation of the prayer in the *Acts of the Synod of Dordt*.[3] After the translation the reader will find the Dutch original.

The prayer is ornate. It breathes the language of Scripture. Its long sentences include many subordinate phrases and clauses. As is the Dutch custom, in these long sentences the subject is near the beginning and the verb at the end. This translation divides the long sentences into shorter ones so that the English reader today can better understand the prayer, Biblical citations and allusions are footnoted.

**English Translation of the Prayer of Balthasar Lydius, at the Opening Session of the Synod of Dordt**

Almighty, eternal God, Fountain of all wisdom, goodness and mercy, compassionate Father in Christ! We pray that Thou wilt open

1 Fred van Lieburg, "The Participants at the Synod of Dordt," in *Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis Dordrechtanae, Vol. 1: Acta of the Synod of Dordt,* ed. Donald Sinnema,Christian Moser, and Herman J. Selderhuis (Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015), XCII.

2 Gerard Brandt, *The History of the Reformation In and About the Low Countries* (London: T. Wood, 1722), 3:8. Also, "From the Prayer of Balthazar Lydius," in Samuel Hopkins, *General Liturgy and Book of Common Prayer,* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1883), 44-45.

3 *Acta of Handelingen der Nationale Synod te Dordrecht,* (Kampen: J. H. Bos, n.d.), 2-4.

our lips so that our mouth may declare Thy praise.[4]

We are unworthy of all Thy mercies which Thou hast bountifully bestowed upon the work and workmanship of Thy hands.[5] Not only hast Thou created us according to Thy image,[6] but also, when we through sin had become by nature the children of wrath,[7] Thou didst recreate us according to Thy image.[8] Since we already are indebted to Thee because Thou hast created us, how much more do we owe because Thou hast also freely redeemed us?

It is great and marvelous that man was made in Thy image. How much greater it is that He who thought it not robbery to be equal with God made Himself of no reputation, took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in our likeness,[9] who of God was made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption![10]

Also with these benefits Thou wast not satisfied. We were a people dwelling in the darkness and shadow of death,[11] without hope of salvation, cast off in the unworthiness of our souls, for whom an unknown treasure would be of no use. But Thou hast enlightened us by the revelation of the Sun of righteousness[12] and truth! Without this, we would have perished everlastingly in these errors, not knowing what way we must walk.

The enemy of mankind sowed tares among the wheat while men slept.[13] This darkness gradually gained the upper hand. Yet through the light of the Reformation Thou hast delivered us from a greater darkness than that of Egypt. In these places Thou hast planted Thy vine,[14] whose shadow has covered the mountains and whose branches are the cedars of God.[15]

4 Ps. 51:15
5 Eph. 2:10.
6 Gen. 1:27.
7 Eph. 2:3
8 Col. 3:10.
9 Phil. 2:6-7.
10 1 Cor. 1:30.
11 Is. 9:2.
12 Mal. 4:2.
13 Matt. 13:25.
14 Ps. 80:8.
15 Ps. 80:10.

The enemy of the human race, that great red dragon,[16] begrudged us this blessed state. He spewed water from his mouth like a torrent to sweep us away as with a flood.[17] He raised high the stakes, provoking horrible wars against Thy turtledove.[18] Thy enemies were out to devour Thy congregation in these provinces. But Thou hast delivered our soul from the snare of the fowler,[19] so that even in the Netherlands men of shield and spear[20] were left speechless. Thou hast ordained new weapons and hast become a wall of fire round about the cities. [21]Thou Thyself hast taken possession of the gates of the enemy, [22] that her gates be lifted up, that the King of glory might enter in. [23]

Going forth with our forces, Thou didst instruct the hands of the Illustrious Prince of Orange to do battle.[24] Taking him by the hand, Thou hast broken the bars of the gates of the enemy and hast granted peace to our lands. Thou hast made us fat with the finest of the wheat[25] and crowned us with Thy lovingkindness.[26] Thy footsteps dripped with fatness. [27] The chief of Thy temporal benefits toward us is this, that when the affairs were the weightiest and the storms were the highest, Thou, our Exalted Lord, hast given the rulers a pliable heart to direct Thy people (over which Thou hast appointed them) with wisdom, and especially to judge between good and evil.[28] Thou hast inspired them with sound counsel. Thou hast wonderfully blessed and made them

16 Rev. 12:3. By the "great red dragon," Lydius refers to Satan, working through the Roman Catholic Church and the Spanish Empire..

17 Rev. 12:16.

18 Ps. 74:19.

19 Ps. 91:3, 124:7.

20 1 Sam. 17:47.

21 Zech. 2:5.

22 Gen. 22:17, 24:60.

23 Ps. 24:9.

24 Ps. 144:1. Lydius refers to Prince Maurice who, in July 1617, openly sided with the Counter-Remonstrant cause against Oldenbarnevelt. Oldenbarnevelt was virtually the Prime Minister of the Netherlands (although that was not his official title) and had favored the Arminians.

25 Ps. 81:6, 147:14.

26 Ps. 103:4.

27 Ps. 65:11.

28 1 Kings 3:9.

as anointed children of honor, who would stand with the governor of the whole land.

For these benefits, Thou hast expected lovely grapes from Thy vine, but, behold, it has brought forth wild grapes![29] Thou hast exalted Thy people, and they have despised Thee! Therefore, Thou hast not withheld from us what we deserved.[30] Thou art become as a visitor in the land, as a stranger who remains therein only overnight; as a man of valor who is defeated, and as a strong man who cannot help. Thou hast confounded our lips! The end of the foreign war has almost become the beginning of the internal one.[31] In peacetime the bitterness of Thy Bride has become exceedingly bitter.[32]

Thou hast laid the ax to the tree root, in order to cut down the unfruitful fig tree.[33] Thy inheritance has become like a wounded lion and has roared against Thee. Many shepherds have destroyed Thy vineyard, trodden Thy portion under foot, and made Thy pleasant portion a wilderness, desolate and empty. [34] Nowhere have the comings and goings been peaceful,[35] but exceedingly troubled by rumors of war.[36] This, because we did not heed Thy warnings, O Lord! One people would rise up against the other, one city against another,[37] for Thou hast afflicted them with every misery. [38]

But in Thy wrath Thou hast been mindful of Thy mercies.[39] Thou hast inclined the hearts of the rulers of our fatherland, consuming

29 Is. 5:2. Following his review of the Reformation and victory following the brutal wars with Spain, Lydius now transitions to the Remonstrant controversy at hand.

30 Lam. 3:42.

31 In 1609, the Netherlands and Spain had declared a truce in the Eighty Year war, which truce lasted twelve years. During this truce, the Arminian controversy was at its height, and the country came close to civil war.

32 Jer. 2:32.

33 Matt. 3:10

34 Jer. 12:10.

35 Deut. 28:6.

36 Matt. 24:6.

37 Matt. 24:7.

38 Ps. 119:75.

39 Hab. 3:2.

them with zeal for Thy house[40] so that they have earnestly sought that which serves the peace of Jerusalem.[41]

To this end have they summoned this National Synod in order to inquire at the mouth of the Lord[42] regarding the quarrels that have been stirred up, and in order that Thy law would be a light[43] to disperse the fog of errors. Nevertheless, as everything depends on Thy blessing, O Lord, we pray that Thou wilt preside at this National Synod with Thy Holy Spirit, with the Spirit of truth and of peace. We pray this according to Thy promise, "Where two or three are gathered in my Name, there I will be in the midst of them."[44]

The Holy Scripture must be interpreted by that same Spirit by which it was inspired, and cannot be understood except by pure minds. Therefore, we pray that Thou wilt first cleanse our intentions, then illumine us so that we may indeed understand Thy holy Word and handle it diligently. Grant, O God, that through the Scripture we may mislead no one, nor be misled, but that in it we may seek and find the truth. Having discovered the truth, may we defend it with steadfast faith.

Sanctify us in Thy truth.[45] Grant that we might exalt Thee with one mouth. Permit no divisions among us, but rather grant that we be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.[46] Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.[47] Rather, let us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.[48]

Cause us always to remember that to an extent strife is much better for us who are united with God, than peace which separates us from God. Cause us to remember that truth and peace are two friends and twin sisters, so that peace shall not come to us if we do not cherish truth, her sister.

40 Ps. 69:9; Jn. 2:17.
41 Ps. 122:6.
42 Lev. 24:12.
43 Prov. 6:23.
44 Matt. 18:20.
45 John 17:17.
46 1 Cor. 1:10.
47 Gal. 5:26.
48 Eph. 4:3.

Grant that we, having set aside perverse errors, might consider the matters laid before us, not with sharp subtleties, but by weighing the certainty of the matters themselves, washing away the bitter stain of slander at the river of true reasoning.

Grant those who are wandering to be brought back to the right path. Give them to be not obstinate. Cause them to remember that ignorance, when recognized, is the highest wisdom; that the truth can be that which seems unbelievable to man, and the lie that which seems plausible; and that the greatest victory is to triumph over error exposed.

Since Thou hast commanded us to pray for kings and princes, and for all who are placed in authority, [49] we pray, among others, for those governments whose theological professors are present in this solemn ecclesiastical assembly, as well as for those who are yet expected; [50] and for his royal majesty of Great Britain, James I, who is a courageous and conscientious protector of the true faith. We pray for his son-in-law, the illustrious Prince Elector of the Roman Empire and Palatinate on the Rhine, [51] and for the Chief Magistrate of the Empire. We pray for the illustrious Duke and Elector of Brandenburg, [52] for the illustrious Count of Hesse, [53] for the United Cantons in Switzerland, for the high-borne counts of Nassau and Wetteravia,[54] and for the

49 1 Tim. 2:2.

50 This list includes all the foreign countries that sent a delegation. It omits France, whose king prevented the delegates from making the trip. The modern reader will know where Great Britain, France, and Geneva (Switzerland) are. Bremen and Emden (also known as East Frisia) were in Germany, just across the border from the Netherlands. Brandenburg was in what is today East Germany. Nassau-Wetteravia and Hesse were in what is today West Germany.

51 Frederick V.

52 Johann Sigismund.

53 Maurice I.

54 Nassau and Wetteravia were really one territory. Count John VI had ruled it until his death in 1606. After he died, his sons each ruled a part of the territory. That his sons ruled explains the use of the plural "counts." That their father had been a count explains in part, if not completely, the word "high-borne." Of the sons, Willem Lodewijk (William Louis) was prominent, having married the sister of Maurice, the Prince of Orange.

honorable and worthy Council, the Republics of Geneva, Bremen, and Emden.

Especially we pray for those whom Thou hast placed over us in the Reformed Netherlands: for the exalted lords the States General, and for their exalted deputies to this Synod; for the illustrious and warlike hero, the Prince of Orange, [55] and for the entire house of Nassau; for the noble-minded lords states of Holland and West Friesland;[56] for the most wise noble-minded lords, the Presidents and Counselors of both of the Courts of Justice; and for the respectable Council of this city, the Lord Sheriff, Mayor, Aldermen, and the eight judges.

Grant that each and every one of them might serve Thee with reverence and rejoice with trembling. Confirm their scepter and secure their throne in ever-increasing measure, that they might remain faithful, nurturing fathers [57] of Thy church in these regions.

Bless also the citizens of this city. Grant that they seek above all the kingdom of God and His righteousness. [58] According to Thy loving kindness, provide them that of which they stand in need. Finally, grant that we all together in this assembly may be dedicated to produce what is pleasing to Thee, to the honor of Thy holy name, the preservation of the truth, and divine blessing for the church and the republic. Amen.

55 Prince Maurice of Nassau.

56 In this paragraph Lydius prayed not for church officials, but for government officials. His mention of two provincial governments, Holland and West Friesland, is striking. For over a decade, the center of the Arminian controversy was in their political jurisdiction, and the provincial government for the most part favored the Arminians. Other provincial governments had to urge these two provincial governments to agree to a national synod. When finally they did agree, the States General set the date for the synod. Probably this is why Lydius referred particularly to these provincial governments. The interested reader can find more about this in "Historical Foreword Addressed to the Reformed Churches of Christ" in Homer C. Hoeksema, *Voice of Our Fathers: An Exposition of the Canons of Dordrect* (Grand Rapids: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1980), 45-102.

57 Isa. 49:23.

58 Matt. 6:33.

**Dutch Version of the Prayer of Balthasar Lydius, at the Opening Session of the Synod of Dordt**

Almachtige, eeuwige God, Fontein aller wijsheid, goedheid en barmhartigheid, goedertierenste Vader in Christus! wij bidden U, dat Gij onze lippen wilt openen, opdat onze mond uwen lof verkondige. Wij zijn onwaardig alle uwe ontfermingen, die Gij aan het werk en maaksel uwer handen mildelijk hebt besteed. Want Gij hebt ons niet alleenlijk geschapen naar uw beeld, maar ook door de zonde geworden zijnde kinderen des toorns van nature, naar uw beeld herschapen. Indien wij al dat wij zijn, U schuldig zijn, omdat Gij ons gemaakt hebt; wat zullen wij vergelden dat Gij ons alzoo vrij gekocht hebt? Want indien het wonderbaarlijk en groot geweest is mensch geboren te worden, naar uw beeld, veel grooter is het geweest, dat Degene, die het geen roof geacht heeft Gode gelijk te zijn, Zich verwaardigd heeft mensch te worden naar ons beeld, en de gedaante eens dienstknechts aangenomen hebbende, ons van Gode geworden is tot wijsheid, gerechtigheid, heiligmaking en verlossing. Maar met deze weldaden niet tevreden zijnde (want een onbekende schat is niet nut) hebt Gij ons, een volk zittende in de duisternis en schaduwe des doods, zonder hope der zaligheid, op het veld daarhenen geworpen in de smaadheid onzer zielen, door openbaring van de Zonne der gerechtigheid en waarheid verlicht, zonder dewelke wij in de dwalingen eeuwig zouden zijn omgekomen, niet wetende wat weg wij wandelen moesten. En als de vijandelijke mensch onkruid midden in de tarwe, terwijl de menschen sliepen, gezaaid en de duisterheid van die allengskens de overhand had genomen, hebt Gij ons door het licht der Reformatie verlost uit de meer dan Egyptische duisternis. Gij hebt uwen wijnstok in deze plaatsen geplant, wiens schaduwe de bergen bedekt heeft, en zijne ranken de cederen Gods. En als de vijand des menschelijken geslachts, die groote en roode draak, dezen gelukkigen stand, ons nu misgunnende, water als stroomen, om ons met den vloed van dien weg te spoelen, uit zijnen mond was schietende, de baren zeer hoog gingen, en alleszins schrikkelijke oorlogen tegen uwe tortelduif en uwe eenige had verwekt, en uwe vijanden daarop uit waren, om uwe gemeente in deze Provinciën te verslinden, hebt Gij onze ziel uit den strik des jagers verlost, ook zelfs, wanneer men in Nederland van

schild en spies niet wist te spreken. Nieuwe krijgen hebt Gij verkoren, de poorten der vijanden hebt Gij zelf omgekeerd, zijt een vurige muur den steden geweest, die hare poorten geopend hadden, opdat de Koning der eere daarin zou gaan. Daarna zijt Gij uitgetrokken met onze heirlegers, hebt de handen van den Doorluchtigsten Prins van Oranje leeren strijden, en hem bij de hand vattende, hebt Gij de grendelen der vijandelijke poorten verbroken, hebt onzen landpalen vrede gegeven, hebt ons vet gemaakt met bet vette der tarwe, met uwe goedertierenheid gekroond, en uwe voeten hebben gedruipt van vettigheid. En, hetgeen het hoofd uwer tijdelijke weldaden onder ons is, Gij hebt onzen Hoogmog. Heeren, als de zaken op het zwaarst en de stormen op het hoogst waren, gegeven een buigzaam hart, dat zij uw volk, over 'twelk Gij ze gesteld hadt, met wijsheid richten, en De Eerste tusschen goed en kwaad oordeelen konden. Hebt hun heilzamen raad ingegeven, en wonderbaarlijk gezegend en gemaakt als gezalfde kinderen der eere, die staan zouden bij den Heerschapper des ganschen lands. Gij hebt voor deze uwe weldaden verwacht van uwen wijnstok lieflijke druiven, maar ziet, hij heeft wilde druiven voortgebracht. Gij hebt uw volk verhoogd, en zij hebben U veracht. Daarom hebt Gij ons ook met recht niet gespaard. Gij zijt geworden als een gast in den lande, en als een vreemde, die slechts om te overnachten daarin blijft, als een held, die versaagd is, en als een reus, die niet helpen kan. Gij hebt onze lippen verward, en het einde van den uitheemschen krijg is bijna geweest het beginsel van den innerlijken. In den vrede is de bitterheid uwer Bruid allerbitterst geweest. Gij hebt de bijl aan den wortel van den boom gelegd, om den onvruchtbaren vijgeboom af te houwen; uw erfdeel is geworden als een leeuw in het wond, en heeft tegen U gebruld. Vele herders hebben uwen wijnberg neergeworpen, uw erfdeel vertreden, uw schoonen akker tot een woestijn, eenzaam en lediggemaakt. Den uitgaanden en ingaanden is niet overal vrede geweest, maar schrikkelijke vrees, en zeer vele gedaanten van oorlog; want het heeft niet veel gescheeld, of naar uwe bedreigingen, o Heere! zou het eene volk tegen het andere, de eene stad tegen de andere gestreden hebben, want Gij verstoordet ze met alle benauwdheid. Maar in uwe gramschap zijt Gij gedachtig geweest uwer barmhartigheden. Gij hebt de harten der Regenten des vaderlands geneigd, en met eenen ijver uws huizes ontstoken, dat zij ernstiglijk gezocht hebben hetgeen

tot den vrede van Jeruzalem dienende is. Tot dit einde hebben zij deze Nationale Synode bijeengeroepen, opdat over de verwekte twisten de mond des Heeren gevraagd zou worden, en Uwe wet een licht zou wezen, al de nevelen der dwalingen verdrijvende. Nochtans, dewijl dat alles aan uwen zegen is hangende, o Heere! wij bidden U, dat Gij volgens uwe belofte:Waar twee of drie in mijnen Naam vergaderd zijn, daar wil Ik wezen in het midden van hen, in deze Nationale Synode wilt presideeren met uwen H. Geest, met den Geest der waarheid en des vredes. En dewijl de H. Schriftuur door denzelfden Geest verklaard moet worden, door welken zij ingegeven is, en niet verstaan kan worden, dan door zuivere gemoederen, wij bidden U, dat Gij dezelve eerst wilt reinigen, daarna verlichten, opdat wij uw heilig Woord wel verstaan, en aandachtiglijk handelen mogen. Maak, o God, dat wij niemand door de Schrifturen bedriegen, noch in dezelve dwalen mogen; maar dat wij de waarheid in dezelve zoekende, vinden mogen, en gevonden hebbende, met standvastig geloof verdedigen. Heilig ons in uwe waarheid: geef dat wij uit éénen mond U grootmaken. Laat niet toe, dat in ons scheuringen zouden wezen, maar dat wij volmaakt in éénen en denzelfden zin en gevoelen zijn mogen. Laat ons niet staan naar ijdelen roem, elkander tergende, elkander benijdende, maar zorgvuldiglijk de eenigheid des geestes door den band des vredes bewaren. Maak, dat wij altijd bedenken, dat een zoodanige strijd velen beter is, die ons met God vereenigt, dan die vrede, die ons van God scheidt; en dat het twee vriendinnen en tweelingzusters zijn, de waarheid en de vrede; dat de vrede tot ons niet zal komen, indien wij de waarheid, hare zuster, niet liefhebben. Verleen ons, dat wij, ter zijde gelegd hebbende de verkeerde aandoeningen, de voorgestelde zaken, niet door scherpheid van spitsvondigheden, maar door bondigheid der zaken zelven overwegen, en de bittere vlek der lasteringen met den stroom der waarachtige redenen afwasschen. Geef, dat de dwalenden op den rechten weg wedergebracht worden, dat zij niet hardnekkig zijn, maar zij bedenken, dat de onwetendheid, erkend zijnde, de hoogste wijsheid is:en dat de waarheid wezen kan in hetgeen, dat den mensch ongeloofelijk is, en de leugen in ‘tgeen, dat waarschijnlijk is, en dat het de meeste victorie is, te triumfeeren over een afgelegde dwaling. En dewijl Gij ons geboden hebt te bidden voor koningen en vorsten, en voor diegenen die in hoogheid gesteld zijn, zoo bidden wij U onder

anderen voor degenen, wier Theologen wij in deze kerkelijke plechtige bijeenkomst aanschouwen en nog verwachten:

Voor den machtigsten koning van GrootBrittanje Jacobus I, die een dapper en zorgvuldig beschermer is des waren geloofs. Voor zijnen Schoonzoon, den Doorluchtigsten Prins, Keurvorst des Roomschen Rijks en PaltzGraaf aan den Rijn, en voor den Stadhouder deszelven Rijks. Voor den Doorluchtigsten Hertog en Keurvorst van Brandenburg. Voor den Doorluchtigsten Landgraaf van Hessen. Voor de Vereenigde Kantons in Zwitserland. Voor de Welgeborene Nassausche en Wetteravische Graven.

Voor den Achtbaren en Hoogwaardigen Raad, de Republiek van Geneve, Bremen en Embden. Maar voornamelijk voor diegenen, die Gij over ons in 't Gereformeerde Nederland gesteld hebt: Voor de Hoogmogende Heeren de StatenGeneraal, en voor hunne H. M. Gecommitteerden tot deze Synode. Voor den Doorluchtigen en Strijdbaren Held, den Prins van Oranje, en het gansche huis van Nassau. Voor de Edelmogende Heeren Staten van Holland en WestVriesland. Voor de Hoogwijze E. M. Heeren de Presidenten en Raadsheeren van beide de Hoven van Justitie; ook voor den Achtbaren Raad dezer stad, den Heer Schout, Burgemeester, Schepenen, en de Acht Gezworenen. Geef, dat zij allen en een iegelijk van hen U dienen met vreeze, en zich verblijden met beving. Dat zij zijn en blijven mogen getrouwe Voedsterheeren uwer kerken in deze streken. Bevestig hunnen schepter, en hunnen troon blijve vast voort en voort. Zegen ook de Burgers dezer stad; geef, dat zij vooral het rijk Gods zoeken en zijne gerechtigheid. En wil naar uwe goedertierenheid het tijdelijke als een toemate hun toewerpen. Eindelijk, geef, dat wij allen te zamen, in deze vergadering, gevoelen en voortbrengen mogen, 'tgeen U aangenaam is, ter eere uws heiligen naams, behoudenis der waarheid, en godzalige rust der Kerk en Republiek. Amen.

**Latin Version of the Prayer of Balthasar Lydius, at the Opening Session of the Synod of Dordt**

Following is the prayer of Lydius in Latin. The text is reprinted (with permission) from Donald Sinnema, Christian Moser and Herman J. Selderhuis, eds., ***Acta et Documenta Synodi Nationalis***

***Dordrechtanae (1618-1619)***, vol. II/2: ***Early Sessions of the Synod of Dordt*** (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 4-8. The Latin critical edition includes marks to indicate the pagination in the original text that it quotes. The removal of these pagination marks is the only intentional altering of the text.

Omnipotens, aeterne Deus, fons omnis sapientiae, bonitatis et misericordiae, benignissime in Christo Pater, precamur te, ut labia nostra aperias, quo annunciet os nostrum gloriam tuam.[1] *Minores sumus omnibus miserationibus tuis*,[2] quas in figmentum tuum et opus manuum tuarum[3] largiter contulisti. Neque enim tantum ad imaginem tuam creasti nos,[4] sed et per peccatum factos irae filios natura[5] ad imaginem tuam reformasti. Quod si nos totos tibi debeamus, quia nos fecisti, quid reddemus pro eo, quod nos ita redemisti? Nam si mirabile et magnum fuit, hominem nasci ad imaginem tuam, longe maius fuit, quod *qui rapinam non est arbitratus esse se aequalem Deo*,[6] ad imaginem nostram homo fieri dignatus sit, formaque servi suscepta,[7] *factus sitnobis a Deo sapientia, iustitia, sanctificatio et redemptio*.[8]

Sed his beneficiis non contentus, quia thesaurus non prodest incognitus, nos populum sedentem in tenebris et umbra mortis,[9] sine spe salutis, proiectos super faciem terrae, in abiectione animae nostrae,[10] manifestatione Solis iustitiae[11] et veritatis illuminasti; absque qua fuisset, in erroribus aeternum periissemus, ignari viae, qua ambulandum esset.

