BEACON LIGHTS

Reformed doctrines applied

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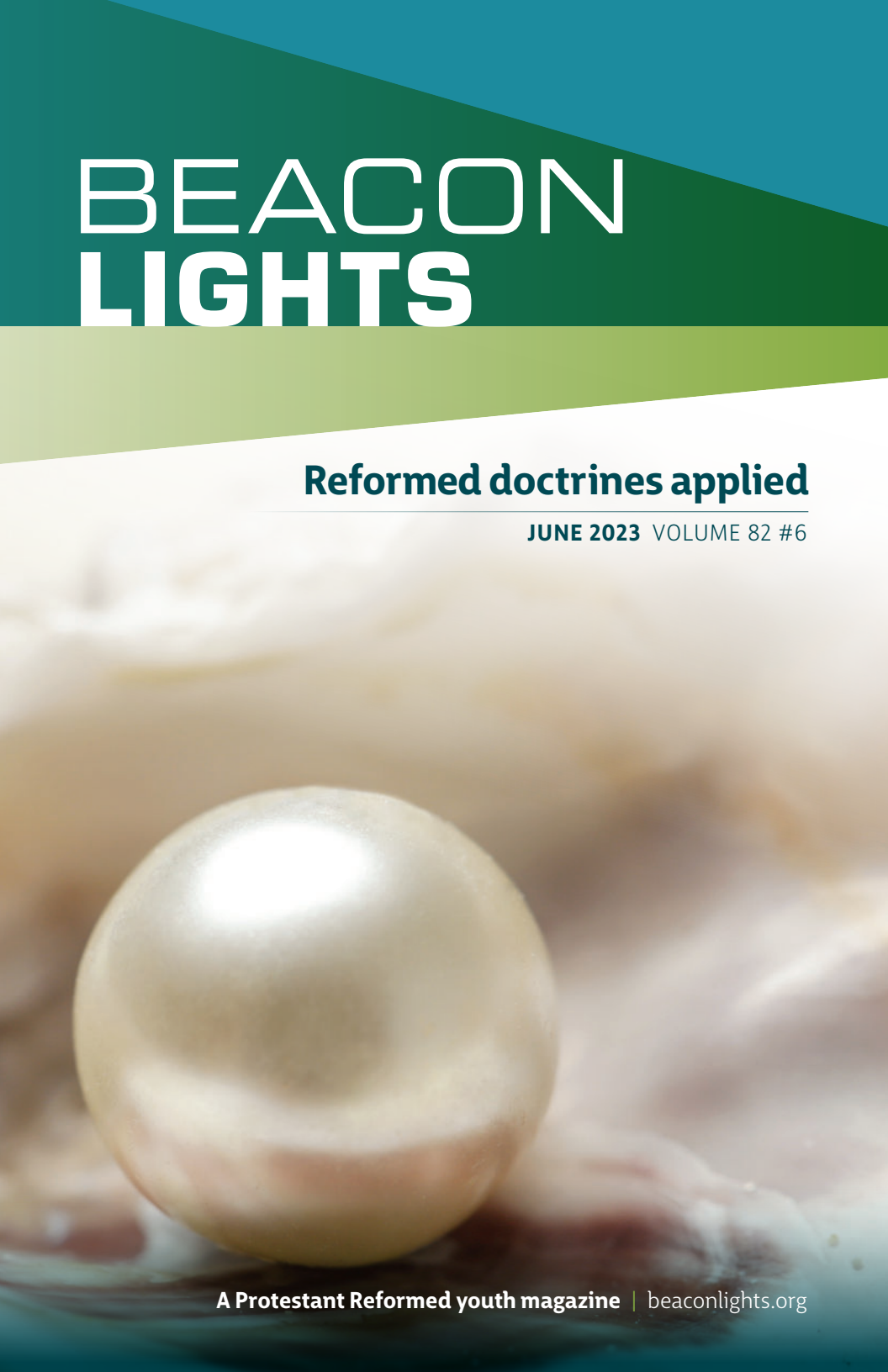

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BEACON LIGHTS

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THE ISSUE AT HAND Brendan Looyenga

Reformed doctrines applied

Throughout the calendar year, the *Beacon Lights* staff makes an effort to balance the content of the magazine so that it includes several different kinds of themes. We aim to touch on practical aspects of Christian living, worldview, worship, biblical studies, and theology. This month the last of these topics is the theme to which we turn.

There is a tendency, especially in the modern church, to view Reformed theology as dry and irrelevant. The doctrines that we teach and defend, however, are neither. Instead, they can be understood as a foundation for the practical way we live out our lives. The foundation of a house is not the most outwardly visible part of its structure, but if it is poorly constructed, the entire house is in danger of falling. When we don't know what we believe and how to defend our faith, our spiritual lives are prone to failure too. A tremor of trials or a stiff breeze of falsehood may bring them crashing down.