Et cum inimicus inter triticum, dormientibus hominibus seminasset zizania[12] eorumque tenebrae paulatim invaluissent, a plus quam

1 Cf. Ps 51:17 [15].
2 Cf. Gen 32:10.
3 Cf. 4 Esd 3:5.
4 Cf. Gen 1:27.
5 Cf. Eph 2:3.
6 Cf. Phil 2:6.
7 Cf. Phil 2:7.
8 Cf. 1 Cor 1:30.
9 Cf. Luke 1:79.
10 Cf. Ezek 16:5.
11 Cf. Mal 4:2.
12 Cf. Matt 13:25.

Aegyptiacis liberasti nos luce Reformationis. Vineam tuam in his locis plantasti, cuius umbra operuit montes et arbusta eius cedros Dei.[13]

Ac cum hostis humani generis, draco ille magnus et rufus,[14] invidens nobis hanc felicitatem, ex ore suo eiiceret aquam tanquam flumen,[15] ut illius vorticibus abriperemur, et iam montes aquarum volverentur, atque horrida bella passim contra turturem et unicam tuam excitasset, atque hoc inimici tui agerent, ut ecclesiam tuam in his provinciis deglutirent, animam nostram de laqueo venantium, etiam tum, cum non appareret clypeus aut hasta[16] in Belgio,
eripuisti. Nova bella elegisti, portas hostium ipse subvertisti, murus igneus urbibus fuisti, quae portas aperuerant, ut intraret Rex gloriae.[17]

Postea egressus cum exercitibus nostris, docuisti praeliari manus[18] Illustrissimi Principis Arausicani, manumque eius apprehendens, confregisti vectes portarum inimicarum,[19] dedisti terminis nostris pacem,[20] et adipe frumenti inpinguasti nos,[21] coronasti nos benignitate tua,[22] et pedes tui stillarunt pinguedine.[23] Quodque caput beneficiorum tuorum temporalium apud nos est, dedisti illustribus et clementissimis Dominis nostris, urgentibus negociis, turgentibus procellis, cor docile, ut populum tuum, cui eos praefecisti, sapienter iudicare possent interque bonum et malum discernere. Inspirasti illis consilia salutaria et mirabiliter iis benedixisti, et fecisti illos velut filios olei splendoris, qui assisterent tibi dominatori universae terrae.[24]

Expectasti pro his beneficiis tuis a vinea tua uvas, et ecce protulit labruscas;[25] exaltasti populum, et ille te sprevit.[26]

13 Cf. Ps 80:9-11.
14 Cf. Rev 12:3.
15 Cf. Rev 12:15.
16 Cf. Judg 5:8.
17 Cf. Judg 5:8; Zech 2:5; Ps 24:9.
18 Cf. 2 Sam 22:35.
19 Cf. Ps 107:16.
20 Cf. Lev 26:6.
21 Cf. Ps 147:14.
22 Cf. Ps 103:4.
23 Cf. Ps 65:12 [11].
24 Cf. Zech 4:14.
25 Cf. Isa 5:2.
26 Cf. Isa 1:2.

Propterea etiam merito non pepercisti nobis. Factus es quasi colonus in terra, et quasi viator declinans ad manendum, ut fortis qui non potest salvare.[27] Confudisti labia nostra, et exteri belli mors, natalis pene fuit domestici. In pace amaritudo sponsae tuae fuit amarissima.[28] Securim ad radicem arboris posuisti,[29] ut ficum infructuosam exscinderes.[30]

Haereditas tua facta est quasi leo in sylva; dedit contra te vocem.[31] *Pastores multi demoliti sunt vineam tuam, conculcaverunt partem tuam, dederunt portionem tuam desiderabilem in desertum solitudinis, posueruntque eam in dissipationem.*[32] Neque ubique pax fuit egredienti et ingredienti[33] verum terror horrendus et imago belli plurima, parum enim abfuit quin iuxta minas tuas, O Domine, gens contra gentem et civitas pugnaret contra civitatem, quia tu conturbabas eas omni angustia.[34]

Sed in ira recordatus es miserationum tuarum,[35] inclinasti corda Patrum Patriae, et zelo affecisti domus tuae,[36] ut serio quaererent, quae ad pacem faciunt Hierusalem.[37] Hunc in finem convocarunt hanc synodum nationalem, ut super quaestionibus motis interrogaretur os Domini, et lex tua lux esset,[38] discutiens omnes errorum caligines.

Veruntamen cum omnia pendeant a benedictione tua, Domine, precamur te, ut iuxta promissionem tuam (*ubi duo aut tres congregati sunt in nomine meo,* cum illis futurus *sum in media eorum*[39]) synodo huic nationali praesideas Sancto tuo Spiritu, Spiritu veritatis et pacis. Et cum sacrae literae eodem Spiritu, quo inspiratae sunt, explicari etiam debeant tantumque a puris mentibus intelligi possint, precamur

27 Cf. Jer 14:8-9.
28 Cf. Isa 38:17.
29 Cf. Matt 3:10.
30 Cf. Luke 13:6-9.
31 Cf. Jer 12:8.
32 Cf. Jer 12:10-11.
33 Cf. 2 Chron 15:5.
34 Cf. 2 Chron 15:6.
35 Cf. Hab 3:2.
36 Cf. Ps 69:10 [9].
37 Cf. Ps 122:6.
38 Cf. Prov 6:23.
39 Matt 18:20.

te, ut eas primo quidem purifices, deinde illumines, ut Verbum tuum sacrosanctum recte intelligamus, religiose tractemus. Effice, O Deus, ne quenquam fallamus per scripturas, nec fallamur in illis, sed ut veritatem in illis quaerentes eam inveniamus, inventam constanti fide propugnemus.

Sanctifica nos in veritate tua,[40] da ut uno ore honorificemus te,[41] ne sint in nobis schismata, sed *perfecti in eodem sensu eademque sententia* simus.[42]

*Ne efficiamur inanis gloriae cupidi, invicem provocantes, invicem invidentes*,[43] *sed solicite unitatem spiritus, in vinculo pacis* servemus.[44]

Fac perpetuo cogitemus, meliorem esse talem pugnam, quae nos Deo (qui est VERITAS) proximos facit, quam pacem illam, quae separat a Deo; duas item esse amicas ac sorores geminas, veritatem et pacem; neque ad nos pacem venturam, si sororem eius veritatem non dilexerimus.

Concede nobis, ut sepositis affectibus pravis, quaestiones propositas non subtilitatum acumine, sed ipsarum rerum soliditate libremus, et conviciorum amarissimam labem, verborum veracium flumine diluamus.

Da, ut errantes in viam rectam reducantur; neque sint pertinaces, sed cogitent, confessam imperitiam summam esse prudentiam et posse in eo quod homini incredibili esse verum et in verisimili mendacium, summamque esse victoriam, triumphare de errore deposito.

Et quoniam mandasti nobis, ut precemur te pro regibus et ducibus, et iis qui in sublimitate positi sunt,[45] rogamus te inter alios pro iis, quorum theologos in hac panegyri ecclesiastica conspicimus et expectamus; pro serenissimo Magnae BRITANNIAE REGE IACOBO I, verae fidei defensore acerrimo et vigilantissimo; pro eiusdem genero, serenissimo Principe Palatino, Romani
imperii septemviro, atque eiusdem nunc imperii Vicario; pro illustrissimo Duce atque Electore Brandeburgico; pro illustrissimo Landgravio

40 Cf. John 17:17.
41 Cf. Rom 15:6.
42 Cf. 1 Cor 1:10.
43 Cf. Gal. 5:26.
44 Cf. Eph. 4:3.
45 Cf. 1 Tim 2:2.

Hassiae; pro confoederatis Helvetiorum cantonibus; pro generosissimis comitibus Nassovicis et Wetteravicis; pro amplissimo et spectatissimo senatu reipublicae Genevensi, Bremensis et Embdanae. Inprimis vero pro iis, quos nobis in Reformato Belgio praefecisti; pro illustribus ac praepotentibus dominis Ordinibus Generalibus, eorumque ad bane synodum delegatis; pro illustrissimo et fortissimo Principe Arausicano totaque domo Nassovica; pro illustribus ac potentibus Ordinibus Hollandiae; pro consiliariis utriusque curiae
spectatissimis; pro amplissimo etiam huius urbis senatu, domino praetore, consule, scabinis et octumviris. Fac ut omnes et singuli serviant tibi in timore, et exultent in tremore, ut sint et maneant fidi ecclesiarum in his oris nutricii. Stabilias sceptrum eorum, et thronus ipsorum sit firmus iugiter.

Benedic etiam urbis huius Dordracenae civibus. Da ut ante omnia quaerant regnum Dei et iustitiam eius, et pro benignitate tua, temporalia illis tanquam superpondium adiicias.[46]

Denique, fac ut nos omnes in hoc conventu grata tibi et sentiamus et proferarnus, ad nominis tui gloriam et veritatis conservationem, ecclesiae et reipublicae piam tranquillitatem.

Audi et exaudi nos per Iesum Christium filium tuum, Dominum nostrum, cui tecum et cum Spiritu Sancto sit laus, honor et gloria in saecula. Amen. ●

46 Cf. Matt 6:33.

# "O my soul!" The Competency of Pastors and Elders to Counsel Depressed Souls (2)

**Barrett L. Gritters**

In the last *PRTJ* (April 2018) I began to address elders with the encouragement that they are competent to counsel depressed members of their congregations. To that article I appended a sermon on Psalm 42, entitled "The Downcast Believer Looking Up to God."

The article's stated purpose, which continues here, was: 1) to encourage elders that God equips them for this aspect of soul-care, even though they may need assistance from professional counselors or medical doctors; 2) to propose a more careful analysis of the relationship between depression and sin than is often given; 3) briefly to reexamine the somewhat common assertion that Jesus Christ may have been downcast, but certainly not because of sin, for He had no sin. This third purpose relates to the second—the consideration of the relationship between depression and sin, now examining the "exceeding sorrowful" soul of Jesus Christ (Matt. 26:38; Mark 14:34; where the Greek is περίλυπός, meaning "very sad" or "overcome with sorrow").

In the first part of the article, I spelled out how important it is for ordinary officebearers to understand depression, expressed cautions about how to approach depressed Christians, gave a layman's description of depression and its common symptoms, and analyzed the judgments of five other Christian writers regarding the causes of this "common cold" of emotional difficulties.

In this second part, I will: 1) propose my own explanation of the relationship between depression and sin; 2) examine the relation between Christ's own sorrow and sin; 3) give practical advice for elders how they can assist depressed members under their care. In a future article, I hope to outline how consistories can labor preemptively, especially in children and youth, with depression.

**A connection between depression and sin**

Before I offer an explanation of a connection between depression and sin, I acknowledge with gratitude the push in this direction by four Protestant Reformed ministers. Prof. Robert Decker, (my predecessor in the chair of Practical Theology at the Protestant Reformed Seminary), Rev. Carl Haak, Rev. Jason Kortering, and Rev. James Slopsema have all spoken and written helpfully about depression. Their speeches and writings were probably more formative in my thinking than I can even be conscious of. Prof. Decker was my seminary professor in Poimenics, and his own sufferings with depression as well as his speeches in the churches about his experiences have helped mold the thinking of a generation of PRCA members in West Michigan, if not across the country. Prof. Decker's regular invitations to Rev. Slopsema to speak about depression in his seminary class brought this wise pastor into my life as well. Rev. Slopsema's own personal experiences with depression enabled him to give good counsel to the churches. Decker's and Slopsema's more recent speeches on depression are now available in pamphlet form. [1]

Rev. Kortering taught Poimenics in the Asian Reformed Theological Seminary as the PRCA first engaged in training Asian pastors in Singapore. His unpublished syllabus was also helpful in developing my thoughts. Rev. Carl Haak's 1992 speech to the officebearers' conference in the PRCA's Classis West, "Dealing with the Depressed," articulates most clearly, although briefly, the thesis that I now develop more extensively. I am indebted to all of these men for their leadership and good counsel that led me in the direction I now take.

Second, I make clear that this is an attempt to present as simple and compact an explanation as can be made. On the one hand, because Christians are "fearfully and wonderfully made," a simple explanation must not be *simplistic*, doing injustice to the complexity of man as he comes forth from the hand of God. It is not easy to understand the complexities of the human heart, soul, mind, spirit, and emotions. On

1 The three speeches include the medical perspective of Dr. Brian Decker, and are entitled: "Dealing with Depression: A Christian Perspective," published by Faith Protestant Reformed Evangelism Committee. It can be found at prca.org under resources/publications/pamphlets. See also Rev. Slopsema's articles in the *Beacon Lights*, beginning in April 2018. (beaconlights.org).

the other hand, it is *also* injustice to God's people to make the matter so complex that there is no way to address the problem, so complicated that the pastor and elder do not know where to begin and, because they are intimidated, have nothing to say of help.

Thus, I want to propose an explanation and approach that, if used wisely, can help elders assist Christians in dealing with depression. The approach does not discount, and wants in fact to recognize: 1) the possible use of medicine; 2) the possible use of trained counselors; 3) the possibility that depression may endure for months and does not respond to counsel immediately; 4) that the devil himself plays a part; and 5) the possibility in certain cases of a genetic predisposition to depression. I will address each of these after I offer my explanation. But my approach does not *start* with any of these. Rather, it begins with the biblical testimony that troubles in man's life have their roots in sin, and depression often does as well.

***My thesis: Depression often results from the improper (that is, sinful) response to the circumstances of life that are often very unpleasant.***

Briefly explained: 1) There are many unpleasant realities in this valley of tears. 2) These unpleasant realities are not the *cause of* but the *occasion for* depression. 3) The child of God ought to react to these unpleasant realities according to the revealed will of God. 4) Instead, he reacts contrary to God's will, which is sin. (Already here I must say that sometimes the sinful reaction is readily recognized to be sin; but often the sinful reaction may not even be recognized as sinful, which is why patient counsel from the Word of God is so vital.) 5) Because blessedness is experienced only on the path of obedience, disobedience always leads to troubles and sorrows.

(The exceptions to this, which is why "often" and not "always" is used in the thesis, are post-partem depression, pre-menstrual syndrome, PTSD, etc. Perhaps included in the exceptions could be disabling injuries, chronic pain, and illnesses like diabetes.)

Each of these elements must be carefully explained.

**Unpleasant realities—the circumstances of life**

Unpleasant realities are often triggers for depression. Many who write about depression put these under the heading, *Causes of Depression*, which is why I, as well, group them together. I will explain in a moment why we should not call them *causes*. "Unpleasant realities" is a phrase broad enough to cover everything that our sinful natures dislike and to which we react improperly. And it is the improper response that is key.

The unpleasant realities may be put into five groups.

1. First, are what some call precipitating causes. These include *life's stresses* such as moving, marriage, change of employment, school exams, etc. They include God's "frowning providences" like illness, unemployment, childlessness, wrecks, the death of loved ones, and other similar circumstances. Some of life's stresses cannot be avoided. Other of life's stresses can be avoided. Those that can be ought to be, if one is unable to handle them, even if they are desirable (like marriage, or moving, or a good job offer).

2. Second, bodily *weaknesses and sicknesses*. There are the inborn weaknesses of body, mind, and emotions. There is the chronic pain from illness or injury. Included is everything connected with "death," as I Corinthians 3:22 speaks of it.

3. Third, *sins committed against us*. Others speak evil about us or mistreat us in some way. When someone is sinned against as an adult, that is hard enough to handle properly, especially if the offended adult is not a strong, mature Christian, but this is more difficult when the sin occurs in one's youth. The sins committed may be as grievous as verbal or sexual abuse, or as simple as failure to teach the child how to handle money, how to eat properly, how to manage time or make good plans.

4. Fourth, *the will of God as it requires of us painful things*: obedience when obedience is costly: mortifying our flesh, giving up our lives in service to Christ and His church. Thus, the unpleasant realities even include God's commandments. The rich young ruler, when confronted with Jesus' call to sell his possessions and give to the poor, "went away sad." Mark's account of the history uses two synonyms, "sad" and "grieved," one indicating the young man was under a dark cloud. The commandment required loss of what was precious to him.

5. Fifth, our *own sins and the reality of our corrupt natures* from birth. The guilt and shame from sins ("A mighty stream of foul transgression prevails from day to day…" is the truth we sing from Psalm 65), and the guilt and shame from one's sinful nature ("I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing" is the confession we make with the apostle in Romans 7), are some of the most unpleasant realities a believer can experience.

Again, the expression "unpleasant realities" may be an unusual expression here. It is not intended to minimize the difficulty, indeed, the great pain and sorrow of these realities. But some expression is needed to cover all the puzzling, difficult, or painful experiences in this valley of tears—by others called "causes"—to which we can respond wrongly.

**These are not the cause but the occasion.**

These unpleasant realities are not the cause of but the occasion for depression. Not everyone who becomes unemployed, or injured, or ill, or suffers a combination of these difficulties, becomes depressed.

A slippery road does not *cause* a car wreck. Rather, our lack of caution driving in these dangerous conditions causes the wreck. The slippery conditions were the important *occasion* for the wreck, but were not the *cause* of it. Similarly, a son's disobedience does not cause conflict between him and his father, even though it may be the *occasion* for it. Rather, his father's improper response to the disobedience causes the fight. One's "A" on a test is not the cause of her best friend's jealousy of her, but is the occasion for it; the cause is in her sinful nature. Or, the "strange woman" (of Prov. 5) and the "flattery of her tongue" (Prov. 7) do not cause the foolish young man to commit adultery with her and ruin his life. They are occasions—powerful and important, but only occasions—for his sin. The cause of his sin is his coming "nigh to the door of her house," his listening to her flattery, and his sinful lusts.

So also with the unpleasant realities in life. All these occasions are *necessary* for the bad outcome. Just as a man does not usually commit the sin of adultery without an occasion for it—a trigger—neither does depression come, usually, without one or more of these occasions. It is not surprising, therefore, that many who teach about depression assign to these "occasions" the mistaken designation "cause." There is an important difference.

**Proper response according to the revealed will of God**

The child of God ought to respond to these unpleasant realities according to the revealed will of God. There are proper and improper reactions to life's stresses, to a major job change, to college placement exams, to unemployment. There are proper and improper ways to respond to heavy burdens and difficult realities, to loss of a loved one or painful injury and chronic illnesses. There are proper and improper ways to respond to the Lord's calling me to give up "house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for [His] sake, and the gospel's…" (Mark 10:29). There are proper and improper ways to respond to great injustice done to me, or to the sad reality that I gave in to my sinful nature and brought shame upon myself or those close to me.

Usually the *proper* response is very painful. Turning the other cheek, or confronting in love someone who hurt me, are difficult and painful. Living without bitterness when I lose something so precious as a wife, and perhaps because of a drunk driver, is not natural. Giving myself fully to others when the others do not respond with gratitude goes so contrary to my instincts that I am tempted so say that the Lord would never require it of me. So, I respond improperly.

The Lord makes clear in His Word what is the proper and what is the improper response to these unpleasant realities. Good elders understand Scripture, understand human nature, and patiently and kindly help the people of God see what pleases Him.

**Improper response is easy**

I just said that living without bitterness "is not natural." That is, our old nature automatically responds sinfully to difficulties. What comes naturally to men, even Christians, is disobedience—improper anger at a son's rebellion; worry when I lose my job; envy when my inborn limitations keep me from excelling; withdrawing from the communion of saints as a response to mistreatment; self-justification and covering up when I fall into sin; etc.

Because the believer has two natures as it were, his "old man" (or "flesh") that must be mortified daily and his "new man" that must be quickened daily, when he faces the unpleasant realities, he must always realize that the way of least resistance (for his old man) is always improper, is disobedience to the revealed will of God, that is,

is sinful. He needs to respond according to his new man. In this way, the proper response will truly be "second nature" to him.

***"That man is blessed who, fearing God, restrains his feet from sin…"***

Last: *That* man and *only* that man experiences the blessings of peace in his life who, fearing God, restrains his feet from sin. *That* man, and *only* that man, who confesses his fault, repents of sin and turns to the path of obedience, knows the favor of God and prospers in it. On the other hand, that man who does not confess, who lives in impenitence and disobedience, does not and cannot prosper. An obedient life may still be painful, but accompanying the pain will be the *peace* of God.

Those familiar with the Psalter recognize the language used here. Psalm 1 is the *first* Psalm for good reason. Just as Paul teaches the Philippians, the God of peace grants peace to, and will be with, those and only those who, living by faith, walk in obedience (see Phil. 4:7-9). A disobedient life cannot come under the blessing of God.

No one will disagree that King David's misery, as he expressed it in Psalm 32, was because of his sin. What they may disagree with, and often vehemently object to, is suggesting that sin be linked to depression in more than a very few, and rare, cases of depression. My thesis here, which I explain more below, is that the shepherds of God's sheep must carefully, patiently, lovingly, help the people of God see that there may be more sin-links than they realized.

In conclusion, then, for this section, we may say that often, not always, depression may be the consequence of disobedience. It must be repeated: Not *all depression* is the result of *sin*, nor does all *sin* lead to *depression*. However, wise pastors and elders must inquire carefully into the possibility that *this* depression may be connected, in some way, to sin. This depression will not lift unless sin is confessed, forgiven, and turned from.

* * * * *

The carefulness with which these truths must be handled cannot be overemphasized. The steps spelled out above are deliberately brief and simple to make them clear, but the implementation of them is difficult, complicated by our sinful natures. Thus, no one may deal with them simplistically. Again, the errors on both sides must be avoided: either making

the matter so simple as to imply that addressing depression is easy and the remedies quick; or making the matter so complex as to imply that addressing depression is impossible for any but the Ph.D.-trained psychologist.

Here are some of the cautions and caveats that may help:

First, ***be careful of misunderstanding the link between depression and sin.***

It must be admitted, and then thought through very carefully by elders and pastors, that although *some* improper responses are egregiously sinful, others are not obviously so. Some are easily seen and admitted. To shout angrily at a spouse's sin, to complain bitterly and incessantly about chronic pain, to nurture worry about a job loss, consciously to refuse to confess even small sins—all these are clearly sinful. These are what Scripture calls "presumptuous sins" (Ps. 19:13).

But other improper responses may not be so obviously sinful to the Christian. These are what Scripture describes as "secret faults" (Ps. 19:12). Even believers must say, "Who can understand his errors?" and admit that likely there are many sins he does not see at the moment. Many Christians have conducted themselves in an improper way for a decade or more, having been raised to live so. The sinful behavior, it may seem to him or her, is not at all sinful, but is the most obvious and the only possible way of response. I refer to those sinful ways of thinking, acting, and responding that a man learned before he became a Christian; or that a woman learned in her youth growing up in very difficult circumstances, responding to demeaning and degrading speech by an abusive father; or to sexual abuse by a relative, neighbor, or teacher; or to parental abandonment; or to home life that was so troubling that the effects on the child (now an adult) can best be described as a kind of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Imagine, once, that a very young child in a nominally Christian home—in your congregation—is severely mistreated by his parents or siblings. In most cases, no one is present to help deliver him from the evil or teach him to respond in a proper way. The poor child learns to survive by responding to the evils in the way he sees his parents or siblings respond to evils. Over the course of years, his life grows more and more troubled. This is the kind of home elders would call 'dysfunctional' and the kind of child his teachers would describe as 'troubled' and 'hard to handle.' Such cases are not rare.

In such cases, patience—a great deal of patience—and careful instruction from the Word of God are necessary.

Here, also, is where brotherly explanation may be given to my friends and colleagues who resist making a connection between depression and sin. I am not saying that we ought to instruct the depressed Christian that easy confession of sin and quick repentance will bring instant relief, and perhaps administer Christian discipline quickly to bring such repentance. I acknowledge that no sin may be identified for a relatively long period of time; that weeks and even months go by for the elder to gain the trust of the depressed member; that only gradually do they see the learned behavior and ingrained thought patterns to be something less than obedience to the revealed will of God. But I assert that seeking a connection between depression and sin is the way to help God's people.

This approach to a depressed Christian, then, may not be rejected because it would be like asking a person to repent of his sin who is dying of cancer. We recognize that this is a faulty analogy, unless we embrace the medical model of depression. At the same time, a comparison *may* be made between the two—between a man dying of cancer and another suffering depression—although not likely in the way the critic of this sin-depression link may expect. A pastor or elder ministering to a Christian dying of cancer may not ignore sin in that case, either. For the root cause of *all* suffering—including the suffering of cancer—is original sin from our first father Adam. Pastors and elders do not, of course, bluntly rebuke the dying Christian for specific sins in his life that caused his cancer (unless the link to smoking, for example, is obvious), but carefully and pastorally call him to see that the cause of *all* death is our original sin in Adam. For this, the dying man is taught that there is forgiveness in the cross of Jesus Christ, and that God uses all physical afflictions to prepare believers for glory and even bring them to glory. Final deliverance from cancer is not in this life, but in the life to come. The Reformed "Form for the Consolation of the Sick," read infrequently by elders and probably used even less, gives this explanation, and is wise counsel for officebearers.

In a similar, but not identical way, we may see a connection between other suffering and our sin. At times the connection is direct and obvious; at other times it may be so difficult to see that the link

is found only by fasting and prayer. For whereas the link between *original* sin and all suffering, including depression, may be obvious, the links between actual sins and this suffering are not. They are *actual sins that are hardly recognized as sin*—"secret faults" (Ps. 19:12).

Nor must you hesitate here, objecting that identifying these sins will only *add* to the burden of the depressed Christian. They are his burden already. Your assistance to help him see them will give him cause for joy: he now can confess them, find forgiveness, begin the battle slowly but determinedly to turn from them, and rejoice in the beauty of growing in grace.

At this point we can profitably note the connection between Christ's downcast spirit and sin. The connection is not difficult to see. Spurgeon may have been right to say that Christ, in one respect, had no sin. Jesus had none of His *own* sin; He had no *personal* sin; He had no actual sin and was guilty of no original sin—of guilt or corruption. But Spurgeon was wrong to say that it could not have been sin that made Jesus downcast and disquieted. Christ, in fact, had a mountain of sin. For He, who knew no sin, was *made sin* for us (see II Cor. 5:21). "The Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Is. 53:6). All our sins were given Him. *All* the consequences of our sins He suffered. The guilt, the shame, the sense of filth and ugliness, were all Christ's. For good reason the prophet said that He would be a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief" (Is. 53:3). The sorrows and grief were a heavy heart, a burdened spirit, being cast down and disquieted. And that which is our greatest fear became the climax of His distress: being forsaken of God. Jesus was forsaken for an eternity.

I want to make this point here in order to strengthen the connection between depression and sin. Charles Spurgeon was not wrong to say that some depression has nothing to do with sin, but we must not take from his teaching about Christ's personal sinlessness that there was no connection in His life. Then neither are we permitted to do so in our lives.

Second, be willing to ***acknowledge the possibility of a genetic predisposition to depression.***

Christians who hold the view I propose can also acknowledge that by birth some are more susceptible to depression. The weaknesses of man's sinful nature differ from person to person. Although all

men are fully depraved in nature, not all natures are identical in their depravity. One may have a greater natural tendency to abuse alcohol, whereas another (also fully depraved) has no temptation to this sin; the difference being not a certain moral strength in one and moral weakness in the other, but merely in their physiology—alcohol may give pleasure to the one but discomfort to the other. Some natures are more inclined to sin sexually than others. And some have weaknesses in their natures that may incline them to depression.

I also urge caution here, for at this point the nature/nurture question arises. Are some families more inclined to depression because of the nature with which they were born—a genetic predisposition—or because their upbringing established common patterns of thought and behavior that would incline them to respond improperly to difficult circumstances? I pray that no one takes offense at this suggestion, but all will recognize that family tendencies may be learned, not inborn, may be nurture more than nature.

If weaknesses are natural, inborn, then lighter loads of stress may more quickly trigger depression in these believers. They may learn, then, that their tolerances are different from those of their friends and accept this as God's will for them. Just as some Christians cannot get by with less than eight hours of sleep without getting sick and must not be envious of those who can survive well on five or six, so these Christians whose tolerances for stress are less and whose inclination to depression greater must recognize their God-given limitations. This is no more reason for jealousy or bitterness than a man who comes to the conviction that he may never touch alcohol again because he has learned that his nature inclines him too easily to abuse it. He learned this by painful experience. He lives with it as a meek Christian. Both accept this as the "burden" the Lord gives them.

Third, ***acknowledge the possibility of the devil's involvement.***

This view of the link between sin and depression must maintain a balanced view of the work and temptations of the devil. The devil's place in our lives—especially in depression—must not be forgotten. We are "not ignorant of his devices" (II Cor. 2:11), not regarding depression either.

We do not argue that the devil is the cause of depression, that the devil's occupation of a Christian is the one and only cause of it, and

that if he would be dispelled, the depression would disappear. But that is not the *only* possibility of the devil's machinations in depressed Christians.

First, who would argue that the devil does not tempt Christians to react wrongly to the unpleasant realities in our lives? If wrong reaction to difficulties leads into, or contributes to, depression, then part of the devil's place in depression is pretty straightforward.

Second, when the child of God is in the throes of depression, the devil will take advantage of that, especially subjecting him to the "greatest temptation" to suppose that he is destined for hell.[2] Some of the devil's best successes—from his perspective—are to convince the Christian that he is not a Christian. This is the devil's most terrible work. He certainly knows Scripture's testimony that no one—not even the devil himself—can pluck believers out of the Father's hand. Whether the devil believes this or not, he knows that his next-best accomplishment would be to convince a Christian that he is not a Christian, thus adding to the depressed Christian's sorrows. For a Christian, this is depression at its worst. If a man is without God in the world, he is also without hope (Eph. 2:12). Without hope, life is impossible to bear. So even though we stop short of admitting the possibility that the devil possesses a regenerated Christian and thus explain depression, we do not ignore his ability to trouble Christians in this other most awful manner. He is a terrible force to aggravate depression, and elders will recognize and address this with their sheep.

Fourth, ***be open to the use of medicine as an aid.***

This view that much depression is rooted in conduct—improper reaction to unpleasant realities—does not rule out the wise and careful use of medicine for the depressed. Medicine is not to be ruled out as somehow "unspiritual." That is, just because much depression is not physical in origin, does not mean that physical means (medicine) cannot be a means to relieve it. Medicine will be used to cure ulcers, even when the ulcers may have been caused by worry; so medicine may be used to remedy depression, even when depression had other than biological causes.

Rejecting the medical model does not imply rejection of medicine.

2 For our "greatest temptation," study the Heidelberg Catechism's teaching in Lord's Day 15.

The medical model of depression suggests that chemical imbalances, for one reason or another, are almost always the cause of depression. Medicine, then, is used to correct the chemical imbalances and alleviate depression. The view I propose does not deny that there may be chemical imbalance in a depressed Christian. Thus, I recommend depressed persons always begin with a medical exam. (More on this, below.) But whether this imbalance is the *cause* of depression (the medical model) or the *result* of the depression is arguable. Nevertheless, a chemical imbalance may be remedied by certain medications prescribed by doctors. After the chemical imbalance is corrected, ideally the medication is discontinued.

An analogy may be helpful. Medication for depression can be likened to crutches for a broken leg. As crutches (or a knee-cart) are a very helpful tool for mobility while a break is healing, so medicine can be used while a wounded soul is healing. But, just as crutches are disposed of as soon as the break heals, the goal of a depressed person is to discontinue medicine as soon as possible. All will recognize the weakness of the illustration, for while a broken leg heals 'naturally,' a damaged soul needs healing and help from wise counsel through the Scripture.

Here, as well, cautions are in order.

On the one hand, we will recognize quickly that in some ailments like bipolar disorder, the only remedy includes the continued use of medicine. An idealistic pastor or elder might consider this a concession to weakness: the depressed is not doing or thinking or believing what he ought to do, think, or believe. Yet that is idealism, not wisdom. Wisdom recognizes the variety of needs and circumstances and will admit that the way for some is medicine for life. Wisdom will not make this the rule, but the exception; nevertheless, it is a possibility for some. And those "some" may not let their need for meds bring them down further.

On the other hand, we should also acknowledge that the use of medicine as an "easy fix" is too common. Some non-Christian and perhaps some Christian doctors will almost automatically prescribe medication for depression, and the depressed come to expect that this is the solution to their problems. Aware of this, I was surprised but very thankful for the advice by a mature Christian doctor, given

years ago to a young wife in a congregation I served. Without my knowledge, she went to him for symptoms of depression, expecting him to prescribe medication. After listening to her carefully, he wrote this prescription (not without carefulness): "Your husband needs to pray with you." That is, she needed work in her marriage. More recently, a young man I know went to his doctor with symptoms of depression. His Christian doctor recommended that he continue what he was doing—going to a pastor for counsel—and return to him in some months if the darkness did not dispel. Such counsel is not the norm. If anecdotal evidence is even close to accurate, too many doctors are inclined quickly to solve a difficult problem with a chemical answer, without accompanying counsel from the Word of God. In fact, medicine used without careful forethought may well be another "improper response to an unpleasant reality," and come with a cost.

The use of medication for depression is not as straightforward as it may appear. Elders must be aware that almost all medicines have side-effects, some very undesirable. Besides, many studies have shown that, while Prozac, Zoloft, and other medications are effective, so are sugar pills. Most trials show that placebos work as well; in some cases, even better.

Last, in connection with medication, Ed Welch's warning[3] is worth pondering: Medicines may relieve me of a pain that God intends as useful to me. Because all "afflictions have been for my profit" we may ask God to teach us His ways from these hardships before too quickly masking the pain with medicine.

Fifth, ***understand the place of professional counselors.***

This view of depression does not only allow, but encourages at times, the use of professionals who may be psychologists, psychiatrists, or licensed professional counselors. Sometimes the tangles people have come into are so complicated that those with specialized training to recognize peculiar patterns of thought may be invaluable. The Christian pastor and elder must not resist such counselors, even if the counselor is not a Christian.

3 Edward T. Welch, *Depression: Looking Up from the Stubborn Darkness* (Greensboro, NC: New Growth Press, 2001), 189-196. Welch makes the point elsewhere in his extensive writings as well.

But the elder will always want to give counsel that supplements the counsel of a professional, even when that professional is a Christian. Even Christian professionals may give counsel that conflicts with Christian convictions and the elder must be able to recognize the conflict and offer careful correction. Non-Christian counselors may be helpful in certain areas, but especially here the elders will want to keep close contact in order to filter out bad advice. Besides, I have often found that the use of Scripture even by Christian counselors is minimal, both during counseling and for homework. The positive explanation and application of Scripture, along with regular memorization of Scripture, are essential components for the plan to help depressed believers. This is how godly elders work alongside of professional counselors.

The standard policy of elders ought to be that, when a member seeks professional help, especially at the elders' recommendation, 1) the elders receive written permission from the member to consult with the counselor (a standard "release of information" form), and then meet with him; and 2) the elders meet somewhat regularly with the member—at least monthly. If my own experience as a pastor and from working with elders is any indication, it is far too easy for officebearers to breathe a sigh of relief when someone else who "really knows what he is doing" takes charge of the case. Elders are responsible for the care of souls.

* * * * *

By now, it will be clear that I have been offering a brotherly answer to those who believe it is wrong and damaging to blame depression on sin.

Their criticism of my view would be in some form as this: "To blame depression on sin is harmful because it increases false guilt and deepens feelings of failure."

I trust I have been sensitive to this criticism, which properly addresses a simplistic approach that blames depression on sin. My response is: The pastor does not simply call the depressed believer to repent. The elder does not act as though the depressed person is spiritually weak and merely needs to get stronger. The church counselor does not assume that the depressed has some dirty secret that needs to be exposed. And, when he broaches the possible link between depression and sin, he does not do it except with the awareness that

if he is not careful he may well drive the suffering believer deeper into the darkness.

Instead, in love he helps the depressed Christian gradually to see what "improper responses" may be involved, only later to point out that these are sins. The medicine of the Word is given in doses appropriate for the person and time. A child cannot take what an adult can. This very fragile woman is different from *that* grizzled and tough man. Then, the level of responsibility in the sin is judged carefully as well. That level is different for the man whose upbringing was so shocking that most Christians cannot imagine it, than for the man whose home life was stable and rearing was godly. But regardless of the degree of responsibility, the sheep are led to the cross of Christ and the mercies of God for sinners.

But it would be incorrect to tell people that "unhelpful thought patterns" are not sin. It does not benefit them either. Being "transformed by the renewing of our minds" is part and parcel of the sometimes painful grace of sanctification. We counselors—elders and pastors—help the people of God to put away old, wrong thoughts, and adopt new and biblical thoughts. We may not expect growth in understanding the realities of sin to come overnight. But our calling to the sheep is for *growth*, "more and more" every day, week, and year.

From one point of view, then, Jay Adams is correct. I judge his advice to be incorrect insofar as he can leave the impression that all the sins that bring about depression are easily identifiable and quickly corrected by repentance and faith. I judge his conclusions to be incorrect when he says that all the residents of the mental hospital he visited were depressed because of unconfessed sin—that is, if he meant sins of which these residents were well aware and from which they refused to turn. But he was correct when, in the main lines, he wanted to find connections between sin and depression.

Let every elder and pastor, however, understand that the "unhelpful thought patterns" that we identify as sinful thought patterns may be very difficult for the child of God to recognize and even more difficult to change. If, for example, an adult grew up in a home that over-emphasized order and cleanliness, it will be very difficult for him to understand that his now-obsession that contributes to his depression is indeed an obsession and not the 'cleanliness that is next to godliness'

as some would say. Simply to tell him to think differently will not be helpful. Or if an adult grew up in a home that over-emphasized money—saving money and spending carefully—it will take a good deal of patient instruction to separate wise biblical stewardship from covetousness and an unhealthy fixation on money. Difficult as it may be to change, it is certainly part of what Romans 12 means when it speaks of our *renewal* by the transformation of our *minds*. Sanctification is change; sometimes the change is excruciatingly difficult.

* * * *

It remains to offer practical helps to the elder who anticipates counseling a depressed Christian under his care.

**How to plan your work**

First, ***do not hesitate to seek advice from others***—pastors, elders, or professionals. No one, except perhaps the most capable and experienced—especially when the depression is deep—should proceed alone in this important endeavor. In this connection, it may be well to give counsel alongside another elder. You can learn from each other. In any case, do not imagine that normally you ought to do this without assistance.

Second, ***see to it*** that the member ***gets the help he/she needs***, both from you and from others. By this I mean that you will immediately assess how deep the depression is, in order to judge whether to advise professional help or not. Visit the member and ask questions. Take notes. Use the assessment sheet I mentioned earlier. Perhaps even develop a modified assessment form with other elders and pastors. Remember to ask what medications they are currently using. Ask about alcohol and drugs.

I have more and more been inclined, in this early stage of assessment, almost routinely to direct the sheep to their medical doctor. He can determine whether there are physical problems that may be involved.

If the member is psychotic (out of touch with reality) or suicidal, seek professional help immediately. Do not delay.

If help beyond your counsel is necessary, convince them to seek out that help, and even assist them to get that help. That is what I mean when I say to ***see to it*** that the member gets help. Remember that the

nature of depression will make people fearful to get help, ashamed and embarrassed to admit their needs. They may be afraid even to open up to you, although the fact that you are meeting with them is a step in the right direction. Give kind instruction about this reality as well: point out that by their symptoms they have indicated their need for help, and that you will be as private about their problems as you are permitted to be. And remember that depression often takes away people's initiative, so that although they know they ought to go to the doctor, they may fail to make the call. Do not be too critical of this lack in the early stages. Your close attention to them will help them.

Involve the family and the church, with permission of the member. The desire for confidentiality is understandable, but the other side of that equation is the need for prayers of the saints and advice from those who are knowledgeable of the facts. Family members can help, even though at times they must be taught not to be 'enablers.' Church members, especially those who have experience with depression, may be of assistance. Some may be more hurtful than helpful, so you will be cautious whose help you enlist; but some are very understanding, patient, and kind. Busy elders will wisely seek out and slowly form such a 'team' to help.

Third, ***meet regularly if possible***. If the problem is a crisis, a meeting every few days at the beginning may be necessary. After matters stabilize—are not an emergency any longer—meet weekly. Be disciplined and predictable. Depressed Christians need order, stability, predictability, reliability. For example, "Every Monday at 4PM" is helpful to them, but to you as well. If you are not predictable, if every week a different time is scheduled, it will not only add to the member's distress, but it almost guarantees that you will not meet weekly.

Fourth, ***consider a 'three-pronged' approach to your visits.***

In the first part of the meeting, deal with the immediate issues that have arisen since the last visit—the crises, if there were any. After these are addressed, seek to deal with what might be underlying issues, the improper responses to difficulties. This will be a slower process that takes place by discussion of all the different areas of the member's life. The third 'prong' of this approach will be to build up the sheep, positively, in all areas of their life. I liken this latter to the

remedies suggested for back pain from a pinched nerve or strained muscle. Doctors usually advise that all the muscles surrounding the spine need to be strengthened in order to support the spine. Strengthen the core. Spiritually, only when the believer is strengthened generally can he address specific problems like depression. This 'core strength' includes private worship, personal relationships, church attendance, etc. I explain this further at the end of this article.

**What counsel to give, generally**

In the visits, be sure *always to give hope*. If it is true that *all* of God's people need hope, this is especially true in depression. In the nature of the case, they have become utterly without hope. The future is so bleak. They are cast down, in part because they cannot imagine anything changing for the better. They probably have tried many things and found them all impotent. Thus, an important part of the elder's work is to emphasize hope. Texts that teach hope will form a regular part of the opening explanation and application of Scripture. Ephesians 3:20, 21, Romans 15:4, and Psalm 42 (where "hope in God" is central) are texts elders will be able to explain, apply, and give as homework for memorization.

Be specific about hope. That is, do not merely use the word, but explain the idea. Hope is confident expectation of and longing for good in the days to come—a good that is not yet "seen." The specific *good* a depressed person longs for is the grace to endure each day, to survive and even have joy amid sorrows, and deliverance from the terrible feelings they now endure. Involved in hope is knowing that others have been where they presently stand, and have endured (I Corinthians 10:13). Involved in their hope is even knowing that you, their elder or pastor, will continue to help them and pray for them, come what may. (Be careful that you do not foster an unhealthy dependency on you—a very real possibility. And be careful not to become so emotionally involved in the case that you are brought down.) But often your love, care, kindness, faithfulness, patience, grace, and good words are the only signs—they imagine—that God is now and will continue to be in their life. In fact, more than a sign of God, you are one of the 'hands' of God by which He Himself ministers to His saints.

In the visits, *always use Scripture and prayer*. You hear the objection, maybe sense in your own soul the devil's sneer: "What, do

you think just reading the Bible and prayer will cure depression? Will you wave the Scripture as a magic wand to relieve this distress?" But the Bible itself instructs about the importance of the Word and prayer. Philippians 4:6 addresses those who are full of cares. "Be careful (anxious) for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God." James 5:13-15 addresses the same reality. The Word is a light in the dark places of depression (Ps. 119:105).

Read, explain, and apply Scripture every week. This takes careful preparation but will be blessed by God whose Word is a power, a balm, and an ointment. Consider writing the text on a card for them to take home. Ask them to look at it when negative thoughts take over. Have them memorize it so that they build up a store of Scripture hidden in their heart. Do not fail to consider the songs of the Psalter, often easily memorized, that speak to the heart in special ways. Be sure to explain the Word, not just read the Word. Be sure to apply the Word, not generally but very specifically and pointedly. Again, God will bless the work put into this preparation.

*Be compassionate.* Scripture teaches that Jesus is a merciful and faithful high priest, able to be touched with the feelings of our infirmities (Heb. 4) and afflicted with our afflictions (Isa. 63). The compassion to the suffering He showed during His earthly ministry is a pattern for pastors addressing depression. If you cannot or will not suffer with the member, reconsider whether you should be the elder who involves himself in this case. Pray for sympathy, lest the Lord chasten you by putting you through the same suffering so that you are able to be compassionate. The Scripture that shows the compassion of Christ would include Matt. 9:36, 14:14, 15:32 (see also Mk. 1:41, 6:34, 8:2, Lk. 7:13, 15:20).

*Be patient, too.* And teach them patience. Sometimes a depressed person will report only one bearable day in the previous week. Encourage them to see the one day as hopeful and to wait for the good days to increase, slowly. Do not allow yourself, or them, to be discouraged by the ups and downs, since all depressed Christians have them. If you show discouragement and impatience, it does not take much imagination to realize what that will do to them. Preach to yourself, too: depression does not have a 'normal' length of stay.

Before beginning, read Rev. Slopsema's very practical and helpful "Some Don'ts" in the pamphlet "Dealing with Depression: A Christian Perspective," and his chapter, "A Friend/Family Member is Depressed: What Can I Do?"

**Helps regarding the outward life**

First, if necessary, *relieve the depressed of the pressures and responsibilities* that they cannot handle. Especially for those whose depression is more debilitating, this is necessary. On the other hand, if the depression is less severe, taking away responsibilities could be detrimental, for the people of God need good things to keep them occupied. Depression is sometimes exacerbated by lack of activity. But at times, temporary relief from the stresses of life is necessary in order to pay proper attention to healing. In some cases, overwork itself may have been the main cause of depression. Remember the "Elijah syndrome."

Second, *a healthy diet, exercise and rest* are vital for emotional and spiritual health. Poor diet and lack of exercise can make even the emotionally strongest feel miserable. Secular as well as Christian literature on depression emphasizes this. God made man as body and soul, with an interdependence among all the facets of our being. If one facet is neglected or abused, the others will be negatively influenced. We are too quick to point out the "little" profit of bodily exercise (I Tim. 4:8), but wrongly interpret that passage if we suppose that it discourages or demeans regular physical activity. I Timothy 4:8 teaches that bodily exercise *does profit*. Indeed, the profit is only *temporal* and *physical* as compared to the spiritual and eternal profit of godliness, but there is profit. Let no one ignore that the Lord made us body and soul, and redeemed our bodies as well as our souls. We neglect care of our bodies to our hurt.

A woman I counselled many years ago recently reported to me how the advice to get regular physical exercise helped her, and that she had passed on the advice to her own daughter, who also battled depression.

Rev. Kortering writes:

> "This reminds me of the case of the young pastor who was spiritually depressed and his ministry was suffering. He went to an old senior

> pastor who listened to his story, and his advice came swiftly and pointedly. 'Go for a walk every morning for one hour for a month and come back and see me.' The young pastor was hurt; he has a *spiritual* problem and he gave him *physical* therapy. Nevertheless, he did it. After the month he returned to the old pastor and exclaimed that his prayer life improved, he was preaching with greater enthusiasm…. How in the world could physical exercise produce spiritual benefits? It illustrates the close relationship between body and soul." [4]

Third, emphasize a *good routine and schedules*. A lack of routine and schedule may be the *result* of depression—a downcast spirit has difficulty carrying out responsibilities. A depressed person is often ruled by his feelings here as well as in other matters. In this case the depressed Christian may need help restoring order in his life. But lack of routine may also *contribute* to depression. He must be helped to see the benefit of order and discipline, structure and routine. It is helpful that sleep patterns, eating habits, chores, and leisure all be consistent. In personal life as well as church life, let everything be done "decently and in order."

I often advise my students in this regard. It is a great temptation for ministers who have no clock to punch or earthly supervisor looking over their shoulder to live disorderly. They expose themselves to depression, even failure in the ministry, if they do not develop good habits, routines, and schedules. The importance of good planning is important for all God's people. Simply to work is not enough; even to work hard is not enough. We must make a plan for our work, or else we expose ourselves to the miserable sense at the end of the day that, although we worked long and maybe even hard, we did not work smart, and therefore did not accomplish what we should have, maybe even wasted a good part of it. Not planning is like adding another weight to our already listing and maybe leaking ship. In the beginning God made a plan to create the world in six days and rest the seventh. It was a wise plan; He stuck to it. To make plans and stick to them is also wisdom for God's children.

Fourth, do not discount *the important blessing of sunlight*. There is a reason for higher incidence of depression in far northern climes like Alaska and Russia, where there is little sunlight for long periods

4 Unpublished ARTS syllabus, 48.

of time. Most of us know those who suffer from SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder), an affliction that comes when daylight becomes less in the fall of the year. Usually those who suffer this find relief in the spring and survive the winter months only with artificial lights (with increased risk of skin cancer) or trips to sunnier climates. But even normal light of a cloudy day is helpful when we take a vigorous winter walk. The wonder of our bodies includes that they need sufficient exposure to daylight, just as our souls need The Light. "The Lord is my light and my salvation."

**Common problems in the spiritual life**

The wise elder or pastor will want to make a plan to address all the spiritual factors that may contribute to or be a result of depression. Patiently and carefully he will find, take careful notes about, and then address the entrenched patterns of wrong responses to difficulties, the bad habits that stunt spiritual growth or sap spiritual strength, the areas of spiritual lacks and weaknesses. Show, by good instruction and by your own example, how to respond to afflictions, to trust God in hardships, to believe His goodness that cannot presently be felt or seen.

Then there are six areas that can be discussed, common to many who suffer depression. Each of these areas can busy you in your counsel for a number of visits.