But *knowing* doctrine is only the first part of our theology. We also have to *live* it. Our Lord reminds us of this in his parable of the wise man and the foolish man: "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, *and doeth them*, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock" (Matt. 7:24, emphasis added). Wisdom is found not only in building upon the foundational teachings of Jesus Christ, but also in living as a vibrant believer in that house of faith.

The purpose of our issue this month is to help readers in this pursuit. The feature articles have as their goal an explanation of specific Reformed doctrines and then an application of them to the lives of believers. As you read this issue, do so with understanding. Then build your house on the foundation of these truths and live accordingly.

This month we are also announcing a change in membership of the *Beacon Lights* staff. After several years of service, Aaron Van Dyke is stepping down from his role as writer correspondent to focus on his studies at seminary. We thank Aaron for his work in finding writers for *Beacon Lights* on a monthly basis and for his many personal writing contributions as well.

Aaron is being replaced by a new duo of writer correspondents: Jacob VanderKolk from Hudsonville PRC and Charles Potjer from Hope (Redlands) PRC. Jacob and Charles join Josh Harris in this role and will serve as the main contacts for writers. We welcome these two young men to the staff and wish the Lord's blessing on their work on behalf of the Federation.

Why are you Protestant Reformed?

Brendan Looyenga

For most readers, the answer to the question framed by this article's title is simple. It's this: "because I was born and raised in a Protestant Reformed church and have never really thought about worshiping elsewhere." This is probably the answer that many churchgoing people would give for their membership today, though it isn't something you should take for granted.

If you are only a member of the PRC because of your family ties or the familiarity of Dutch Reformed culture, then you haven't fully grappled with what it means to be a member of a church. Without a stronger foundation of belief, there is no solid reason to stay. There may come a time when you question your membership in the PRC and start thinking about going elsewhere. Before you do that, however, think carefully about such a decision.

I'm sure that many readers have heard the argument that staying in the PRC is necessary because the PRC is "the purest manifestation of the church" that exists today. I'm willing to go on record saying that this isn't a good argument for several reasons. In the first place, I'm not sure there is a straightforward way to prove this claim, which assumes much more than just doctrinal precision. We'll talk about what defines a true church of Jesus Christ shortly, but that isn't the same thing as saying, "the purest." If, on the other hand, the claim is simply a statement of one's faith ("I *believe* the PRC is purest"), then I suppose most people would be willing to argue the same thing for their church or denomination. That isn't conclusive.

What the claim really sounds like is a strong dose of pride. I'm not

sure when the practice of calling the PRC "the purest manifestation" started, but by now I would hope that most members of our denomination have been sufficiently humbled by events in the past few years to back away from that claim. We have seen enough doctrinal error, moral scandal, and controversy to make anyone choke on those words. It's time to set aside the claim of being "the purest manifestation" and to engage in a more authentic look at why being a member of the PRC matters.

We can start this search by discovering God's definition of the purest manifestation of the church, which is described in Revelation 7:9–10.

> After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

You probably realize that this church isn't found anywhere on earth. This is the *church triumphant* made up of "God's people who, having fought their fight and kept the faith, are now in heaven, resting from their labors."[1] They are the only people who can lay claim to the title of "purest manifestation of the church."

Needless to say, we are not (yet) part of that church. Until the day that the Lord is pleased to take us home, we remain members of the *church militant*, battling against the world, the devil, and our own sinful natures. This threefold enemy, whom only Christ can fully conquer, ensures that we can't claim any titles for ourselves in this life. What we can strive for, however, is to be faithful.

The faithful church of Jesus Christ isn't perfect. It has spots and blemishes that can only be covered by the blood of Christ. Sometimes the church isn't nearly as antithetical as it should be in its battle to remain "unspotted from the world" (James 1:27). At other times it falls for the lies of Satan and slides toward doctrinal error rather than standing for the truth (Gal. 1:6–7). And even if a church does remain faithfully antithetical and doctrinally orthodox, who of its members can stand before God claiming to be more upright than others before the holy standard of his law? Even the best Christian must admit that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). On this earth there is no church that can claim to be the "purest manifestation."

But this still leaves the question we started with. Why *should* you remain a member of the PRC?

1 John Owen, chap. XVI, "Of the Church," in *Greater Catechism* (1645) (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), 30.

We can start answering that question by understanding what the *church* represents. It is not first of all an institution made up of buildings, committees, or even officebearers. Instead, the church is "a body of believers who are united to Christ and one another."[2] As a member of the PRC, you are part of a body of people who are united to Christ by faith. That means you are accountable first and foremost to Jesus Christ, who governs his church by his word and Spirit.[3] It is Christ who exercises his authority through the various offices of the church, which are given "for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:8–12).