***1. Self-esteem***

Depressed persons often have a very low view of themselves. Is this low self-esteem a root or a fruit of depression? In either case, their sense of worthlessness is strong. Inferiority prevails. Sometimes, then, they will do foolish things to prove that they have some value and worth. In the secular literature there are many unbiblical promotions of an improper self-esteem. I have read Christian books that use mostly secular psychology. But we may not allow an unchristian promotion of self-esteem to cause us to overreact and leave the impression that there is no *proper* and biblical self-esteem.

On the one hand, the child of God must abhor and humble himself in dust and ashes on account of his sin.[5] There can be no proper

5 The Reformed "Form for the Administration of the Lord's Supper," explaining what is necessary before a believer comes to the Supper, says, "That every one consider by himself his sins and the curse due to him for

self-esteem without a clear-headed view of one's self as depraved in nature. "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing," Paul lamented, speaking as a regenerated Christian. Only with that confession could he then thank and praise God for Jesus Christ. Christians hate their sinful flesh, loathe their evil natures, long for deliverance from this body of death, and daily mortify this "old man" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 33). Only this will lead them to humble and genuine confession of sin as a regular practice of their Christian faith and life. If that is not done, we do grave injustice to the gospel and to Scripture's testimony of our *present* depravity. Spiritual and emotional health depend on this, first.

At the same time, the child of God must see himself as God sees Him and esteem himself as one of God's precious children. As *chosen* by God we are *precious* to Him, so that even our death is precious (Ps. 72:14; Ps. 116:15). As *redeemed* by Christ's precious blood, we are precious to Him (I Pet. 1:19). *Regenerated*, we are *new creations*; indeed, all things are become new. Because God *justifies* us, He *accepts* us and *approves* us. We are *heirs* of all God's creation as His *adopted* children. He *sanctifies* us so that we are *actually good* (even though only with small beginnings). Because God *redeemed* us in *our bodies* as well as our souls, even our bodies (loathsome as sometimes they appear to us) are precious to Him. As our loving and wise Father, God *ordains and guides all creatures* (even those that contribute to the sorrows of my depression) so that none of them will separate us from Him, and all of them will work our good—even those that look the most awful (Gen. 50:20). In this paragraph alone are texts and concepts that will keep an elder busy explaining and applying Scripture for many visits.

Every member of Christ's body has his important place in the body (I Cor. 14), whether he sees and understands that place or not. Even the human appendix, which was assumed for many years by most experts to have no function, does. So does every believer in the body of Christ.

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them, to the end that he may abhor and humble himself before God, considering that the wrath of God against sin is so great, that (rather than it should go unpunished) He hath punished the same in His beloved Son Jesus Christ with the bitter and shameful death of the cross…."

***2. Seeking approval from men***

If others think well of me, so I imagine, I can think well of myself. The great fear of the depressed is that others will disapprove of their actions, their appearance, their family, their choices, their friends, their job, their car, their personality…. One driving force in their life is to do what others will approve and praise. Soon, this wrong thinking becomes a dominating reality, so that the depressed Christian will do almost anything to gain the approval of others. Besides being wrong, this is a miserable way to live.

It will be helpful for an elder first to examine whether and to what extent this is a problem. Then, examine what factors contributed to this way of thinking. "Seeking approval of men" is often connected with an improperly low self-esteem. Thus, if one's view of self becomes biblical, his craving for acceptance and approval by others will lessen. One of the most liberating realities for a Christian who suffers this is to be freed from the bondage of man's approval. Ed Welch's *When People are Big and God is Small: Overcoming Peer Pressure, Codependency, and the Fear of Man* is one of the helpful books to read in this connection.

Beginning with yourself, learn to turn your attention from men to God. First, it is much easier to receive approval from God than from man, for God approves of us when by faith we embrace Christ, but men place impossible demands upon us, requiring of us what we usually cannot do, or must not do. Second, when we live by faith, we can live in gratitude for the unique place God gave to us—even the lowest place is far too good. And when we fail, we go to the cross, where God testifies His perfect love and unconditional acceptance.

Psalm 17:2 is my favorite in this regard: "Let my sentence come forth from thy presence." For "sentence," other translations offer "vindication." That is, my vindication must come from God, not from others. The Psalter versifies it: "Send thy approval from on high, my righteousness make clear." This is what God's people want, and pray for: "O God, I do not want approval from men, or vindication from people; I need Thy approval, and Thine only." Paul's advice to Timothy, applying first of all to pastors, applies to all God's people: "Study to shew thyself approved unto God" (II Tim. 2:15). We do too much "studying" to be approved by men. Paul said to the Corinthians:

"We labour, that… we may be accepted of him" (II Cor. 5:9). We are not "men-pleasers" (Eph. 6:6), but those who seek to please God.

***3. Perfectionism***

The sins and weaknesses just mentioned often lead to or are a part of *perfectionism*, the never-ending striving for flawlessness, the setting of impossibly high standards for performance, accompanied by constant critical self-evaluations. It is the sin of setting unrealistic standards and goals for oneself. Along with this, usually, is a desire to know what others think of my performance, which connects this weakness with the former two.

The perfectionist is an overachiever, probably a workaholic. He may excel at what he does, but he may also produce very little because what he has to present can always be better than what it is.

A perfectionist will defend his sin of perfectionism. He will claim that Christians must always improve, ought never be satisfied with mediocre performance, and that aiming high is helpful to grow and develop. But when the perfectionist meets or comes close to meeting the high personal standards he sets for himself, he is still not satisfied, either because he did not meet the *highest* standard or because he is ashamed he had to work *so* hard to accomplish what he did. So, he is driven further into the bondage. Every perfectionist recognizes himself in this description.

What drives this mentality is what a counselor can probe, graciously but pointedly. Is it truly to do right before God? Or is it to prove himself to others? Is it an attempt to do the best he can for God's sake, or so that others will esteem him?

Let us ask what *God* expects of us, what *God* calls us to do, what *God* qualifies us to do, and what is realistic given the gifts *God* has given to us. God has not called us to do every work. God has not called us to produce as much as or with the same quality as our neighbor. He calls us to do our best, while we recognize the limitations we have, mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, etc. To use the analogy of I Cor. 14, the perfectionist is likely a foot who wants to be a hand, an ear who wants to be an eye. A good book on perfectionism would be useful for a counselor who finds this problem. A good start, however, would be a study of I Corinthians 14.

### *4. The fallacy of feelings*

"The fallacy of feelings" is the expression I use to describe a very serious error that should be addressed when one becomes depressed.[6] It is a spiritual fallacy to think that we ought to do only what we *feel* like doing. Depression often inclines us to do only what we feel like doing, and *not* to do what we *ought*, because we have no desire. We do not feel like geting out of bed, doing our homework, going to work, conducting devotions, exercising, praying with our spouse, attending church, saying I'm sorry to a fellow worker, and a host of other things the Lord calls us to do. We do not feel like it, therefore we do not do it. The consequence of acting on feelings, however, is only worse feelings, because our conscience convicts us that we did not do what we ought to have done, or did what we ought not to have done.

In a multitude of circumstances, not only in cases of depression, elders will find the need to advise the sheep not to act according to feelings, but according to God's revealed will. When a husband does not *feel* like leading his family in worship, he must do it nevertheless. When a wife does not *feel* like getting up early enough to lead her children in morning devotions prior to sending them off to school, she gets up anyway because she knows God wills that she lead her little lambs to begin their day with the Word and prayer. When a young person does not *feel* like studying for next day's test, he bucks up and studies because God calls him to work. So when the feelings of the depressed Christian are so low that he believes that he *cannot* do what he is called to do, he wrestles against those feelings and prays for the grace to do what he knows he ought to do.

Of course, this is more easily said than done, which is always the case in directing troubled members, especially disconsolate ones. But there is encouragement that elders can offer to those whose *feelings* are so low that they believe it impossible to *do* what is right: God rewards obedience—perhaps in a special way the obedience done in such difficult circumstances—with renewed joy in the doing, and even hearty desires to do what is right.

In one of C.S. Lewis' finest lines in *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis

6 Although the expression is usually connected with bad logic—arguing a case based on emotions—the expression has use in counseling depressed Christians.

has the senior devil advise his junior apprentice about this very matter: "Our [the devils'] cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer *desiring*, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will [that is, God's will] looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him [God] seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and *still obeys*."[7][emphasis added]

Practical counsel for those who are tempted to act on feeling rather than on God's revealed will includes: 1) You are not a hypocrite when you do what is right even when you do not want to do so. Pray, even when you do not want to pray, etc. 2) God calls you to have right desires; when you do not have them, confess that sin and find forgiveness. 3) God promises to give what He commands (eagerness and even joy in doing), so ask Him for it. He that asks, receives (Matt. 7:7,8). 4) Thank God even for the sense of remorse you have. You know you should desire to do right; you confess that you do not have that desire; you want that desire. All this is God's work in you, for which you may thank God. 5) Wait patiently for increased desire and increased joy, even when it is so small that you are ashamed.

***5. Assurance of salvation***

Because assurance of salvation is a topic so large as to demand a book, I will only outline some elements an elder can address, and leave to him to study for himself how to develop this important truth.

Assurance of salvation is often lost by depressed Christians. As we noted earlier, one of the devil's favorite goals is to rob the believer of salvation's assurance. Because he cannot pluck us out of the Father's hand, our grim foe does the next best thing: convince us that we never were in God's hand. Not all depressed Christians lack assurance, but when they do, this lack ranks high on the list of subjects that needs to be addressed.

First, God grants assurance by faith alone. The devil's great work is to convince us that salvation and its assurance come by works and because of works. So the Christian begins to examine his works, and when he finds few, if any, he concludes that he must not be a believer. He becomes convinced that God will judge him for his sins, the sins of commission and omission, and that his present misery is only the

7 C.S. Lewis, *The Best of C.S. Lewis,* (New York: The Iverson-Norman Associates, 1969), 38.

beginning of what he will endure forever, deservedly. It cannot be repeated often enough that faith embraces Christ alone, depends on Christ's works, not my own. It cannot be said loudly and emphatically enough that Christ's suffering covered all my sins, and that none of my works or suffering can cover one of them. We may not weary of teaching that Christ's obedience, and not my own, merited for me God's favor, and that my disobedience does not cancel God's love for me. It must be said over and over that God approves men and women through faith alone, because of Christ alone, by grace (not works!) alone.

This is true even though I may lose assurance when I walk in sin (see, for example, Isaiah 59:2). But the restoration of my assurance comes, not by working, but by faith alone. Even though God may chasten my disobedience by withdrawing Himself from me, turning His face away from me; and even though He will not turn it back toward me except in the way of my repentance and obedience; nevertheless my restored assurance comes by faith. We do call depressed Christians to obey. First, however, we call them to repent and believe, to see Christ, trust Christ, depend on Christ, and be thankful for what Christ has done for them. Then, and only then do we show them the path (of obedience) to which they must return and upon which they must walk.

It is important to understand the reasoning of the depressed believer. "An unbeliever cannot have the assurance of God's favor; I do not have the assurance of God's favor; therefore, I am an unbeliever." Whether his logic is as tidy and explicit as this, that will be his/her underlying reasoning. Our task, as pastors and elders, is to show the error in this thinking, beginning with the important truths that believers, for a time, may lose a sense of God's favor (see Canons V:5); and that God will use this experience, painful though it may be, to bring them to a richer and ever deeper knowledge of, and appreciation for, this most precious of blessings.

A caution: our efforts will be in vain if we continue to focus the depressed believer's attention on his doubts and fears, rather than directing his attention to Jesus. Nor must we fall into the trap of trying to examine the faith of the depressed person. Faith does not turn in on itself, examine itself, study itself to see if it is genuine. Faith looks away from itself to Christ, always and only to Christ. Thus, the im-

portance of the regular reading, explaining, and applying of Scripture, even those passages that seem to have nothing to do with his or her present experiences and difficulties. Show them Jesus. Show them Jesus. Continue to show them Jesus. And in God's good providence and grace, whether you understand it or not, and whether it comes as soon as you wish or not, He will restore to the sheep a knowledge of God's love.

The Psalms speak often to believers whose hearts are cast down. Three of my favorites are Psalm 42 (with 43), Psalm 77, and Psalm 88 (remember to use the accompanying versifications of these Psalms in the Psalter). Do not doubt the power of God's Word when the depressed believer, reluctant as he may be, memorizes and repeats and sings these Psalms. And what a blessing to the elder who memorizes, repeats, and sings these Psalms with the sheep, after he has studied them himself.

If an elder wants another approach for his work regarding assurance, perhaps after long labor with apparently little progress, let him study and discuss with the struggling believer the Canons of Dordt, a creed full of references to assurance. Study especially Heads I and V, and do not fail to follow these heads with the rejection of errors that accompany them.

***6. Service and selflessness***

When you believe it appropriate, address also the great need for believers to be looking outside of themselves to others. One of the greatest needs for spiritual and emotional health is to look outward rather than inward, to seek the good of others more than the good of one's self. That must not be misunderstood, because it is also true that we cannot benefit others when we are not ourselves healthy. On the other hand, if we only seek ourselves and ponder our own welfare, we will only spiral into more depression. Focusing on ourselves, our needs, our sorrows, our hurt, may be important; but it is not the only important thing.

When a child of God endures depression, it is most natural to concentrate on how to be delivered from the affliction. We certainly pray for the grace to endure this affliction, even to be delivered from it. At the same time, we do not allow our own pain to deter us from being busy serving others.

Is our depression in part the result of self-centered living? That

is possible. Or is a self-focus the result of depression? Either way, the path of emotional and spiritual vibrancy is the path of loving and serving the neighbor.

Isaiah 58 gives surprising and beautiful instruction in this regard. The beginning of the chapter exposes the people in their sins of selfish living. They often did not even regard the needs of their own family members. They fasted—that is, they went through the motions of religious activity—but they were not busy with the things that mattered to God: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, relieving the poor. Then the prophet made this beautiful promise: If you open your home to the poor, cover the naked, and deal bread to the hungry, the Lord will satisfy your soul in times of drought, fatten your bones, and make you like a watered garden and a spring of water. God will enrich the *souls* of those who love their needy neighbor. The soul that turns inward is a parched soul. Like an ingrown toenail, a soul turned inward only brings pain to itself. For the souls that care for others, their gloom will be as the noonday and their light will arise in their darkness (see vv. 10, 11).

We are speaking of a sin of *omission*, perhaps the greatest sin of omission—a failure actively, selflessly, purposefully, energetically to give one's self to others. Christians are too often concerned only with not *committing* sin, and if they do not commit too many gross evils, believe themselves to have done what God has asked them to do, and safe, spiritually. The result is that, although they have not committed sins worthy of censure, or sins that others would see and censure them for, they have still been guilty of serious sin—the sin of omission. The result is that many Christians are suffering a "low grade feeling of guilt." [8]

The sins of omission of which I speak include failures to bring a meal to a widower, fix the car of a widow, or show care to fatherless children. They also involve our failures to do the greatest good a man can do to others—direct him to God. Witnessing of our faith is not only by a good example of moral uprightness, but by speaking the truth in love. Failure here is one of our greatest sins of omission.

So give to your hurting sheep opportunity to suggest how he can

8 For someone on the edge of depression, if this bad feeling is added to his other bad feelings, he may suffer the "death by a thousand cuts."

exercise himself in serving others—Christians and non-Christians. Remind him of the great commandments—first to love God, and then to love the neighbor as he loves himself. But allow him to suggest where he could most comfortably start helping. Not everyone has the same gifts (Rom. 12:6-8), which means that we counselors must not try to direct everyone to the same exercises of mercy. But all the people of God must show mercy to the needy and spend themselves in the sacrificial giving that is love. Major steps are not necessary. If they live in a home with a family, let them learn to approach little jobs around the house as their testimony of love for others. Or, have them begin with writing a card of thanks or a note of encouragement. Advance to baking some cookies for others or, if a man, 'adopting' a widow or widower whom he can help, or visit, or pick up for church. Maybe a relative who has been neglected because of an old fallout between them could use help. One never knows whether discussions like this might even uncover some serious matter, some old and deep 'infection' that has never been addressed and now can be treated.

I used to live near the Salton Sea—the largest body of water in California, created over 100 years ago largely by waters mistakenly diverted from the Colorado River. It has become a salty, dying lake because, though there are times when water flows into this sea, there is no outlet. Some have called it the "Useless Sea." The fish we caught there as boys in the 60s no longer can survive the increasing salinity. It is not unlike the Dead Sea, into which flows the Jordan River, which also has no outlet, and therefore is also a dying sea. God created His people like bodies of water: we need both inlet and outlet to be healthy, vibrant. We must be outward looking: whom can we serve in love?

**Finally… Faith, Hope, and Love**

Implied in everything we have seen above is the positive response that God's people are called to have when they face difficulties.

It is the calling of us elders to teach the people of God to live and respond in *faith, hope, and love.* These three heavy-weights of the Holy Spirit's graces are like David's three mighty men; we can hardly be thankful enough for them. We ought to concentrate on increasing them within us. Elders and pastors know how to build up the people of God in these three graces. "Strengthen your core!"

***Faith*** is our union with our Savior. Faith embraces Christ and all His benefits. Faith knows Christ's Word and works. Faith understands truth—all the truth of the Word of God. Faith also is assurance that these truths apply "not only to others, but to me also" (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7).

Faith is our victory that overcomes the world (I Jn. 5:4). It is our shield that quenches all the fiery darts of the wicked one (Eph. 6:16). All believers need faith increased. This is especially what the depressed Christian needs.

Because faith is worked by the Holy Spirit through His Word (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 25), our calling as elders is to bring the Word to discouraged Christians. We believe the Lord will use it to work faith that may, at present, appear small as a mustard seed.

These are some of the important truths of the Word that help: Faith in the providence of God so that we are not only thankful in prosperity, but also patient in adversity (Lord's Day 10). Faith that "all things are ours" (I Cor. 3:21-23), that all things work together for good for God's own children (Rom. 8:28). Although we cannot see why the troubles appear in our lives, we do not live by sight but by faith (II Cor. 4:15-18). Faith acknowledges that our good God sometimes "sends evils" (Lord's Day 9). And faith embraces the truth that those our Father does not avert, He turns to our profit (Baptism Form).

A proper response to troubles in our lives is a *believing* response.

It is also response in hope.

***Hope*** is God's gift that enables His people confidently to expect good in the days to come. Hope looks at the days ahead and believes that good is in them. Hope reaches out, not only to the distant future of heaven (of course, the depressed Christian says, *that* will be good when I see God face to face and receive my final reward!). But hope reaches out to the closer future of tomorrow and next week and next month and believes good will be in them, too.

Hope is so important that Scripture says that we are "saved by hope" (Rom. 8:24). Hope keeps us going. By hope we do not quit but endure to the end. Hope is what kept Moses going in the most difficult of circumstances (Heb. 11:24-27).

But depressed Christians often are without hope. They understand

that only those who have *God* can have hope (Eph. 2:12); and because they are without God (they believe) they also can have no hope.

So teach them about hope (as was mentioned, above). Specifically, direct them to Psalms 42 and 43. And teach them the *third* truth in Lord's Day 10 (Q&A 28) on providence. The Catechism teaches that the benefit of believing providence is *threefold*, not twofold as we often imagine. The profit of believing providence is 1) thankfulness in prosperity, 2) patience in adversity, but *also* 3) "that in all things that shall hereafter befall us [the future!], we place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love; since all creatures are so in His hand, that without His will they cannot so much as move."

Faith, hope, and love. The greatest of these is ***love***.

First, we teach depressed Christians about God's love for them. Unconditional love that is not directed to them because they are lovely, since there is no loveliness in them, naturally. But He loves them nevertheless. He *determined* to do us the greatest good (in His gracious election of us), *desires* that good for us, and then does that good by *delivering* us from our sin, *drawing* us into His bosom with the cords of love and *dwelling* with us forever.[9] What love of God that He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up for us all! Nothing shall separate us from that love of God. Study carefully Romans 8:28-39. Believe that God will use these words to convince His own of His love.

Then, out of gratitude for God's love, we love Him. This is the great commandment. *Determine* to love Him, to glorify and enjoy Him forever.[10] Call the depressed Christian to make a plan in the morning that centers in his plan to serve God, to glorify and enjoy Him. Then, pray for the grace to *desire* this. But even if the desire is not present, *do* Him the greatest good a man can do: glorify Him, draw near to Him, *dwell* with Him, and enjoy Him forever. And since

9 For an explanation of the biblical idea of love, especially these four "D"s that I contend make up the main elements of love, see my sermon on Matthew 22:37-40, "The Great Commandments: To Love" on Sermonaudio.com.

10 The first Q&A of the Westminster Shorter Catechism identifies well how Christians love God: Man's "chief end" is to "glorify God and to enjoy Him forever."

it was costly for Him to love us, we must not expect our love for Him to be anything less than that: it will cost us everything—all our heart and all our mind and all our soul and all our strength.

Then, we love the neighbor.

This brings us back to the outward-looking stance with which the people of God must live. Faith is for *me*; hope is for *me*; but love is for *others*. When we read I Corinthians 13, we remind ourselves that Paul is speaking about love for the *neighbor*. God's love for me is implied, but it is not the subject of the chapter.

This "second commandment" is like the first. So we teach God's people that the way of spiritual and emotional health is to awake to make a plan to love God, and then a plan to love the neighbor. Determine to do the neighbor good, and then do it. Give yourself to your neighbor, your unlovely neighbor, even your enemy neighbor (see Matt. 5:43-48). This is costly, very costly. But this is the way of emotional health and spiritual joy.

Then, we can even love ourselves. "Love thy neighbor as *thyself*."

This is not the "self-love" of narcissism—an abominable, grandiose view of one's self and a desire for the attention and praise of others. Nor is this self-love dependent on finding something in ourselves that is good, attractive, lovable; because we are very unlovely. If our love for ourselves depended on finding something attractive, we would be destined forever not to love ourselves. In fact, our daily calling is to "consider by ourselves our sins and the curse due to us for them, to the end that we may abhor and humble ourselves before God."[11] We are, in ourselves, very unlovely.

But love does good to the unlovely. Love of *self* parallels the love we show to others. Just as God's love for us did not depend on *our* loveliness, and our love for our enemies does not depend on their loveliness, so our love for ourselves does not depend on finding something attractive or desirable in ourselves. When we understand what love is, we understand how this

11 This is a quotation from the Lord's Supper Form (with the singular pronoun changed to the plural). The "Compendium" of the Heidelberg Catechism says, "After what manner must you examine yourself before you come to the Lord's Supper? A. 1. I must examine whether I abhor myself for my sins and humble myself before God on account of them." Although this is reference to what is required of us before the Lord's Supper, it is the Christian's calling to regard himself so daily.

is possible. So we *determine* to do good to ourselves; by the grace of God we *desire* that good for ourselves; then, by the same grace, we *do* ourselves good, both to our bodies and to our souls. And the greatest good that we can do ourselves is to draw near to God, *dwell* in His presence, delight in His works and ways, and look forward to the day when this weary night is past, and we will love and be loved by God in perfection. ●

# Family Visitation: An Institution Too Valuable to Lose[1]

**Barrett L. Gritters**

When the Officebearers Conference Committee of Classis East first asked me to speak about our denomination's practice of family visitation, I was thrilled at the opportunity to speak on what I consider a vitally important practice. I assumed that a small fellowship hall would suffice to hold those who might be interested, so when Hudsonville PRC's large sanctuary became the venue and the interested audience—including not only elders but other members—almost filled the sanctuary, I realized how this important practice still has a treasured place in the hearts of the people of God. I have hope for churches whose leadership values this historic practice and wants to do it right.

In this speech I present ideals, high ideals. As officebearers serving the Lord Jesus, we want to aim high. The practice deserves our best. Even though each man has his own unique gifts and abilities, his own personality and limited strength, we aim high so that each may do his best. Christ will be honored in this way and, we pray, His church maintained.

**Family Visitation's Biblical Basis**

Family visitation—*the official, systematic visits (at least annually) by a committee of elders to all the homes of the congregation*—is an institution that is rooted not in tradition, but in Scripture. To say it differently, although it *is* tradition in many Reformed churches, it is not *merely* tradition, but based on and done in obedience to Scripture.

First, there are two significant names for elders that indicate the calling to visit the homes of church members. The designation of elders as "overseers" or "bishops" (Acts 20:20, Phil. 1:1, I Tim. 3:2, Titus 1:7; the word is translated "bishop" in Acts 1:20 and I Pet. 2:25) indicates the elders' calling *to look upon, to watch over, carefully to inspect* the sheep under their care. Their very name mandates them

1 A revision, for publication, of a speech given on January 9, 2018.

to "see over" the church members. Of course, the title does not mandate a "once-per-year-by-two-elders-with-each-family visit." But it strongly leans in that direction when it calls elders *overseers*. What better way to do this than by regular, official visits to the homes? *How* this oversight is done may not be the point in the title *overseer*; but *that* oversight must be conducted cannot be denied.

The designation of elders as "shepherds" is also common in Scripture. Already in the Old Testament the leaders of the people are spoken of as shepherds. Their shepherd-like calling is made pointed in Jeremiah 34 where the prophet issued sharp warnings against the apostate elders who fleeced the sheep in order to feed themselves, and scattered the sheep who then became prey to beasts. In the New Testament, Jesus called Himself the *good* Shepherd (John 10:11). He is the *great* Shepherd in Hebrews 13:20. Peter refers to Him as the *chief* Shepherd (I Pet. 5:4) and *Overseer* (I Pet. 2:25) of our souls. So it is plain that elders are shepherds when Peter says speaks to the elders, "Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight (I Pet. 5:2). "Feed the flock" could be translated "shepherd the flock," and "taking the oversight" is verb form of the Greek "overseer." Peter instructs elders: "Be shepherds to the flock by being overseers."

This designation "shepherd" deserves more explanation. This explanation will help elders think more clearly about their work of visiting homes.

A shepherd's duty is to feed, lead, warn, and protect his sheep. He is to do this for the flock as a whole, but also individually, with his eye on each member of the flock. The good shepherd knows each of his sheep "by name" (John 10:3). He is familiar with every one of them. He knows their history, their weaknesses, their sorrows, their besetting sins and unique temptations. Then, according to those unique needs at that particular time, he feeds, leads, warns and protects them. Three other New Testament texts are helpful to clarify the shepherd-like calling of elders.

Acts 20:28 is Paul's final exhortation to the elders whom he calls "overseers." "Take heed" is his opening exhortation. That is, the work of an overseer takes carefulness, attentiveness, self-discipline and diligence. The work of family visitation takes preparation, careful forethought and prayer. That is, it cannot be done "with a lick and a promise."

I Thessalonians 5:12-14 includes exhortations to the flock to know their elder-shepherds in three respects: a) that the elders "labor" among them. Here, the word *labor* refers to toil unto exhaustion—just what elders often feel after a season of visiting families for three hours in an evening, for many evenings; b) that the elders are "over" them, that is, at the head of the flock, directing, ruling, caring for, and giving aid. Family visitation is conducted with friendliness, but not the kind of casual atmosphere that takes away from the official character of it. Elders serve in an *official* capacity; c) that involved in the elder's calling is to "admonish," which includes both instruction (including reminders) as well as warnings. Elders may be greatly reluctant ever to issue warnings to church members; but the reluctance is not because Jesus has forbidden them to warn when warnings are necessary. Shepherds must warn of dangers, whether the sheep are aware of them or not. Just as parents warn their children, always in love, so elders with the flock under their care. If any elder is hesitant to warn, he ought to re-read Ezekiel 33:1-9.

Hebrews 13:7 and 17 are also exhortations to the *sheep* regarding their attitude towards the elders. The exhortations contain is instruction to the elders. a) First, the elders *rule.* Remember those who "have the rule over you." This rule is exercised, the apostle says, not by force but by "speaking the word of God," which means that family visitation must always bring the word. Never may a visit be conducted without explanation and application of Scripture itself. b) Second, the people of God must "follow the faith" of the elders and reflect also on the elders' conduct ("considering the end of their conversation," when "end" means "outcome" and "conversation" means "way of life"). Faith and life. When the elders live among the congregation—and not merely on the annual visits—they keep in mind that the flock is learning from their example. Ministers live in a "glass house." So do the elders.

Hebrews 13:17 adds these significant aspects to the instruction: a) Elders must "give account" someday to the Chief Shepherd. Written or oral reporting to the consistory is one thing; the account that must be given to Jesus with regard to their work is quite another. b) There is true joy in the work of eldership: "that they may do it with joy." But there can also be "grief" (referring to the sighs and groans that might

result) when the sheep do not obey and submit to the elders' rule. c) Last, there is mention of "unprofitability" in the elders' work. If the people of God do not submit, the apostle says, "that is unprofitable for" them. Two brief applications belong here: First, the elders do their work to profit the *people,* not themselves. Second, a reminder is in order about what profits are important—not only the bottom line of and financial gain in a business, but the blessings received by the spiritual work of elders with the people of God.

As an aside, elders would do well to ask their pastors to preach texts like these prior to conducting the annual family visits. Often, a "theme text" is chosen for the visits, which text the minister preaches to set the tone for the visits. As often, it would be valuable for the minister to instruct God's flock regarding the biblical justification for family visitation itself.

In addition to the instruction and applications already mentioned from these texts, the texts indicate two matters that might be overlooked. First, scrutiny of the membership by the elders is not illegitimate intrusion—the sense some may have—but commanded by Jesus. Asking personal questions of individuals is not lording or overbearing, but obedience to Jesus Christ who calls elders to "watch over" the flock, to "see" them, and not superficially, but deeply. Second, the calling of elders and the purpose of "family visitation" is individual soul-care by Jesus Christ Himself. It is the care that the Chief Shepherd has for His sheep, who gave His life for them. He loves them and has their interests in His heart. So does the elder.

**Family Visitation's Confessional Basis**

Based on the instruction given in passages such as these, the practice of family visitation is mandated in the Reformed creeds, not so much in the Three Forms of Unity where the church's faith is confessed, but in the so-called minor creeds, especially the Church Order of Dordt, where the church's practices are expounded. The following are our focus here (**emphasis** is added):

**Dordt's Church Order, Article 23**

> *The office of the Elders, in addition to what was said in Article 16 to be their duty in common with the Minister of the Word, is to take heed*

> *that the Ministers, together with their fellow-Elders and the Deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and* ***both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members****, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian Religion.*

Here, note: 1) the number of visits per year is determined by the consistory according to circumstances; 2) the purpose is comfort and instruction; 3) family "servants" or employees may have sat in on these visits in the past, which gave opportunity to the elders to exhort them regarding the Christian religion!

**Dordt's Church Order, Article 44**

> *The Classis shall authorize at least two of her oldest, most experienced and most competent Ministers to visit all the Churches once a year and to* ***take heed whether the Minister and the Consistory faithfully perform the duties of their office****, adhere to sound doctrine, observe in all things the adopted order, and* ***properly promote as much as lies in them, through word and deed, the upbuilding of the congregation****, in particular of the youth…*

Here, note: 1) the article is not directly about family visitation, but the visits classis makes to individual consistories within the classis—something very similar to "family visitation," but on an ecclesiastical level; 2) the church visitors inquire whether consistories are building up the congregation by word and example; 3) special emphasis is given to "the youth."

**Dordt's Church Order, Article 55**

> *To ward off false doctrines and errors that multiply exceedingly through heretical writings, the Ministers and* ***Elders shall use the means of teaching, of refutation, or warning, and of admonition****, as well in the Ministry of the Word as* ***in Christian teaching and family-visiting****.*

Here, note: 1) the subjects of discussion in family visitation include doctrine, the importance of true doctrine, and the dangers of false doc-

trines and errors. Add "reading good books with sound doctrine" to the list of subjects on the visit. 2) elders should talk with the youth about "Christian teaching," which is a reference to catechism instruction; and in that instruction are given warnings about false doctrine. 3) *elders* are qualified to speak of false doctrines and errors that multiply, implying that elders are well-read.

When the church visitors, spoken of in article 44 above, oversee each consistory, the mandatory questions include these: *Is family visitation conducted faithfully, so that each family receives an official visit once a year? Does he (the minister) regularly conduct the catechism classes, visit the sick faithfully, and take part in family visitation?*

Finally, in the "Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons" are found these important statements (**emphasis** is added):

In the doctrinal part:

> *Therefore, in the **first** place, the office of elders is together with the ministers of the Word, to take the oversight of the Church, which is committed to them, and **diligently to look**, whether **everyone properly deports himself** in his confession and conversation; **to admonish** those who behave themselves disorderly….*

In the exhortation to these newly installed officebearers:

> *Therefore, ye **elders**, be diligent in the government of the Church, which is committed to you, and the ministers of the Word. Be also, **as watchmen** over the house and city of God, **faithful to admonish and to caution** every one against his ruin; **Take heed that purity of doctrine and godliness of life be maintained** in the Church of God.*

In the section exhorting the congregation:

> *Beloved Christians, receive these men as the servants of God: count the elders that rule well worthy of double honour, **give yourselves willingly to their inspection and government.***

In the closing prayer:

> *We beseech thee, replenish them more and more with such gifts as are necessary, for them in their ministration; with the gifts of wisdom,*

> *courage, discretion, and benevolence, to the end that every one may, in his respective office, acquit himself as is becoming;* ***the elders in taking diligent heed unto the doctrine and conversation****, in keeping out the wolves from the sheepfold of thy beloved Son; and in admonishing and reproving disorderly persons.*

In addition to what I noted above, what these creedal statements make clear is:

1. *What* family visitation *is*: An annual visit (at a minimum annually) by elders to each home to "comfort and instruct" (Church Order 23).

2. *Whose* work it is: The elders' work, primarily. Of course, the minister assists (Church Visitation Questions), but the elders take the lead. The days are gone of mostly small congregations where the minister could easily visit each family. Elders must shoulder the bulk of this work. (In 1973, the year of my high school graduation, only four PRC congregations were larger than 50 families. Today, in 2018, two-thirds of them are larger than 50, many over 100 families.)

3. What is the *nature* of the work: Official visits conducted by committees. Family visitation may not devolve into a casual visit by one elder, perhaps with his wife, but ought to remain an official visit by a committee of two men.

4. What is the *importance* of the work: The command of Christ to "watch over the flock," going "from house to house," to be engaged in the personal spiritual care of every sheep and lamb in your flock, elevates the importance of these visits to a very high position.

**Family Visitation Itself**

I describe family visitation here with clearly defined mandate and purpose: Family Visitation is conducted to determine, and then address with the Word of God, the unique needs of this home this year.

***This home:*** Each home, of course, is different. In some is a married couple; in others a single man or woman. Some have children; others are childless. Some have many children; others have one or a few. Some are old, others are young. It is the calling of the elders' committee to determine the needs of *this* home.

***Unique needs:*** Not all similar homes have similar needs. One elderly couple may be very different than another elderly couple. One single member may desire to be married and struggle with discontent; another may be convicted of God's calling to him to remain single, and be content with it. One family with many children may struggle financially; another may be financially stable but spiritually weak. This home consists of newer members; another home has roots in the church that go down many generations. Certain homes have a strong commitment to reading and study; others need encouragement and exhortation in this regard.

***This year:*** By this I do mean *this year,* and not the *emergency needs of today.* If a family has emergency needs, these should not wait until the committee of elders is scheduled to come in a couple of weeks or even months, any more than an acute physical need like chest pain may wait until the regular physical check-up with the family doctor is scheduled. Of course, if an emergency came up the week the family visitation is scheduled, this may well be one subject of discussion with the Word of God. But depression or serious sin-struggles must have the attention of the elders whenever they occur, as soon as possible. "Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church…" (James 5:14). But the main point here is that a home's needs differ from one year to another, and elders are called to observe these. Children change from year to year, as do health, financial circumstances, and so forth.

***Determine the need:*** Here is the work that takes great wisdom, patience, grace, and especially true love.

Some needs the elders know because they have been working all year to learn them. If Reformed elders may have 'mantras,' their mantra ought to be, "The good shepherd knows his sheep." An entire speech could be devoted to give counsel to elders how to be and become familiar with the congregation's needs (I will say more about this, below). One cannot start to know a family at the family's annual visit. This also explains why, in most congregations, men are not nominated to the eldership who are relative newcomers to the congregation; and if they are, often not elected because the membership understands the need for elders to know them. And if a relative newcomer *is* elected,

he will devote himself to knowing the needs of his sheep.

Some needs are known because members will readily make their needs known. But many needs come to light only because the elders ask. A good practice at a family visit, therefore, is that the elders ask a family, early on, "What can we help you with? What are the needs of your family that we may bring the Word of God to address?" But to ask the question in the right tone and spirit is a spiritual gift and art for which elders pray. The people of God are often shy, scared, or embarrassed to reveal their struggles and sorrows. But they need wise elders to probe—gently, lovingly. The members are sometimes like a quivering dog with a painful sliver in its paw, who knows well the need to have it removed, but fearful of the hurt that probing involves. Or, to the contrary, perhaps more like an angry dog that does not want to admit hurt or ask for help.

Here is where the difficult work of family visitation comes. Family visitation consists of asking good questions to determine needs, *before the word of God is explained.* Asking good questions. Asking the right kind of questions. Asking in the right way. And not being satisfied with pat answers and generalities because, well, we elders are somewhat shy and embarrassed to probe.

I am reminded of my own medical doctor and his approach to me on my annual check-up. Before he talks about what he thinks I need, he asks me about any pains I have, any changes in my body I have noticed, any new skin-cancer spots that need excision or freezing. It is his job to *determine* my needs in order to *address* those needs with his medicine.

It may not go without saying, then, that the elder may not (perhaps nervously) do all the talking. I have heard of mothers who, after the family visit was over, wept saying, "They have no idea what goes on in our home! They never asked! Are they interested?!" My response to that sad plea is, "Of course they do care; but they might not have been trained to ask, and they maybe have not prayed for the boldness and wisdom to ask the right questions in the right way."

So elders will ask the teen, for example, about personal devotions. And they will not be satisfied with the standard answer, "Well, not as much as I should," after which the elder nervously agrees, "Well, we all struggle with that," and proceeds quickly to the next subject.

Instead, they will ask questions that do not allow a yes or no answer, but ask, "Tell us about your personal devotions? When do you have your own private Bible reading time and prayers? Where are you reading now?" After short discussion, the elder can suggest a Bible reading 'program' that he has tucked away in his Bible. Then, after jotting down a little note to himself on the family's 'card,' he says to the young man, "Can I call you again next week to follow up on this? I would like to help you establish a good habit of personal Bible study." Such work will give 'traction' to the shepherding. Such work will endear the elder forever to the parents of the teenagers. On account of *such* elders mothers will not cry in frustration after the visit, but weep with joy that the elders are assisting parents to do what they have been working on themselves.

Or the elder will ask a young mother of three grade-school-aged children about mornings before school and whether that is a happy time or hectic and perhaps frustrating. With a smile of recognition and sympathy he asks. Perhaps he begins with the mother in this way: "How are *you* doing, mom? You have a high calling and a heavy responsibility with these covenant children! God will not forget your labor of love shown to these little lambs." Then, with that note of understanding and love, he will ask about what the home looks and sounds like before the children are off to school. Wisdom will lead him to exhort the children to obedience and honor to both Dad and Mom, will exhort Dad to sympathize with Mom, and will encourage a regular prayer before school that includes *respect* for the teachers, *kindness* to the fellow students, and the grace to *work hard*.

Determining needs is not unlike a shepherd digging deep into the sheep's wool; it takes some work, effort, patience and care on the part of the shepherd; and trust on the part of the sheep. But an elder cannot truly perform the work of family visitation without learning the unique needs of this home, this year.

### *Address the needs with the Word of God*

After determining the needs, he 'comforts the distressed and distresses the comfortable,' advises the confused young person, encourages the barren wife, rebukes the lazy husband or comforts the hard-working man who cannot quite earn enough to pay the bills. He

does this always with the Word of God that addresses the particular needs he has found in this home this year.

Which is why one text—a theme text, for example, adopted for this year's visits—cannot suffice for every visit in the congregation. A theme text may be a good idea, but if it is the only one at the elder's disposal it would be like a doctor making a house visit with only penicillin in his bag. The implications of this are significant: First, elders are students of Scripture, ready to speak to the needs of the people with the comforting (or admonishing) Word of God, whatever that Word must be in the unique circumstances they find. Second, this also explains why family visitation, done properly, is not a job for the young man, but usually the older man who will be studied in the Scripture and how it applies to so many different needs. Third, this also explains why (although it is wrong) it is often easier to do family visitation in some other way—*any* other way—than the hard way I have described.

**What Family Visitation is Not**

Given what we have said, above, it becomes clear what the family visits ought not to be.

***Not a social visit***

Sometimes family visits are mostly social visits *intentionally*. This would be explained by a misconception of the nature of the shepherd's calling—to minister the Word of God. Sometimes, however, well-intentioned elders allow the visit mostly to slip by because they want to "ease into" the visit and relax the sheep by comments about their home, the new pet, the weather, and so forth. Pretty soon, though, five minutes of small talk turns to fifteen and by the time they read Scripture and open with prayer only twenty minutes remain for serious talk, and nothing significant develops.

Instead, we must get down to business soon. Indeed, the elders show kindness. But kindness may better be shown by relaxed, but no-nonsense and direct approach. Beating around the bush by talking about anything *but* the spiritual needs of the family may well make the family *more* nervous. Social talk can come another time. When I have only 15 minutes with my family physician, it might be nice to

talk about church matters—we are both interested in them—but we must be on to the business at hand: why my sciatic nerve still is not calming down, or what I must do to avoid more skin cancer, or the like. How much more with the Great Physician of my soul.

***Not a Bible Study***

This one may sound surprising, but when I took an informal survey of ministers, the one warning I received from colleagues most was this one: Family visitation may not become a Bible Study.

Now this may not be misunderstood. Explaining and applying the Bible is exactly what elders are called to do. What can happen, however, is that the "theme text" chosen for the visits this year becomes the one and only Bible passage that the elders explain and apply. The minister preached a sermon on the text; the elders took notes during the sermon; and the family is expected to be familiar with it and be able to discuss it. Now, of course, Bible Study is profitable. But such Bible Study is *not* the purpose of family visitation, because the "unique needs of this family this year" are not addressed in this way. Besides, there are opportunities to study the Bible many times mid-week when the believers gather to discuss Scripture.

An elder recently told me about one of his visits many years ago. His fellow elder did a fine job explaining and applying the "theme text" but gave the home no opportunity to speak. When they got into the car to go on to the next visit, the elder asked his partner, "So, what did you learn about that family tonight?" The point was a sharp one.

***Not a themed-visit***

This is not much different than a visit in which a certain Bible passage is discussed. Instead of one text, there is a certain theme emphasized—living in the last days, the communion of saints, church unity, fighting the good fight, and so forth.

The same problem appears here: the specific purpose of family visitation is missed—to determine and then address with the word of God the unique needs of this home this year.

**Related Dangers**

There are certain dangers that elders must avoid, even though some of them are very difficult to avoid.

***The visit turns into a gripe-session***

Some members wait until family visitation for the opportunity to bring complaints to the consistory. Because elders want to do justice to the concerns of members, they take the time to listen—sometimes the entire visit. But family visitation is not the proper forum for people to air grievances. That may be done at a different time and in a different forum.

Elders can mistakenly contribute to this problem by agreeing that a standard question must be asked at each visit: "Do you have anything you would like us to bring to the consistory?" That question was expected at each visit when I first became pastor in one congregation. Soon, though, we realized that it contributed to the mentality that "beefs" with the consistory were saved up for family visits, and some people waited with bated breath for the elders to ask *the* question… at which point they would unload.

If all keep in mind the positive purpose of family visitation, we will avoid this danger.

It is also the case that a "chronic complainer" often is looking for a smokescreen to cover what really needs addressing in *his* home. It is a mistake for the elders to offer it to him in this way.

***Lack of cooperation on the part of the people***

The danger here is not that some member openly resists the inquiries of the elders, or even rejects the visit altogether. But the member straight-arms the elders in a politer, shall we say sophisticated manner. But it soon becomes apparent that the elders' visit is not appreciated, and it reminds one of the balky husband who submits to his annual physical at the medical doctor only because his wife has insisted that he go.

There are two answers to this problem. First, the minister should preach regularly about what it means to submit to the elders' oversight and what are the duties of these officebearers. Second, the elders and pastor may gently and very kindly teach the members that they themselves—church members—have asked the elders to come to their home for their inspection. It would not be wrong for the elders to say as a standard opening greeting which, over the years, becomes expected, "Thank you for asking us to come into your home tonight." That is,

in a not-so-subtle but friendly way the elders remind the family of a couple of fundamental truths. "As members of this congregation: 1) you chose us to be your overseers at the annual congregational meeting; 2) you commissioned us to do the work of the elder, and gave us a mandate in the Church Order to come to your home each year. This is what your membership in the church means." If that is not what these members understand by church membership, one of two things must be true: the elders failed to instruct these members of this reality when they confessed their faith; or the members themselves changed their minds about their membership. All prospective members ought to be taught the implications of membership. One is that they *submit* to inspection by the elders. The other is that, as members, they *require* the elders to make this inspection in their home.

***Formalism and stiff atmosphere***

The danger of formalism and stiffness is real. It is not wholly a caricature to describe family visitation as an evening when the children are bathed and dressed as though for church, sitting primly and properly on the couch (peeking through the blinds, of course, to prepare to shout, "They're here!!!), all the while Dad and Mom are nervously awaiting the dreaded hour when the elders arrive at the front door that is probably never used except for that once-per-year visit. Indeed, the opposite—a sloppy informality—will not do either, as this is a visit of Jesus Christ to the home. But the formalism must be avoided or a profitable visit will be impossible.

I give the seminary students a couple of pieces of advice in this regard: Dress neatly, but not too fancy. Give a warm and genuine greeting with a smile. Give the littlest children a piece of candy and a hug, if appropriate. Sit, perhaps, at the kitchen table where the family may feel more at ease. And pray directly for the needs of this family.

If the visit is formal and stiff, a 'going through the motions' kind of exercise, no one will open up, elders will learn very little about the home's needs, and the only sense anyone will have at the end of the visit will be relief. "Ah, that's over for another year." Instead, when you go to your car, you are praying that, back in the home you just left, they are reflecting together with gratitude: "God, our Good Shepherd, provides for us so richly! We thank God for faithful elders."

Implied here is that when elders conduct the visits well, most of what

criticism comes of the practice will be eliminated. The people of God will be eager for the visit to come because they have learned its value.

**Preparation for the Visit**

Elders prepare for all the visits, generally. But each visit must have its own unique preparation. Each home is different—old saints, young saints, single members, large families, the *minister's* family! etc. Each home requires its own prayerful preparation.

*It is wise to make an outlined plan each year.*

The minister can provide this for the elders. Even though this is extra work, it is work that pays rich dividends. The outline may include a *brief* introduction to the text the elders choose to introduce the visit; questions and discussion topics from the text; and then large blanks for elders to fill in with items for discussion at this particular home this year. In addition, there ought to be a space for notations of matters to remember and follow up. A separate outline is carried into each home.

***Special time ought to be given to prayer.***

The elders' meeting to prepare for this year's visitations will include: 1) a decision on a text; 2) a request for the minister to prepare an outline; 3) discussion of the needs, generally, in the congregation; 4) fervent, specific prayers that the Lord will use the visits to comfort and instruct, to edify and correct, to encourage and admonish, all the members. Then, each committee of elders ought to prepare for their visits by praying together before they leave. I do not remember which elder first suggested it, but a fine practice for the elders is, when the elder who drives fetches his partner at the partner's home, before they leave they turn off the car engine and spend some minutes together in prayer.

Going on these visits without prayer would be like a minister trying to preach without prayer. To put it positively, every minister knows what unction the Spirit gives—wholly gracious and beautiful to experience—when he has spent the week in fervent prayer for the sermon; so every elder knows that the Lord is pleased "to give His grace and Holy Spirit (for these visits) to those *only* who with sincere desires continually ask them of him, and are thankful for them" (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 45, Q&A 116).

***Get to know the particular family you will visit.***

I come again to John 10. The good shepherd knows his sheep. Know everything you can about them. Names… never forget their names. Be able to call them all by name, even when the family has seven little children. Know their occupations, what the students are majoring in college, what friendships (boyfriend and girlfriend also) they have, and all the history you can know of the members—family history, church history, health history, and so forth.

The elder is always thinking about the sheep. "When you can't sleep, count sheep," is a phrase I use with my students at seminary. I doubt whether it is so, but I would like to believe that the origin of the "count sheep" cure for sleeplessness came from a wise pastor who, when burdened by the trials of the ministry, mentally ran through the church directory and prayed for each member from A through Z.

Make it your business to know the flock. Study the church directory when you rise early on Sunday morning. Keep notes in your personal copy of all the information you have about them, and review it before you go out on visits. Talk to the members at church to ask about their welfare. It is wonderful to behold elders who, rather than talking with their little clique after worship, mingle with all the members to express their interest in their welfare. Become known, in a dozen different ways, as the elders who care.

Then, at family visitation, you will not feel the need for small talk because you see and talk to the members regularly. You will be able to pay attention, quickly, to the important matters of their spiritual well-being. More important, because of your interest in and knowledge of them, the sheep will open up to you and listen to you in a way they never would if you had not made it obvious that you were interested in them. A good shepherd knows his sheep.

I can guarantee to you, brothers, if the first time you talk to that 19-year-old in your "district" (aside from a quick hello as he walks out of the sanctuary) is when you see him in jail or on a discipline call, he will not give you the time of day. But if you have, for years, been showing interest in him even when he seems to shun you, you will be the *first* person he wants to see when he's in trouble.

If the first time you have serious conversation with a family is when you push open that stuck front door that is never used except for

family visitation, the visit will be as stiff as the door hinges and getting them to talk will be like pulling teeth. But when you have loved the family for a long time, the grace the Lord gives for that visit will feel like the dew of Hermon that descended upon Mount Zion. There the Lord will command His blessing.

Brothers, know your sheep as the Lord knows you.

And may the Lord richly grace your family visits to the welfare of your congregations. ●

**Appendix:**

## Topics for consideration on Family Visits

**Our Approach**: As the Good Shepherd to His sheep.
**Possible Opening**: *"Thank you for asking us to your home tonight. We come representing the Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd. We are not here for a Bible study or to give a sermon, but to see what are the needs, concerns, joys, sorrows, of your home, which we can address with the Word of God and over which we can pray."*

***Thesis: Family Visitation's purpose is to 1) determine, then 2) address with the word of God, the 3) unique needs of 4) this home, 5) this year. Each element, 1-5, must be considered separately.***

***Topics Initiated by the Home:*** perhaps *begin* with this; that is, what the members desire to speak of; what is on their mind?

A. Like a doctor at your physical exam: "First, tell me what I need to know about you."

B. Do you have concerns or subjects you would like us to help you with? (not referring to complaints or criticisms)

C. Do you have spiritual needs we may address? Wounds, discouragements, questions, fears, weaknesses? How can we as elders help you?

***The Spiritual Well-Being of the Home/Family/Individual:*** (here, looking *inside* the home)

A. Worship and devotions (family and individual)

1. Family: How often? What reading? Explain your practices. Systematic reading? Children participate? How much discussion, applications? Prayers meaningful? Pray for us? Sing? What would you like to improve? How can we help improve your family worship?

2. Individual: Tell us about your private devotions. What makes them profitable? How can we help?

B. Family life:

1. Generally, to any: What do you like about your family life?

2. Relationship between children and parents.

3. How do you understand your calling to teach your children? Father. Mother.

4. Discipline of children

5. What family traditions do you want to maintain?

6. Prepare children for marriage? Preparation for work? For financial responsibility?

7. Sabbath observance. How spend afternoon? Prepare on Saturday night? Give suggestions.

8. What do you read? *Standard Bearer*, *Beacon Lights*, books. "Have you read the recent…?" Then be ready to discuss, comment.

C. Children and young people:

1. Children show love to parents different ways at various ages. How do you show appreciation (or?) to them?

2. Who are your friends? Tell us about them. (Ask each year, so that at age 17 they are not surprised)

3. Catechism/Young People's Society. Confession of faith; Lord's Table.

D. One's occupation, physical welfare. Important subject. How does work effect your spiritual life? Temptations?

E. What threats to your home? Our homes?

1. Visits must discuss Internet, smart-phone use. Both children *and* adults. What safeguards?

2. Entertainment.

3. Friendships.

4. Busyness, priorities.

5. False doctrines (Church Order, Art. 55)

F. Other:

***The Calling of the Home towards the Church:*** (here, looking *outside* the home)

A. What should be the relation of Christians to the church of which they are members?

B. Church attendance. Preparation? What offerings does a NT Christian bring? (financial, but more: sacrifice of praise)

C. What is the communion of the saints? (see LD 21, Q&A 55 "… his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ *his* gifts for the advantage and salvation of *other* members.") Opportunities? Which do you take? How can we as church improve?

D. What do you see as the purpose of Bible studies, societies?

E. What do you consider an edifying sermon? What could make ours more edifying? How do you pray for the ministry of the Word? (Let elders 'filter' criticisms and bring them *as their own* to the minister)

F. Other:

# George Martin Ophoff: A Bibliography (3) His Old Testament Writings

**Douglas J. Kuiper**

In the last issue of the *PRTJ*, I noted that George Ophoff's *Standard Bearer* writings fall into six categories. I treated his New Testament Studies, Church History, and Church Polity articles in that issue. I hope to treat his Doctrinal/Polemical and Miscellaneous articles in the next issue. In this issue I cover his Old Testament writings. These include over 600 articles over half of Ophoff's total *Standard Bearer* contributions.

Before proceeding, as I reviewed Ophoff's Old Testament writings I found two additional articles that should be classified as New Testament writings, but did not appear in the last issue. These relate to the history of God's dealings with Pharaoh, but they expound passages in Romans 9. They are:

Romans 9:18-20, "The Lord's Grace Sovereign," 24.10.230.

Romans 9:20-21, "The Potter and the Clay," 24.5.107.

In his Old Testament writings Ophoff was at his best. He viewed Old Testament history as typical history–that is, he viewed persons and events as types of New Testament spiritual realities, specifically of the person of Jesus Christ and of His saving work. Ophoff also understood Old Testament history to be the history of God realizing His covenant. Recognizing the value of Ophoff's insights, Homer Hoeksema quoted from Ophoff often in his books that explain Old Testament history, under the series theme "Unfolding Covenant History." In his introduction to the series, the editor, Mark Hoeksema, acknowledges Ophoff's influence on Homer Hoeksema.[2]

That Ophoff was at his best in his Old Testament writings explains why his rubric "Day of Shadows" was his longest running rubric in the *Standard Bearer*. Although the rubric heading did not appear until

2 Homer C. Hoeksema, *Unfolding Covenant History: An Exposition of the Old Testament, Volume 1, From Creation to the Flood*, ed. Mark Hoeksema (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2000), xxi, xxx-xxxii.

volume 22, Ophoff began these writings already in volume 3 with several articles devoted to "The Types of Scripture" and "Principles of Interpretation." In volumes 3-13 Ophoff covered the period of Old Testament history from Adam and Eve's state of perfection to the time when Israel was encamped at Sinai. In volumes 14-16, Ophoff turned from the history to examine the laws given at Sinai–not only the Ten Commandments but also the ceremonial laws, the sacrifices and offerings, and the tabernacle and its furnishings. In volume 17 he resumed the history of Israel at Mount Sinai, and by the time he finished treating the history of Israel in volume 29, he brought his readers to the history of David's return to Jerusalem after Absolom's rebellion. In volumes 30-34, under the same rubric, he gave overviews of the prophecies of Isaiah, Malachi, Haggai, and Zechariah.

Reading Ophoff's Old Testament writings, one realizes that Ophoff was not the most organized writer, and that economy of words was not his strong point. However, to dismiss Ophoff's writings for this reason would be a serious mistake. To read them is to reap fruit in at least three ways. First, every believer who reads Ophoff will find deep insights into and helpful expositions of the Old Testament. Second, preachers who study Ophoff's hermeneutical method (the principles that he used when interpreting Scripture) will find a sound approach to Scripture, especially the Old Testament and an example worth emulating. Too often today, Old Testament history is preached only to teach moral lessons. Far more meaty and edifying will be sermons by Reformed preachers who understand and emulate Ophoff's approach. Third, Ophoff puts Old Testament history in the service of polemics, refuting errors that were current in his day (common grace, for example), or responding to the views of others (Abraham Kuyper, for example). One can do these things without stretching the meaning of Old Testament history when one understands that this is typical history, the history of God's unfolding of His covenant.

As an aside, because Ophoff integrates polemics into his Old Testament writings, a judgment had to be made whether certain articles fit more appropriately into the Old Testament category (this issue) or the Polemical or Miscellaneous categories (next issue). When it was obvious to me that Ophoff's essay was occasioned by his treatment of Old Testament history, or was a significant explanation of an Old

Testament passage or phenomenon, I included it in the Old Testament category. Examples of articles that might be put in a different rubric, but that are included here, are the following:

"The Origin of the Offerings," 7.5.100.

"The Egyptian Learning of Moses," 16.1.18, 16.2.43.

"What Divine Duty Has the Civil Magistrate Toward the First Table of the Law?" 15.6.143, 15.9.215.

The Old Testament category itself can be subdivided. The first subcategory includes articles that develop foundational principles for understanding part or all of the Old Testament. These are listed alphabetically. The second group contains articles that are overviews of an entire book of the Bible. The third group is the largest; it includes all of Ophoff's expositions of Old Testament passages. Some of the articles are intended to be expostions of a specific passage, in which case the text is placed in parenthesis. Many others, not based on a specific text, treat or evaluate historical events. Regardless of the occasion for his writing them, these articles are all placed into the same category, and presented in the order in which the material would be found in Scripture.

**Foundational Principles or Specific Topics**

Ophoff addresses some significant questions in Old Testament studies, which do not fall neatly under a textual heading. The articles about the unifying idea of the Scriptures are significant for understanding Ophoff's view of Old Testament history as the fulfillment of God's covenant promise. Notice also a number of articles dealing with prophecy.

"The Angel of Jehovah in the Old Testament Scriptures," 18.17.382.
"The Angel of the Lord in the Old Testament Scriptures," 18.18.402.
"The Day of the Lord in Old Testament Prophecy," 18.13.286.
"The Dream as A Medium of Revelation," 18.21.486, 18.22.498.
"Elijah and Elisha, a Comparison," 18.5.106.
"Elijah and Elisha - the Baptist and Christ," 18.8.178.
"The Final Period of Prophecy," 9.7.166.
"The Nazarite," 18.3.61, 18.4.84.
"The Person of the Prophet Daniel," 18.8.184.

"The Person of the Prophet Isaiah," 18.6.132.
"The Person of Jeremiah, the Prophet," 18.7.154.
"Principles of Interpretation," 3.13.300.
"Prophecies Concerning Christ," 16.10.232.
"Prophecies Concerning Jerusalem," 16.14.330.
"Prophecies Concerning the Life and Character of Christ," 16.8.186.
"Prophecy," 12.19.447.
"Prophecy of Scripture and Its Fulfillment," 5.7.167.
"Prophecy and the Prophets," 9.6.130.
"The Prophet of God," 12.15.352, 12.16.375. Concluded in "Proph ecy," 12.19.447.
"The Prophets," 18.12.266.
"The Protevangel as the Unifying Idea of All the Scriptures," 28.6.139, 28.7.159, 28.8.186, 28.9.210, 28.10.232.
"The Significance of Samuel for Old Testament Prophecy," 18.4.82.
"The Time of the Birth of Christ in Prophecy," 16.4.95, 16.6.143.
"The Types of Scripture," 3.6.127, 3.8.175, 3.9.199, 3.10.225, 3.11.250, 3.12.270.
"The Unifying Idea of the Scriptures," 32.16.371.

**Introductions to Old Testament Books**

One aspect of Old Testament studies is "Isagogics," or introductions to the various books. Isagogical studies attempt to understand the book's background: the historical circumstances of the writer, the date and occasion for writing the book, the book's purpose, and other questions of a similar nature. One question often asked of a book of the Bible is its "canonical significance," that is, what the book's role is in the canon of Scripture. Every inspired book, after all, has a different function than any other, and contributes uniquely to the revelation of God in Christ.

Ophoff's introductions to Old Testament books are profitable reading for anyone preparing to study a particular book of the Bible, whether in Bible study or for personal or family devotions.

"The Book of Numbers," 13.8.189, 13.9.209.
"Numbers–Deuteronomy," 13.10.234.
"The Book of Deuteronomy," 13.11.263, 13.13.309, 13.15.354.

"The Canonical Significance of the Book of Deuteronomy," 19.17.394.
"Canonical Significance of the Book of Judges," 22.5.109.
"The Canonical Significance of the Book of Ruth," 22.10.230.
"The Fixed Principle of the Book of Chronicles," 6.16.375.
"The Age of Ezra and Nehemiah," 6.17.402.
"The Book of Esther," 18.15.333.
"The Place of the Book of Esther in the Canon," 18.16.358.
"The Author of the Book of Ecclesiastes," 18.10.225; "Communication and Reply," 18.13.289, 18.14.310
"The Book of Ecclesiastics," 7.14.320, 7.15.359.
"The Canonical Significance of the Song of Songs," 18.11.246.
"The Prophecy of Isaiah," 17.16.381.
"The Prophecy of Jeremiah," 17.17.406.
"Ezekiel," 17.19.453, 17.20.477.
"The Book of Daniel," 17.11.263, 17.12.284, 17.13.310, 17.14.335.
"The Prophet Hosea," 15.19.462.
"The Book of Joel," 17.7.164.
"Amos," 15.21.510.
"Obadiah," 15.22.531.
"The Book of Jonah," 17.8.188.

**Expositions of the Old Testament**

Turning to his Old Testament expositions, we come to the heart of Ophoff's Old Testament writings.

Included in this list is Ophoff's last published article "Ishmael," 35.8.191. It ends with the words "to be continued." This is a striking reminder that man's work ends when the Lord is pleased to end it, not when a man thinks his work is finished.

Twice Ophoff interrupted his Old Testament writings for an extended period of time. First, in 1949, there was a gap between the articles "Michal's Contempt of David" (25.14.328) and "David's Decision to Build the Lord a House" (26.10.230). Again there was a gap from late 1950 to May of 1952, between "David and Nathan" (27.2.38) and "Thou Art the Man" (28.15.353). During these periods, Ophoff focused on three other series of articles. First, Ophoff entered into the controversy regarding the conditionality of God's covenant,

in which the churches at the time were embroiled, writing numerous polemical articles responding to the writings of Rev. Andrew Petter, a minister at the time in the PRCA who was promoting conditional covenant theology.

Second, he wrote a series (see below) regarding God's covenant with Israel at Sinai. Although he is not explicitly polemical in this series, and does not allude to the controversy in the PRCA, one cannot read his articles in any other light. In them Ophoff argued that God's covenant with Israel at Sinai was the covenant of grace with the elect, and not a covenant into which every Israelite genuinely entered. The principles that Ophoff drew out of the covenant of God at Sinai set the foundation for the defense of an unconditional covenant in the 1950s.

Third, during the second hiatus Ophoff also turned his attention to a church historical series on the reformation in the Netherlands and the struggle with the Arminians. These articles are historical, and do not explicitly address the conditional covenant controversy in the PRCA. One could wish Ophoff were alive today, so that he could be asked whether (though he did not make explicit application to the covenant controversy in the PRCA) he treated the Arminian error intentionally at this time in order to hold before the readers of the *Standard Bearer* his view that the conditional covenant theology being promoted in the PRCA was essentially Arminian.

***Genesis: Sunday School Lessons***

"God the Creator" (Genesis 1), 13.12.286.
"Man's Temptation and Fall" (Genesis 3), 13.13.306.
"Noah's Obedience" (Genesis 8, 9), 13.14.332.
"Abraham a Man of Faith" (Genesis 12), 13.14.334.
"Lot in Sodom" (Genesis 13, 19; Deuteronomy 32; Proverbs 23), 13.14.328.
"Abraham the Friend of God" (Genesis 18), 13.15.355.
"The Forbearance of Isaac" (Genesis 26), 13.15.358.
"The Profanity of Esau" (Genesis 25, 28), 13.16.382.
"Jacob's Flight, Penial" (Genesis 28, 32), 13.17.403.
"Joseph's Exaltation," 13.17.407.
"Brotherly Love of Judah," 13.18.426.
"Jacob's Journey to Egypt," 13.18.430.
"Jacob in Egypt," 13.18.431.

***Genesis: History***

"The Garden of Eden," 3.13.302, 3.15.347, 3.17.387.
"The Temptation of Man" (Genesis 3:16), 34.8.177.
"The Cherubim and the Flaming Sword," 3.18.416.
"Man Clothed by the Lord God," 3.19.443.
"The Types of Scripture," 3.20.465.
"Foundation Truths," 3.20.475. A polemical article defending the idea that "every symbol, transaction, and speech of Paradise militates against the theory of common grace." Common grace, more than the earthly Paradise, is the focus of this article.
"The Institution of Marriage," 3.22.510, 3.23.545, 3.24.563, 4.1.14, 4.3.58, 4.4.81, 4.5.112.
"The Sabbath," 4.4.87, 4.5.103, 4.6.130.
"The Sabbath of Paradise," 4.7.151.
"The Sabbath," 4.14.319, 4.18.423, 4.20.473, 4.21.486, 4.22.510.
"The Sabbath of the Reformation," 4.23.541.
"Sacrificial Worship," 5.11.247.
"The Origin of the Offerings," 7.5.100. Ophoff argues that the Old Testament sacrifices from the time of Cain and Abel onward were not of human origin, but divinely instituted.
"The Two Seeds," 5.13.301, 5.15.344.
"The Antediluvian World," 5.16.368, 5.17.397.
"The Antediluvian World," 33.8.179.
"The Covenant with Noah," 32.21.488, 33.7.153.
"The Deluge," 5.21.502, 5.22.514.
"The Fuller Light," 6.3.56.
"The Confusion of Tongues," 33.15.344.
"Abraham," 6.4.80, 6.5.103, 6.6.129.
"The Man Lot," 6.8.175, 6.9.203.
"Abraham and Common Grace," 6.9.205, 6.10.223, 6.11.250.
"A Further Examination of Kuyper's View of the Patriarchs," 6.11.257.
"Abraham's Clash With the Four Kings," 6.12.271.
"Melchizedek and Christ," 18.1.11, 18.2.36.
"Abraham," 6.13.296.
"Abraham: The Establishment of the Covenant," 6.14.319.
"Sarai And Hagar," 6.16.368.
"Ishmael," 35.8.191.

"The Covenant Sealed," 6.17.396.
"The Laughter of Abraham and of Sarah," 6.19.440.
"Abraham the Friend of God," 6.20.469.
"The Overthrow of Sodom," 6.21.488.
"Lot's Daughters," 6.22.512.
"Abraham and Abimelech," 6.22.518, 6.24.573.
"The Expulsion of Ishmael," 6.23.539.
"Abraham's Offer (sic) Up Isaac for a Burnt Offering," 6.24.561.
"Abraham's Sacrifice of Isaac," 35.3.70.
"The Purchase of Machpelah–Burial of Sarah," 7.1.4.
"Isaac's Marriage," 7.1.19.
"The Marriage of Isaac," 7.2.33.
"The Sons of Keturah, Abraham's Death and Burial," 7.2.42.
"Abraham," 7.3.63, 7.4.80.
"Isaac," 7.5.116.
"The Man Isaac," 7.9.196.
"Esau and Jacob," 7.10.220.
"Jacob Blessed and Esau Cursed," 7.11.247.
"Jacob's Flight and Dream," 7.14.333.
"Jacob in Haran," 7.15.344, 7.16.393.
"Jacob's Flight," 7.18.417.
"Jacob's Return," 7.19.437.
"Peniel," 7.20.466.
"Peniel," 34.14.322.
"The Meeting of Jacob and Esau," 7.21.483.
"Jacob at Shechem," 7.24.535.
"Jacob at Ephrath and Edar," 8.1.8.
"Joseph," 8.2.32, 8.3.57.
"Joseph in the Pit," 8.4.79.
"Joseph in Potiphar's House," 8.5.112.
"Joseph Exalted," 8.6.126.
"Joseph's Policies," 8.7.153.
"Joseph's Brethren in Egypt," 8.8.174.
"Joseph's Self-Disclosure," 8.9.210.
"Jacob's Journey to Egypt," 8.10.225.
"Jacob in Egypt," 8.18.416.
"Jacob and Pharaoh," 8.24.559.

"Jacob and Joseph," 9.1.8.
"Jacob and His Sons," 9.2.46.
"Judah," 9.3.70, 9.4.81.
"Zebulun and Issachar," 9.5.104.
"Dan Shall Judge," 9.6.136.
"Dan Shall Be a Serpent," 9.7.151.
"Asher's Bread Will Be Fat," 9.7.156.
"Naphtali," 9.8.188.
"The Lone Archer," 9.9.215.
"Benjamin," 9.11.261.
"The Promise," 9.12.287.
"Jacob's Burial, The Suspicion of the Brethren," 9.13.297.
"Joseph's Faith, The Coffin in Egypt," 9.14.335.

***Exodus: History***
"The New Generation," 9.15.357.
"The Ark Among the Flags," 9.20.478.
"Moses at the Court of Pharaoh," 9.21.503.
"The Egyptian Learning of Moses," 16.1.18, 16.2.43. Ophoff comments on Stephen's words recorded in Acts 7:22. I include the article here because it regards a facet of Old Testament history.
"Moses' Faith," 9.22.527.
"The Man Moses," 10.3.67.
"The I Am," 10.5.118.
"Serving Him on the Mountain," 10.9.213.
"The Rod and the Serpent," 10.11.248.
"The Miracle of the Rod" (Exodus 4:2-4), 24.4.81.
"The Leper Cleansed," 10.13.311.
"The Third Sign," 10.17.408.
"Moses Goes," 10.20.477.
"The First Encounter," 11.1.6.
"Hardened Yet Guilty," 11.2.29.
"The Ten Plagues - Their Purpose," 34.15.347.
"I am the Lord," 11.3.68.
"The Second and Third Plagues," 11.4.94.
"The Plagues," 11.5.115, 11.6.142, 11.7.162, 11.8.188.
"God's Plagues on Pharaoh's Heart" (Exodus 9:13-14), 24.3.63.

"The Lord Maketh Pharaoh to Stand" (Exodus 9:16), 24.1.13.
"The Eighth Plague," 11.9.199.
"The Ninth Plague," 11.11.262.
"With God No Unrighteousness," 11.12.271.
"The Institution of the Passover," 11.13.295, 11.15.341.
"Eating the Lord's Passover" (Exodus 12:7), 24.12.279, 24.13.301.
"God Seeing the Blood" (Exodus 12:13), 24.11.250.
"The Tenth Plague," 11.16.381.
"By the Strength of the Lord's Hand," 11.17.392.
"God's People Live Alone" (Exodus 14:20), 24.6.130.
"The Crossing of the Red Sea," 11.18.414.
"The Passage Through the Red Sea," 11.19.438.
"The Wilderness," 11.20.461.
"Marah and the Wilderness of Sin," 11.21.501, 11.22.511.
"The Manna of the Desert Period," 28.13.309, 28.14.331, 28.16.380. Although Ophoff includes Numbers 11:4b as the subheading of the first article, these articles are not an exposition of a particular text.
"Rephidim," 12.1.6.
"Amalek," 12.2.31.
"Jethro," 12.3.58.
"Sinai," 12.3.61, 12.4.81, 12.5.105, 12.6.128, 12.7.153, 12.8.178, 12.9.203, 12.10.238.
"The Covenant of Sinai," 28.10.234, 28.11.258, 28.12.282, 28.13.306, 28.14.329.
"The Covenant of Sinai," 31.19.442, 31.21.488. These two articles are the written form of Ophoff's commencement address in 1955, when Herman Hanko (now emeritus professor) graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary.
"The Covenant Ratified and Broken," 12.16.372.
"Moses Prays for His People," 12.17.395.
"Moses Destroys the Idol," 12.19.442.
"Prolonged Intercession," 12.22.516, 13.1.16, 13.2.30.
"Moses' Intercession," 29.1.20.
"The Lord Repenteth" (Exodus 32:14), 28.16.384.
"Seeking the Lord Without the Camp," 28.18.432, 28.19.450.
"Moses' Revelation," 13.3.58.
"Moses' Final Prayer," 13.4.92.

***Exodus-Deuteronomy: Study of the Ten Commandments and Mosaic Law***

By turning his attention to the Ten Commandments and the Mosaic law, Ophoff was continuing the history of Israel, for Israel received the law while she was encamped at Sinai.

Ophoff's purpose regarding the Ten Commandments was not to write lengthy expositions of each of the commandments (14.2.47), but briefly to set forth what is essential. As the following indicates, Ophoff treated the first five commandments, then turned to the ceremonial laws. Later he explained the sixth and seventh commandments, but he never treated the last three.

"The Law," 12.11.256, 12.12.273.
"The Excellency of the Law of the Ten Commandments," 12.14.320.
"The Law," 13.5.118.
"The Law, System Not Disorder," 13.6.140.
"I Am Jehovah Thy God," 14.2.45.
"Thou Shalt Have No Other Gods Before Me!" 14.3.65.
"Thou Shalt Not Make Unto Thyself Any Graven Image," 14.5.115.
"The Second Commandment," 14.9.215.
"The Third Commandment," 14.10.235.
"The Oath," 14.10.238.
"The Fourth Commandment," 14.11.256, 14.12.283, 14.13.311.
"The Fifth Commandment," 14.15.351, 14.16.379.
"What Divine Duty Has the Civil Magistrate Toward the First Table of the Law?" 15.6.143, 15.9.215.
"Thou Shalt Not Kill," 17.2.44, 17.3.67.
"Thou Shalt Not Commit Adultery," 17.5.117.
"The Rite of Expiatory Sacrifice," 29.5.107, 29.6.137.
"The Rite of Expiatory Sacrifice: The Animal Sacrifice of the Old Dispensation," 29.7.155.
"The Atoning Sacrifices of the Old Covenant/Dispensation," 14.11.260, 14.13.306.
"The Offering by Blood," 14.14.330.
"Sacrifice by Blood," 14.15.357.
"Sacrifice of Blood," 14.17.401.
"Sacrifice by Blood," 14.19.452.

"Sin Offerings," 14.20.479.
"The Sin Offering," 14.21.500, 14.22.524, 15.1.18. (His exposition of Hebrews 13:10 [15.1.22] relates to this article. This exposition is cataloged in the New Testament section.)
"The Trespass Offering," 15.2.40. (His exposition of Matthew 5:23-24 [15.2.45] relates to this article. This exposition is catalogued in the New Testament section.)
"The Burnt Offering," 15.3.62. (His exposition of Hebrews 11:17-19 [15.2.45] relates to this article. This exposition is catalogued in the New Testament section.)
"The Peace Offering," 15.5.116.
"The Meat Offering," 15.13.307.
"The Altar of Incense," 15.15.361.
"The Table of Shewbread," 15.15.365.
"The Shewbread," 15.16.384.
"The Golden Candlesticks," 15.16.385.
"The Most Holy Place," 15.17.412, 15.18.432.
"The Day of Atonement," 15.19.458.
"The Great Atonement," 15.22.529.
"The Tabernacle," 16.3.66, 16.4.88.
"The Typical Significance of the Tabernacle," 16.7.162.
"The Levitical Priesthood," 16.8.188, 16.9.209, 16.11.262, 16.19.448, 17.4.91, 17.5.112, 17.6.138, 17.7.160, 17.8.186, 17.9.215.

***Numbers and Deuteronomy: History***
"The Numberings," 17.9.211.
"Still At Sinai," 17.10.237, 17.11.259.
"The Graves of Lust," 17.12.285.
"Moses' Reaction to the Peoples' Wailing for Flesh," 17.13.306.
"Miriam and Aaron's Revolt Against Moses," 17.15.354.
"Tried and Found Wanting," 17.16.376.
"Moses' Intercession," 17.17.404.
"The Apostates Doomed," 17.18.428.
"The Forty Years," 17.19.450.
"Moses' Fall," 17.20.475.
"At Mount Zion," 17.21.501.
"The Manna," 19.1.9.

"The Brazen Serpent," 19.2.34.
"The Conquest of the Trans-Jordan Region and Significance," 19.3.58.
"Balaam the Son of Beor," 19.4.82, 19.5.106.
"Israel's Sins," 19.6.134.
"The New Separation from the Heathenism of Midia," 19.7.154.
"The Numberings of the People," 19.9.205.
"The Avenging March Against the Midianites," 19.10.238.
"The Numberings," 19.10.240 (a continuation of 19.9.205).
"The Distribution of the Amoritish Kingdoms," 19.13.298.
"The Anticipated Inheritance," 19.14.327.
"The Command to Drive out the Canaanites," 19.15.346.
"The Levitical Cities," 19.16.370.
"The Cities of Refuge," 19.16.373.
"The Limits of Israel's Inheritance," 19.16.377.
"Moses as Mediator, a Type of Christ," 19.18.413.

***Joshua***

"Joshua, The Son of Nun," 19.20.462.
"Rahab and the Spies," 19.20.464.
"The Crossing of the Jordan," 19.21.484.
"The Capture of Jericho," 19.22.508.
"The Heinous Sin of Achan," 20.1.10.
"The Altar of Blessing and Cursing," 20.2.30.
"The Standing Still of Sun and Moon," 20.2.33.
"The Conquest of Southern and Northern Palestine," 20.4.79.
"The Great and Terrible God (Joshua's Wars)," 20.5.108.
"The Division of the Land in West Palestine (The Inheritance of Caleb)," 20.5.110, 20.6.135.
"Shiloh (The Distribution of the Land)," 20.8.177.
"All Came to Pass," 20.9.196.
"The Dismissal of the Two and a Half Tribes," 20.9.198.
"Choose Ye This Day Whom Ye Will Serve" (Joshua 24:15), 9.8.191.
"Jehovah or Baal" (Joshua 24:15) 16.10.237.
"Joshua's Parting Discourses to the People," 20.9.199.
"Joshua's Parting with the People," 20.10.220.

***Judges and Ruth***

"The Nations Remaining to Serve Israel," 20.10.222.
"The New Generation," 20.11.234.
"The First Three Judges," 20.13.282.
"Israel's Deliverance Under Deborah and Barak," 20.15.330.
"The Significance of Deborah," 20.16.354.
"Gideon," 20.16.356.
"Zerubbaal," 20.17.374.
"The Victory Is the Lord's," 20.19.420.
"Proud Ephraim and the Treacherous Cities," 20.20.447.
"Gideon the Judge Who Refuses to Be King," 20.21.470.
"Abimelech, His Usurped Rule and Downfall," 20.22.498.
"Abimelech's Fall," 21.1.6.
"Renewed Apostasy and Repentance," 21.2.34.
"Jephthah," 21.3.57.
"Ammon's Answer and Jephthah's Reply," 21.4.82.
"Jephthah's Vow," 21.5.108.
"The Pride of Ephraim," 21.6.130.
"Samson, a True Servant of God," 28.21.504.
"Samson, the Nazarite Judge," 21.7.154.
"The Lord Does Wondrously," 21.8.180.
"Samson's Seeking Occasion," 21.9.203.
"Samson's Finding Occasion," 21.10.226.
"Samson Justified in His Seeking Occasion," 21.11.246.
"The Philistines Offend Anew," 21.12.270.
"The Reactions of Unbelief to Samson," 21.13.294.
"Samson Possesses the Gates of His Enemies," 21.16.366.
"Samson and Delilah," 21.17.390.
"The Lord Departs from Samson," 21.18.413.
"Samson's End," 21.19.438.
"Micah's Spurious Sanctuary," 21.20.458.
"The Exploration of the Tribe of Dan," 22.1.10.
"The Wicked Deed of the Gibeathites and the War Against Benjamin," 22.2.34.
"The War Against Benjamin," 22.3.60.
"The Two Oaths," 22.4.85.
"Elimelech and Naomi Go to Moab," 22.6.130.

"Naomi," 22.7.156.
"Ruth," 22.8.180.
"Faith Rewarded," 22.9.207.

***1 Samuel***

"Samuel's Descent," 22.11.253.
"Hannah's Prayer," 22.12.277.
"Hannah's Song of Thanksgiving," 22.13.298.
"Eli's Sons and the Child Samuel," 6.13.308.
"Eli's Punishment," 22.14.321.
"Samuel Called to be a Prophet," 22.15.346.
"Eli's Sentence Irrevocable," 22.16.370.
"Israel Smitten Before the Philistines," 22.17.397.
"Ichabod," 22.18.425.
"The Ark Among the Philistines," 6.12.284.
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"David's Grief for Absalom," 29.16.370.
"David's Return," 29.17.393, 29.19.443.

***2 Kings***

"Destroying the Idol," 9.19.440. This is the written version of Ophoff's address at the Grand Rapids area Field Day on July 4, 1933. It regards King Joash's good beginning as a king, and sad end.

***Job-Ecclesiastes***

"Historical Conclusion of the Book of Job," 15.10.237
Job 38, 40: "Wilt Thou Disannul My Judgment?" 15.3.69, 15.4.92, 15.6.138, 15.7.165, 15.8.210, 15.10.232.
Job 42:5,6: "Job Sees God With His Eye," 22.19.446.

Psalm 36:9, "In God's Light We See Light," 5.1.32.
Psalm 95:7b-8a, "Today If Ye Hear his Voice, Harden Not Your Hearts," 15.20.487.
Ecclesiastes 1:2, "Vanity of Vanities," 22.20.466

***Prophets***

During the last six years of his contributions to the rubric "Day of Shadows," Ophoff turned his attention to the Old Testament prophets. He did not intend these articles to be a commentary, but rather "to give the thread of the argument of the prophets and to supply brief explanations as frequently as this may be necessary for the understanding of the argument" (29.20.467). The first article mentioned below is an introduction to this venture.

"The Later Prophets," 29.20.467.
Isaiah 1:2, "Children That Rebelled," 9.6.143.
Isaiah 1:18, "Come Now, Let Us Reason Together," 15.22.535.
Isaiah 9:10b-13, "The Prophecy of Isaiah," 33.21.488.
Isaiah 49:13, "God's Love for Zion," 28.22.522.
Isaiah 49:14-15, "God's Love of Zion," 29.8.189.
Isaiah 53:1, "The Arm of the Lord Revealed," 26.18.424.
Isaiah 53:2, "The Glory of Christ the Heavenly," 26.6.137.
Isaiah 53:3-5, "Jesus, the Man of Sorrows," 26.2.38.
Isaiah 53:6-7, "Christ Brought as a Lamb to the Slaughter," 26.4.89.
Isaiah 53:8-9, "Christ Alone in His Suffering," 25.12.277.
Isaiah 53:9-10, "Christ Sees His Seed," 26.17.401.
Isaiah 53:11-12, "The Risen Christ," 26.19.449.
Isaiah 60:1-3, "Zion's Light is Come," 16.7.167.
Isaiah 61:3, "Beauty for Ashes," 12.12.287.
Isaiah 61:3, "Unto Them That Mourn in Zion," 17.4.90.
"The Prophecy of Isaiah," (Ophoff's comments begin already in the article "The Later Prophets," 29.20.267), 30.1.11, 30.4.82, 30.5.106, 30.7.152, 30.11.253, 30.12.275, 30.13.299, 30.14.323, 30.15.347, 30.16.368, 30.17.395, 30.18.421, 30.19.441, 30.20.465, 31.1.9 (titled "Exposition of Isaiah 37:21-35"), 31.2.33, 31.3.57, 31.4.78, 31.5.105, 31.6.129, 31.7.157, 31.8.177, 31.9.204, 31.11.249, 31.12.274.
"The Living Creatures (Cherubim) in Ezekiel 1 and 10," 18.19.427, 18.20.461.

Micah 2:11, "The Choice of the Apostates," 17.10.235.
"The Prophecy of Haggai," 31.16.369, 31.17.393, 32.4.79, 32.5.106.
"The Prophet Zechariah," 32.6.128, 32.7.152, 32.8.177, 32.9.201, 32.10.225, 32.11.249, 32.12.273, 32.13.297, 32.15.346, 32.16.370, 32.17.393, 32.18.442, 33.3.58, 33.4.82, 33.5.104, 33.6.132, 33.8.178, 33.17.395, 33.20.465, 34.1.9, 34.2.34, 34.3.58, 34.4.81, 34.5.106, 34.6.132, 34.7.150, 34.8.176, 34.9.202, 34.10.226, 34.11.248, 34.12.273, 34.13.297, 34.14.321, 34.15.345, 34.16.367, 34.17.392.
Malachi 1:2a, "I Have Loved You," 26.21.497.
"The Prophecy of Malachi," 31.13.297, 31.14.321, 31.15.344, 31.16.369. ●

# John Calvin Research Bibliography

Compiled by Ronald L. Cammenga

**#14: Calvin's Doctrine of the Means of Grace, Preaching, and Baptism**

**Related Topics:**

**The prestige of the preaching office, or the preaching of the Word as the Word of God.**
**The purpose of the preaching of the Word to "conduce hardness of heart," or, the relation between the call of the gospel and the decree of predestination.**
**Objections to this view of preaching answered.**
**The sacraments as means of grace.**
**a. The sacraments as signs.**
**b. The sacraments as seals.**
**c. The sacraments as signs and seals of God's covenant.**
**The relation between the sacraments and the Word.**
**"Similarity and dissimilarity of the old and new sacraments."**
**The meaning of baptism.**
**Prototypes of baptism in the old covenant.**
**Valid baptism.**
**Infant baptism defended and the Anabaptists opposed.**

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**#15: Calvin's Doctrine of the Lord's Supper**

**Related Topics:**

**Influences on the development of Calvin's view of the Lord's Supper.**

**The real, but spiritual presence of Christ in the Lord's Supper.**

**Rejection of wrong views of the Lord's Supper.**

**a. Rejection of the Zwinglian view.**

**b. Rejection of the Anabaptist View.**
**c. Rejection of the Lutheran view, Joachim Westphal in particular.**
**d. Rejection of the Roman Catholic view.**
**Proper supervision of the Lord's Supper.**
**The "use" or benefit of the Lord's Supper.**
**a. For the church.**
**b. For the individual believer.**

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**#16: Calvin's Doctrine of Human Government and the State**

**Related Topics:**

**The magistracy ordained by God.**
**The differences between spiritual (ecclesiastical) government and civil (secular) government.**
**The calling of civil government: what it is and how far it extends.**
**The right of the government to wage war.**
**Christian use of the courts.**
**Obedience to the magistrate the duty of every Christian.**
**When obedience to God necessitates disobedience to the civil magistrate.**

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# Book Reviews

*From Zwingli to Amyraut: Exploring the Growth of European Reformed Traditions.* Jon Balserak and Jim West, eds. Vol. 43. Reformed Historical Theology. Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2017. Pp. 182. $107.00 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

This review is reprinted with permission from the *Puritan Reformed Journal* 10, no. 2 (July 2018), 315-16.

The ten essays in this volume focus on some particular aspect of the European Reformation. Jordan Ballor's opening essay shows the effect of Charles V's refusal to support the cause of the Reformation when Luther asked him to do so. The Reformers had to seek support from local civil leaders, and the reformation would be a regional, not an empire-wide, event.

Two essays regard Zwingli, and two regard Bullinger. Pierrick Hildebrand shows that Zwingli began using the covenant idea as the central point in his theology *before* his defense of infant baptism. Jim West examines five letters written by Huldrych Zwingli–three to Heinrich Bullinger, an unsent one to Johannes Eck, and another to Heinrich Uttinger. Rebecca Giselbrecht examines letters exchanged between Anna zu Rappoltstein (a noblewoman who supported the reformation in Zurich) and Bullinger, noting expressions of piety in them. Joe Mock demonstrates that Bullinger developed his understanding of the covenant and Eucharist independently of Zwingli.

Three essays investigate the respective contributions of Peter Allix, Giovanni Diodati, and Moses Amyraut. As Hywel Clifford shows, Allix opposed Unitarianism in England by demonstrating that ancient and medieval Jews believed in the Trinity. Emidio Campi tells us that Diodati translated the Bible into Italian and, in the second edition, included a commentary. Alan Clifford investigates Moses Amyraut's ecumenical efforts with the Lutherans. Clifford argues that "Calvin maintained the doctrines of universal atonement and divine election side by side" (161), that Amyraut consciously followed in Calvin's footsteps, and that Beza

moved Calvinism in a different direction from Calvin on this point. With the words "unconvincing" and "simply incorrect" (162), Clifford briefly dismisses the alternate view provided by Richard Muller. One who agrees with Muller will disagree with some of Clifford's assertions. In this reviewer's estimation, Clifford should have engaged Muller more fully on this point to show the reader why Clifford thinks Muller is incorrect here.

The last two articles this reviewer found to be of lesser value, more because of the writing style than the subject matter. Jon Balserak shows that Vermigli, Melanchthon, and Calvin introduced a shift in how the church viewed prophecy. The reader must follow Balserak all the way to the end to know what he is doing; no thesis is stated early. While I realize that an essay can accomplish only so much, I was disappointed that in an eleven-page essay devoted to the developments of these three reformers, Vermigli's contribution received one page, and the contributions of the other two received a paragraph each.

Stefan Lindholm's essay regards the Reformed understanding of the union of the two natures in the person of the Son of God, and the communication of properties. Lindholm writes the chapter as a "primer to fellow students, new and old" (137). The essay is not an easy read: Lindholm's vocabulary and writing style are complex. If "primer" means "simple introduction," this student did not find it so.

In summary, the average layman would find a general history of the European reformations more helpful than this book. Nevertheless, the book should be found on library shelves and in the hands of scholars who have a focused interest in the European reformations. ●

*Reading Paul with the Reformers: Reconciling Old and New Perspectives,* by Stephen J. Chester. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017. Pp. 500. $60.00. (hardcover). [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

I and the Protestant Reformed churches appreciate the old perspective of understanding Paul (OPP), and repudiate the "New Perspectives on Paul" (NPP). We have no interest in *reconciling*

these perspectives, as this book aims to do (notice its subtitle). Yet the OPP adherent can appreciate something about this book: not its *goal*, but Chester's exposure of some fundamental weaknesses of the NPP. To demonstrate this, I will first explain the book's background, then summarize its content.

Let me be clear: this book is a scholarly book devoted to a specialized subject. As a result, not all of our readership may be interested in reading it, nor profit from it. But all of our readership ought to be aware of the significance of this book, especially for those who appreciate the OPP.

**Background**

The OPP refers to the way in which Luther, Calvin, and other Reformers understood key concepts in Paul's epistles. For instance, they viewed the term "righteousness" in his letters as referring usually to God's verdict that sinners are righteous before Him, that this righteousness is alien (the righteousness of another, of Jesus Christ), and that it is imputed (Christ's righteousness legally declared to be ours). Another aspect is the Reformed confessional understanding of faith as the bond by which we are united to Christ, the only means by which we are justified, and that which inevitably leads us to do good works of gratitude (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 7, 23, 24, 32; Belgic Confession, Arts. 22-24; Canons of Dordt, III/IV, 14). A third aspect is that God rewards our good works, but this reward is unmerited (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 24; Belgic Confession, Art. 24). Yet another is that the phrase "works of the law" in Paul's epistles usually, if not always, refers to the attempt by depraved humans to earn favor with God by keeping His law.

Ever since E. P. Sanders's book *Paul and Palestinian Judaism* appeared in 1977, some New Testament scholars have challenged the OPP and promoted the NPP. The term "NPP" does not refer to *one* unified and alternate way to understand Paul's epistles; it is the New *Perspectives* (plural) on Paul, referring to *several* alternate views. In common, these different new perspectives reject the explanation of Paul given by the Reformers and the Reformed confessions.

Behind this rejection are at least two presuppositions. The first is that the Reformers understood salvation primarily as an individual matter (*I* am a sinner,

*I* am saved, *I* have been united to Christ, *I* have been justified by faith, *I* will live to God's glory) and ignored the communal aspect of salvation (the gospel affects a whole body of people, and we are to live toward the members of that body as renewed). That this presupposition is false is evident from Calvin's own development of the doctrine of the *church* (why develop ecclesiology, if salvation is individualistic?), from the Belgic Confession, which was written as the confession of the church ("*We* all believe and confess...," Art. 1), and the Heidelberg Catechism's doctrine of the communion of saints (Q&A 55). Nevertheless, the NPP presupposes this.

The second presupposition is that one reads Paul best in light of the writings of other Jewish writers of his day. For this reason the NPP advocates an understanding of "Second Temple Judaism," referring to the beliefs, practices, and literature of the Jews from the time they returned from the Babylonian captivity until A.D. 70, when the temple was destroyed. This literature sheds as much or more light on Paul, in the mind of the NPP advocates, than the Scriptures. The NPP effectively replaces the great hermeneutical principle "Scripture interprets Scripture" with "Second Temple Judaism literature interprets Paul." That this undermines the sufficiency of the Scriptures for faith and life should be clear to every Reformed believer.

Specific NPP representatives have developed the main tenets of the NPP in their writings. In his book *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* Richard Hayes argued that the phrase "the faith of Christ" refers in Paul's epistles not to our faith in Christ, or the faith which comes from Christ, but to Christ's own faith and faithfulness (377-85). Douglas Campbell built on this by arguing that if "faith of Christ" refers to *Christ's* faithfulness, then the righteousness which is by faith must refer to *Christ's* own righteousness, manifested for his own benefit, *not* as imputed to us (386-91). The well-known N. T. Wright said that divine justification is not fundamentally a matter of God declaring an individual righteous in Christ, but of God declaring who are in the covenant (391-400). Mention of the term "covenant" immediately causes Protestant Reformed believers to become interested. We agree that those who are justified are in God's covenant. However, Wright's covenant doctrine is sig-

nificantly different from ours, and his point is that justification is *not* a matter of God imputing Christ's righteousness to His elect, *but* of God declaring a body of people to be His.

So the question is fundamentally this: were the Reformers right, and are the Reformed creeds correct, in their understanding of Paul? Or must we dismiss them entirely in favor of the New Perspectives? Or can the two be reconciled in some way? Chester attempts the latter.

**Summary**

Chester devotes the first chapter to showing that the difference between the OPP and NPP is not only one of *exegesis* (what does the text actually mean?), but more fundamentally one of *hermeneutics* (by what principles do we determine what the text means?). Chester illustrates by referring to Erasmus' interpretation of Galatians 2:11-21, which differed significantly from Luther's, especially regarding why Paul rebuked Peter for refraining from eating with the Gentiles. Luther considered Paul to be rebuking Peter because Peter was undermining the gospel of justification by faith alone. By contrast, Erasmus considered Peter and Paul to be agreed in their doctrine, and viewed Galatians 2:11ff. as an allegory, a sort of skit in which Peter and Paul pretended to disagree in order to teach the Jews an object lesson. Chester's goal is to emulate Erasmus in his attempt to reconcile the OPP and NPP. If Chester were to emulate Luther, he would have to conclude that either the OPP or NPP is the true gospel, that the other is the false gospel, and that the two cannot be reconciled.

In part 2 of his book, Chester gives an overview of the teaching of Luther, Melanchthon, and Calvin. That the Reformers agreed in the fundamentals and were Augustinian in their view of grace, he demonstrates. At the same time, they moved beyond Augustine in their understanding of Paul, inventing a "new exegetical grammar" (chap. 2). Chester shows that the Reformers agreed both in their understanding of unregenerate man (as expressed in key Biblical terms like "sin," "the law," and the "conscience" of natural man, chap. 3) and of the regenerate man (as expressed in their understanding of concepts like "grace" and "faith," chap. 4). Then he examines the distinct contributions of Luther (chap. 5), Melanchthon (chap. 6) and Calvin

(chap. 7) to the Reformed view of Christ's righteousness.

All of this leads to chapters 8 and 9. In chapter 8 Chester evaluates the NPP teachings in relation to the teachings of these Reformers, and in chapter 9 he shows how the two can be reconciled. For the purpose of this review, chapter 8 is most significant. Chester summarizes his main points in his introduction (7-9):

1. The NPP claims to be radically different from the Reformers in its understanding of Paul. Yet in some respects the NPP advocates are in line with the Reformers' Chester contends; both agree on what Paul means by "sin" and "flesh," for instance. *But the NPP men apparently will not admit this*.

2. At times the NPP *misrepresents* the Reformers. Some NPP scholars allege that Luther explains Paul as having struggled with a guilty conscience *before* his conversion (Rom. 7). In fact, Luther did not explain Paul this way.

3. NPP men apparently overlook Luther's and Calvin's insistence that our righteousness is the alien, imputed righteousness of Christ.

4. N. T. Wright's explanation of justification is not only different from the Reformers' explanation, but also from Paul's. On this point, N. T. Wright must decide if he is indeed interacting with Paul's writings, or not.

5. NPP men have not done justice to the sovereignty of God's grace in causing the gospel to be preached and men to believe.

In chapter 9, Chester sets forth how, in his mind, the NPP men can meld the best insights of both the NPP and the Reformers, in order to "reconcile" the two views.

**Fundamental Weakness**

The fundamental weakness of Chester's thesis is his presupposition that the NPP and OPP can be reconciled. This weakness has at least two components to it. One is that some aspects of the OPP do in fact need revision: "The purpose of such a study of the Reformers is not to advocate the wholesale adoption of their Pauline interpretation...rather...it is to put the insights of previous interpreters to work for present interpretative advantage" (54-5). The second component is that some aspects of the NPP are an improvement over the OPP. NPP scholars should revise their view in light of the Reformers, but not

abandon their view altogether.

The fact is that reconciliation of these two views simply is not possible. First, the Reformers are dead; they cannot change their view. Second, it is not possible that the OPP be revised, for it is the confessional position of Reformed and Presbyterian churches, creedally expressed in the Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards. For Chester, this is not an issue; he is professor of New Testament at North Park Theological Seminary in Chicago, which is the denominational seminary of the Evangelical Covenant Church. But it is an issue for those who consider the Reformed confessions to be faithful summaries of Scripture, and have adopted them as our own creedal expression. Even more, it is an issue for officebearers in Reformed churches who have subscribed to these confessions. Third, in light of the weaknesses of the NPP position (see 3-5 above), is it realistic to suppose that the NPP and OPP can be reconciled without rejecting some of the NPP's foundational tenets? How does one meld the best insights of the OPP and NPP, which will include reconsidering some aspects of the NPP, and still have the NPP?

Reconciliation is not possible. What is possible, and desirable, is a wholesale renunciation of the NPP view, and a heartfelt embrace of the OPP.

**Significance**

The book is significant because it demonstrates that NPP scholars generally *have not been reading* the Reformers, or if they have read them, the NPP scholars have not been *interacting* with the Reformers' view of Paul. In modern scholarship, one who ignores what others have said concerning the topic about which one is writing has committed a cardinal sin. It is expected that the writer will first research what others have already said. At the most, a scholar who does not refer to the related work of others can claim to be ignorant of that other work, but no NPP man can possibly be ignorant of the fact that the Reformers had a consensus interpretation of Paul, which interpretation influenced Protestantism for centuries.

Second, Chester suggests that the NPP scholars are *intentional* in their neglect of the Reformers: "Contemporary Pauline scholarship characteristically misunderstands its relationship with Reformation exegesis in ways that are

rhetorically convenient" (359). To ignore the Reformers serves their ultimate cause, which is not dialogue or interaction, but is to reinterpret the Bible, to set aside the Reformed viewpoint entirely, and to bring in a new viewpoint that cannot coexist at all with the old.

The book exposes the *scholarly* weakness of the NPP. This weakness in their methodology is necessary for them to advance their cause: those who are bent on teaching something new must ignore what faithful interpreters of Scripture have said in the past, and what faithful churches have adopted as their own doctrinal position. They cannot refute it; they must ignore it, and try to sidetrack the church by getting her to read Second Temple Judaism literature.

Had the book been written by one who opposed the NPP, it would not pack quite the same punch that it does, coming from the pen of one who is sympathetic toward it. ●

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*The Emperor Has No Clothes: Dr. Richard B. Gaffin Jr.'s Doctrine of Justification*, by Stephen M. Cunha. Unicoi, Tennessee: Trinity Foundation, 2008. Pp. 148. $9.95 (softcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

He doesn't, of course, as has been evident since the emperor defended Norman Shepherd in the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC) in the 1970s and 1980s and John O. Kinnaird not long thereafter. The officebearers in the OPC could not, and still cannot, see his nakedness. Neither can the nominally conservative Presbyterian and Reformed churches of the ecumenical organization known as NAPARC.

Now, a mere theological boy in the OPC cries out for all to hear, "the emperor has no clothes."

The emperor is prominent, influential OPC theologian and churchman, Richard B. Gaffin, Jr. The clothes of which he is devoid are the orthodox confession of justification by faith alone. His shameful, doctrinal nakedness is the teaching of justification by faith and works.

The layman who observes what all the learned, degreed

theologians of Westminster Seminary, of the OPC, and of NAPARC are unable to see is Stephen M. Cunha, who remains a member of the OPC.

His cry of nakedness is this book.

Gaffin publicly defended Norman Shepherd for many years at Westminster Seminary and in the church courts of the OPC, finally obtaining Shepherd's acquittal, despite Shepherd's open, public, explicit denial of justification by faith alone and of all the doctrines of grace (88-97).

Likewise, Gaffin headed the successful defense at the OPC's general assembly of ruling elder, John O. Kinnaird, against the charge, solidly established, of teaching justification by faith and works (see 48, 49).

Then, with lavish praise, Gaffin recommended Shepherd's book denying all the truths of the gospel of grace, *The Call of Grace* (88). "Gaffin's public support for and endorsement of Mr. Norman Shepherd's distinctive covenant theology is the elephant in the room within the OPC" (88).

In his own writing, at this time of controversy in the OPC over justification, Gaffin explains Romans 2:13 as teaching that humans must be, and *can be*, justified in the final judgment by their own good works (52-60). In several of his publications, Gaffin makes the works of faith partly the instrument with faith of justification (32, 35). "Gaffin is teaching that works are partially instrumental in justification. This is a different gospel" (35).

In conflict with Scripture and the Reformed creeds, Gaffin blurs and compromises the absolute "law/gospel" antithesis, which attributes justification solely to gospel and rejects law altogether in the matter of justification (38-87).

> Dr. Gaffin says that the Law/Gospel antithesis is "not a theological ultimate" and that the Gospel "is to the end of removing an absolute law-gospel antithesis in the life of the believer." It is here where one may rightly question whether or not Dr. Gaffin truly understands the classic Protestant Law/Gospel antithesis (43).

The naked emperor in the OPC and in contemporary Presbyterian and Reformed ecumenicity "teaches that believers are, in some sense, still under the condemnation of the law and that

justification is by faith with its works, and he denies that there is an absolute antithesis between the Law and the Gospel…The heart of the problem is Dr. Gaffin's view that works in some sense play a causal role in justification" (95).

Since Cunha is, by his own admission, but a theological child, he can be excused for failing to recognize that justification *according* to works (in the final judgment) is fundamentally different from justification *by* works (as Shepherd and Gaffin proclaim) and for overlooking that Shepherd's and Gaffin's false doctrine of justification by works is rooted in a false doctrine of the covenant, namely, that the covenant is conditional, with all the children of believers alike.

Cunha's demonstration of the false doctrine of justification by faith *and by faith's works*, now firmly established and approved in the "conservative" Reformed churches, is weighty enough. For a start.

In Hans Christian Andersen's story, the people who had been gullible in accepting the naked emperor as clothed responded to the cry of the child. It is doubtful that Presbyterian and Reformed people, including the clergy, will respond positively to the cry of Cunha. Indeed, it is virtually certain that they will not.

Apostasy is a far different thing than silliness. ●

*"Free Grace" Theology: 5 Ways It Diminishes the Gospel,* by Wayne Grudem. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016. Pp. 159. $19.99 (hardcover). [Reviewed by Daniel Kleyn.]

Free Grace theology teaches that one is saved because of faith in Jesus Christ alone. What they emphasize is that works do not play a role in attaining salvation. They also teach that a life of good works does not follow from salvation.

In this book, Wayne Grudem confronts what he sees as two serious problems with this view. The first is that the proponents of Free Grace teach that the gospel message need not include a call to repentance. The second is that the Free Grace view maintains that one who is justified by faith need not live a life of good works.

Grudem points out that these erroneous views originated from Dallas Theological Seminary, and were especially promoted by Zane Hodges (1932-2008).

As indicated by the title of the book, Grudem is convinced that Free Grace theology diminishes the gospel in five ways. First, because it has an erroneous understanding of the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. Secondly, because it avoids issuing the command to unbelievers to repent of their sins. Thirdly, because it gives false assurance to many who profess faith in Christ. Fourthly, because it overemphasizes that faith is assent to truth and underemphasizes the need to trust in Christ. And fifthly, because it wrongly interprets certain critical passages of Scripture.

I can appreciate Grudem's concern that the Free Grace viewpoint fails to give proper place, in the preaching, to the command to repent. I can also understand his concern that the Free Grace movement does not do justice to the place of good works in the life of a justified believer. He is correct in stating that this runs contrary to the Reformation teaching that "we are justified by faith alone, but the faith that justifies us is never alone." He points out, correctly, that Scripture teaches and that the Reformers taught that genuine saving faith produces a life of good works.

However, I have serious reservations about this book and about the author's teachings. Grudem criticizes the Free Grace movement of misunderstanding and misrepresenting the Reformation doctrine of justification by faith alone. But he himself does the same thing, so that we end up with both the Free Grace movement and Grudem himself teaching conditional salvation.

Grudem does this by losing sight of the biblical truth that faith is the means (or instrument) for our justification and teaching instead that faith is a condition for justification. He speaks about our faith as something "that God requires of us" (20) and "that God responds to" (28) for our justification. He mentions some "initial things that an unsaved person needs to do in order to be saved" (129). He states that "repentance is essential to saving faith" (125) and "necessary for saving faith" (141).

The author, in my judgment, is inconsistent. On the one hand he maintains that "we must never begin to teach that justification

comes by faith plus works, even a little bit of works" (144). But he himself does exactly that by making both faith and repentance works that are necessary for justification. Grudem overreacts to the Free Grace error of denying the need for repentance by making repentance a condition for salvation. Thus, while it may be said that the Free Grace movement has fallen into the ditch of denying the place of good works in the life of a believer, Grudem has fallen into the opposite ditch of making the good work of repentance (which is in reality a fruit of our salvation) a necessary condition for justification and salvation. On account of these inconsistencies, I found the book disappointing and confusing.

Was the book at all helpful? Yes. It helped as regards coming to know what Free Grace theology is and becoming aware of some of its weaknesses. And, on account of the author's own errors, the book helps one think through the proper relationship between justification by faith alone and our life of repentance and good works. The book was also a good reminder of the need for clarity concerning these important truths of the gospel. However, it is not a book that I would recommend. ●

*Still Protesting: Why the Reformation Matters*, by D. G. Hart. Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2018. Pp. xiii + 207. $18.00 (softcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

The threat to Protestantism of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) is by no means a thing of the past. In recent years, a number of prominent Protestants have defected to Rome. Upon doing so, some write spirited defenses of their apostasy. The defenses paint glowing pictures of the Roman Church as the one church of Christ descending down the ages and as a unified body in contrast to the divisions of Protestantism. In addition, the defenses invariably attempt to demonstrate that Rome has changed for the better in theology, worship, and Christian life from the time of the Reformation.

Our age also sees warm, close ecumenical relations between Protestant denominations and the RCC based on supposed oneness

in the gospel. It lives in Protestant, or formerly Protestant, minds that barriers between Rome and Protestantism were taken down by the Roman Catholic council known as Vatican II.

Advocates of Protestant return to Rome argue that whatever controversy Protestants may have had with Rome in the past is unfounded and unnecessary today. They sing the siren song, "Come back to mother Rome, the unified church descending in unbroken succession down the ages from the apostles themselves." It is a danger that Protestants, especially young Protestants, heed the song of the sirens and come to spiritual ruin.

All of this falsehood, D. G. Hart exposes and explodes in *Still Protesting*. "The Reformation is not over" (11).

The fundamental issue of the Reformation was justification by faith alone, which truth is fundamental for every human: "The Reformers addressed the most basic question that confronts all human beings: How can a sinner be right with and worship in good conscience a righteous God who demands sinless perfection?" (14) Presbyterians who fall away to Rome and evangelical churches in ecumenical relationship with the RCC deny that justification by faith alone has this importance in the Bible, in the experience of sinners, or in the theology of a church. They rather emphasize the unity of the church.

Also with regard to unity, the thinking of converts to Rome and of Protestant churches in ecumenical relation with Rome is mistaken. Rome is not, in fact, a unified church, in contrast to a divided Protestantism, but is bitterly divided, as much as or more than the Protestantism it criticizes for division. "When Protestants convert they are going to find a church with even more diversity than evangelicalism and almost the same amount of theological chaos and liturgical experimentation as in mainline Protestantism" (182).

Rome has not changed, with regard to doctrine, worship, or practice, from the time of the Reformation. Rome's doctrine of justification remains the same as it was in 1517: "It [Rome] has yet to reform its teachings and practices, which make its members still dependent on the works of saints and acts of penance and less hopeful about going to be with the saints and angels at death" (61).

Rome's doctrine and prac-

tice of indulgences, the corruption of the gospel of grace that sparked the Reformation, have not changed in the slightest: "In 2000 Pope John Paul II encouraged bishops to recover the practice of granting indulgences as part of the observance of the new millennium" (52).

Fundamental to Hart's warning to tempted evangelicals is his sound insight into the doctrinal issues of the Reformation and his uncompromising defense of them as the gospel of grace. Hart's book is a clear, genuine echo of the sixteenth-century call of Jesus Christ for the Reformation of the church in that echo's distinctively Reformed sound. The following statement concerning the Reformation's doctrine of "Christ alone" is representative:

> You cannot have the sufficiency of Christ that Protestantism teaches, the complete and entire righteousness that allows you to stand blameless on judgment day in God's presence—you cannot have that kind of sanctity and then add to it the alleged beauty, majesty, and holiness of Roman Catholicism. In the sixteenth century, you were either one or the other. You either trusted in Christ alone or you prayed to a saint who, along with Christ, might help you avoid sin and so spend less time in purgatory. That choice is still the issue today, five hundred years after Luther first objected to the corruptions, idolatry, and abuses that had grown up around the beatification and canonization of saints (195).

The author's doctrinal insight and soundness are complemented by impressive knowledge and use of the history of the church, not only at and following the Reformation of the sixteenth century, but also that of the early post-apostolic church and that of the church today.

The warning given by the book against seduction by Rome, so that one abandons Protestantism for membership in the RCC, is probably unnecessary for the reader of this journal. Nevertheless, grounding in the gospel recovered by the Reformation is always in order. Besides, in our day of the great apostasy of II Thessalonians 2, the true church may not take the faithfulness of her members for granted, not even the faithfulness of her officebearers. It belongs to the apostasy that on every hand the

impression is left that the RCC has changed from the false church it showed itself to be at the Reformation, thus making the protest of the Reformation outdated. Hart demonstrates that the true church is, and ought to be, "still protesting."

If D. G. Hart is representative of the learning and Reformed orthodoxy of Hillsdale College, where Hart teaches, readers of this journal should seriously consider sending their young people to this college. ●

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*Between Wittenberg and Geneva: Lutheran and Reformed Theology in Conversation,* by Robert Kolb and Carl Trueman. Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2017. Pp. 236. $26.99 (softcover). [Reviewed by Cory J. Griess.]

The purpose of this book, as the authors themselves relate it, is threefold. First, it is to present the case for confessionalism, whether Lutheran or Reformed, in distinction from modern American Evangelicalism. "Each of us was concerned about a couple of related phenomena we had noticed among seminary students. The first was the failure of many of them to understand the differences between being confessional and being Evangelical" (Preface, ix). The second purpose of the book is to relate the differences between the Lutheran and Reformed confession. "What both Bob and I wanted to do was to write a book that would explain the differences between our two communions" (Preface, ix). The third purpose regards the manner in which the first two purposes are accomplished. "…it might be helpful to produce a book outlining Lutheran and Reformed positions on various doctrines, in a manner that would help students to see what is at stake…" while avoiding, "the bitterness that has often characterized such engagement in the past" (Preface, x).

The authors carry out the purpose of the book by writing in eight chapters on eight topics central to both the Lutheran and Reformed Confession. In each chapter there is first an introduction to the topic, usually highlighting a bit of the historical setting of the development of the doctrine, or the importance of the doctrine to the tradition. What follows in

each chapter is an essay by Robert Kolb on the Lutheran view of the topic, and then an essay by Carl Trueman on the Reformed view of the topic. These essays are not written by the authors as though facing one another, and there is no back and forth in the book. Rather, they are both written "facing forward" as a teacher teaching a class of students, aware that the teacher next door may be teaching some things differently. Finally, each chapter has a conclusion apparently written by Trueman.

For the most part, the book accomplishes what its authors set out to accomplish in my judgment. The eight topics chosen are indeed key topics and I cannot see that any others would have been better than the ones chosen. The book does not whittle away the differences between the two traditions, but is honest where there is disagreement. The book also honestly states the agreement and, indeed, indebtedness of the traditions to each other (especially the Reformed to Luther). The book is irenic in tone. Both men approach their essays as teachers of historical theology, although their personal commitment to their respective traditions is obvious in the writing.

While I, for one, would have appreciated some back and forth, I recognize the difficulty of doing that in book form. Other books (*Five Views on Sanctification,* etc.) have done this, but these types of books end up being quite massive. This book manages to cover eight significant topics quite thoroughly in 236 pages. However, if not a dialogue, a summary at the end of each chapter stating the basic position and key reasons for the position of each and key arguments against the position of the other side would perhaps have been helpful. This, or something similar, might have forced the authors to face head on the arguments of the other side in a more comprehensive manner in their essays. I was hoping, for example, to read a Lutheran take on the question of how Jesus' body was physically present in the Last Supper, especially given the fact that the Lord was bodily standing there when He gave the bread to the disciples, and had not yet ascended to the right hand of His Father. This is a common Reformed argument against the physical presence in the Supper, and is one that Trueman brings up in his section in the appropriate chapter. There is no touching on that question in the Lutheran section, though I have to imagine the

argument was dealt with at some point in Lutheran history. There are some loose ends like this.

The question of who gets to define the Lutheran and Reformed positions on the matters in question is an interesting one and one that the authors faced. Both men describe themselves as strict confessionalists (Preface, xi-xii), yet their approach to presenting the view of their traditions differs a bit. Kolb, while "committed to upholding the Book of Concord in a strict manner," believes that "the writings of Luther present the best 'Lutheran' offer for conversation in the whole household of faith," and therefore focuses on Luther's personal understanding of the issues. Trueman focuses on the Reformed confessions as the consensus for what it means to be Reformed. As this is carried out in the chapters, however, the difference is not as stark as the preface makes it seem it will be. Kolb does quote from the Book of Concord, and Trueman does rely (heavily in places) on Calvin. Kolb quotes at times from the chief characters of Lutheran confessional orthodoxy (Chemnitz and Gerhard), and Trueman relies heavily on Bavinck to give the summary of the Reformed tradition. Perhaps the main difference is this, Trueman sets all the history before the Reformed Confessions and either shows how they are the climax of the history or lets them have the final say. This is not necessarily the case in Kolb's essays. To my mind the confessions ought to define the tradition in both cases.

The book, wonderfully, ends up functioning as a well written, concise yet thorough enough theological history of the Reformation up through Lutheran and Reformed orthodoxy. The essays move through the material and do not belabor unnecessary points or give material simply for the sake of giving material. A gift of both authors is the ability to take massive subjects and give the significant parts with enough historical background to provide the reader a good grasp not only of the doctrine as understood in its tradition but also the milieu out of which it arose, all the while not burdening the reader with too much information.

The book gave me a greater appreciation for both traditions. Being from the Reformed tradition myself, the book allowed me to enter more comprehensively into my own tradition. The book also allowed me to see some of the "whys" regarding the Lu-

theran understanding that I never grasped. Even if I disagree with the conclusion, one that fails to appreciate Christ's presence by His Spirit, I can appreciate better the motive in Luther and Lutheranism's view of the physical presence of Christ in the Supper—the condescension of Christ to His people. I can appreciate in a new way what I always knew but grasp now more thoroughly, the Reformed indebtedness to Luther and Lutheranism.

Trueman, when he speaks of the covenant and baptism, skirts a number of issues. Perhaps this is understandable in a book of this nature, nonetheless, it is a bit frustrating to one who is imbibed in covenant theology. His recounting of the Reformed doctrine of the covenant is in my judgment too bare bones. For example, he makes no attempt to report how the Reformed dealt with the promise to the children in baptism when some of those children fall away—a subject concerning which much ink has been spilled, and concerning which Bavinck, upon whom he relies heavily, had something important to say.

I recommend the book highly, especially to anyone interested in Reformed or Lutheran theology, or the history of the Reformation. In my judgment, it could be very usefully assigned in a church history course or history of dogma course at the seminary level. Even in a seminary where, God willing, there will never be any confusion in the students' minds about the difference between being confessional and evangelical.●

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*The New Calvinists: Changing the Gospel*, by E.S. Williams. London: The Wakeman Trust & Belmont House Publishing, repr. 2017. Pp. 80. $7.99 (softcover). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma]

This small book performs a valuable service for evangelical, especially Reformed, Christians and churches. It exposes, and issues a timely warning against, a popular and spreading corruption of the pure worship of God. The warning is especially urgent in that the violation of the second commandment parades itself as a new form of Calvinism and attracts hordes of young people who, as they are bowing down to an image, suppose (of all absurd

notions) that they are modern disciples of John Calvin.

The movement in view is known as the "new Calvinism." It features "worship" services that are crafted after the whims of those in charge and that are aimed at arousing the carnal emotions of the largely youthful audiences. Prominent in this "worship" are hip/hop musicians, rappers, rock bands, strobe lights in a dark auditorium, and the like worldly entertainment. The author describes one such (typical) service, notable among other things for its introduction to the sermon of John Piper.

> [It was] worship…based on a culture of rock music and psychedelic lighting that produce[d] a spirit of revelry. Led by Christian (sic) rock artist Chris Tomlin and Christian (sic) rapper Lecrae, the young audience was worked into a state of ecstatic excitement. Into this toxic atmosphere, John Piper, emerging theatrically through the darkness, took to the podium and preached to the massive crowd. Remarkably, he preached in the dark, except for a spotlight that focused on him. Why no light? Because the mystical, ecstatic atmosphere…so carefully cultivated by the mix of darkness, psychedelic, strobe lights, and relentless, overpoweringly loud beat music would have been shattered if the youthful audience had been brought to its senses (35).

The ungodly entertainment masquerading, and not at all successfully, as the worship of God is disobedience to the second commandment of the law, as explained by the Heidelberg Catechism: "What doth God require in the second commandment? That we in no wise… worship Him in any other way than He has commanded in His Word" (Q+A 96). The "new Calvinism," which is, in reality, the old image worship, underscores the importance of genuine Calvinism's confession and practice of the "regulative principle of worship." This is the truth of the second commandment, that the only elements of the worship that is acceptable to God are those that God Himself has commanded in His Word.

Other leading proponents and practitioners of the "new Calvinism" are Tim Keller, allegedly a Presbyterian, and Mark Driscoll,

an independent. The popularity of these image worshippers and their ministries spill over into Reformed and Presbyterian churches. A nominally Reformed church in the south suburbs of Chicago that features raucous contemporary music and is hugely popular with young people in the area, always recognizable as violation of the second commandment, I now recognize as a church plant of the "new Calvinism."

An avowed principle of the "new Calvinism" is deliberate accommodation of the church to the culture of the ungodly world. "The Gospel must be made culturally acceptable, and in order to do so needs worldly methods to help it" (11, 12). The "new Calvinism" rejects the truth of the antithesis—the spiritual separation of the church from, and the spiritual warfare of the church against, the wicked world. Keller and his cohorts advertise this calculated worldliness as the tactic by which they will influence and ultimately win over, or Christianize, the world. The calling of the church, according to them, is to make the world Christian. There is a postmillennial element in the "new Calvinism." Devotees of A. Kuyper's program of "Christianizing" the world by a common grace of God are susceptible to the allure of the "new Calvinism."

Evident already in the leading figures of the "new Calvinism" is that the world is overcoming them, rather than that they are conquering the world for Jesus. Keller is a theistic evolutionist; allows for salvation apart from Jesus Christ; accepts the Roman Catholic Church as a true church; and engages in mysticism. He also vigorously promotes the liberation theology of the Roman Catholic liberation theologian, Gustavo Gutierrez: Christianity is the social activity of distributing wealth (taken from the rich and from the hard-working middle class) to the poor (17-29).

Piper has heard God talk to him in a direct, mystical manner (33, 34). That this is a lie, or delusion, is evident from the fact that the voice did not say, "Piper, repent of your disobedience to the second commandment of My law."

As for Mark Driscoll, not only was his lordly, indeed, tyrannical, conduct too much for his own underlings in his church, over which he governed like a Protestant pope, so that they forced him to resign, but also the man's public speaking, supposedly preaching, obsesses about sex,

especially deviant sex, favorably, and contains so much swearing that his friends refer to him as the "cussing pastor" (44).

This book demonstrates once again that if God does not determine the public worship of the church, Satan gladly will—and does. If Israel does not heed the second commandment, the nation will be found dancing naked around a golden calf, *as the worship of Jehovah God*.

And if the churches repudiate the old Calvinism of the creeds, they will be cursed with the "new Calvinism" of Tim Keller, John Piper, and Mark Driscoll. ●

## Contributors for this issue are:

***Ronald L. Cammenga,*** professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

***David J. Engelsma,*** professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

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

***Barrett L. Gritters,*** professor of Practical Theology and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

***Daniel Kleyn,*** missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippians.

***Douglas J. Kuiper,*** professor of Church History and New Testament Studies in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, Wyoming, Michigan.

***H. David Schuringa,*** emeritus minister in the Christian Reformed Church of North America.