A church that faithfully submits itself to the authority of Christ has three specific marks: (1) it preaches "the pure doctrine of the gospel," (2) it practices and protects "the sacraments as instituted by Christ," and (3) it holds its members accountable to Christ by exercising discipline.[4] Your calling as a believer is to seek a church that displays its submission to Christ by *actively* maintaining these marks. Not just one of them, but all three marks. If these marks are present in your church, you should remain in it as a member. If they are absent or declining, then you have reason to question whether or not to stay.

It's also worth mentioning that an important part of submission to Jesus Christ includes obedience to his final command, which we call the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20). Not only must the church preach the pure doctrine of the gospel to its members, but it must also go out seeking to "teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." True Christian churches are evangelical and mission minded, seeking to bring the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ to others who have yet to hear it.

By God's grace the marks of the true church mentioned above are present in the PRC. There remains a deep commitment to gospel preaching and to instruction of God's people at all ages in the truth of God's word. The good news of salvation is also brought to the nations through our denomination's mission work, even at the cost of some congregations going without a pastor at times. The sacraments are administered according to Scripture and used to point members to the joy of their union to Christ and each other. And yes, discipline is administered by elders

2 John Tweeddale, "The Worship and Head of the Church Militant," *Tabletalk*, April 2023, 19.

3 Heidelberg Catechism A 31, in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 96.

4 Belgic Confession 29, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 62.

who do this out of love for the sheep they are called to shepherd. Though imperfect, the PRC is a true and faithful manifestation of the church militant on this earth.

The reason for your church membership in the PRC doesn't stop there, however, because in addition to being united to Christ, you are also united to other believers who share your faith. If all you do is go to church on Sunday, then you are missing out on what it means to be a member in the fullest sense. The church *is* the people, the life, and the fellowship in which you participate. Perhaps that's hard to understand as a young person, but you'll have to trust me that it will continue to grow in meaning as you mature into adulthood. Being in a church means helping those who have needs. It means serving others at your own expense. It's washing feet and making yourself a servant.

Before you think about worshiping elsewhere, consider carefully whether you're truly living as a servant-member with the other people who sit in the pews next to you each Sunday. If you've never tried to enjoy real Christian fellowship with other members or sought to serve them, then you haven't experienced what it means to be part of a body.

God has put you in your church, and it's a wonderful opportunity for you to serve the body of Christ. Don't assume that switching churches or denominations will make your spiritual life better if you are simply focused on yourself and your own needs. Your church membership isn't first about you and your needs—it's about submitting to Christ by loving his body. When you live for Christ and seek to serve others, you will find that the weaknesses of your church and its members are easier to overlook. And being able to look past those weaknesses and to love where God has put you is a blessing beyond description!

Suffering for well-doing

Sam Bomers

A couple years ago I traveled with some friends to the state of Washington. We flew into the city of Seattle and stayed there for a few days before traveling elsewhere. One night as my friend and I rode bikes down the streets of Seattle, we had the occasion to chat with a couple of locals. A few minutes into the friendly chitchat, the polite conversation took a turn for the worse. When we mentioned our beliefs and stance against the LGBTQ+ movement, any friendliness the locals had shown to us was then replaced with anger and name-calling. We were no longer able to get any word in and had to endure being screamed at as we jumped back on our bikes and rode off down the road. We did not feel safe as the name-calling directed at us was drawing a crowd of other locals who also started joining in the verbal abuse.

I recount this memory as a real-life example of hostility against the beliefs that we hold in accordance with Scripture. I readily admit this example is nothing in comparison to the suffering of God's people around the world, though it does show that here in the United States, too, there is continued growth in the hatred of Jesus, his followers, and their beliefs. The Christian confession we hold stands in stark contrast to the liberal movements of this modern age. God gives clear instruction in his word how man and woman must live, and yet the totally depraved minds of men have twisted and profaned the very ordinances of creation to suit their own lifestyles. The first chapter of Romans (vv. 22–32) clearly lays before us the ungodly culture we now see sweeping our country.

Young Christians, with the calling to "be sober, be vigilant" (1 Pet. 5:8), you must heed these shifts within our nation. Your calling then, first and foremost, is to know the Scriptures.

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The Scriptures are your sword to attack the evil imaginations of men (Eph. 6:17). You must not respond in the same way as the wicked do with name calling and aggression, "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing" (1 Pet. 3:9).[1] Jesus always responded to the attacks of the wicked with the word of God and always left his attackers dumbstruck before him. With Jesus as your example, go forward in the knowledge of Scripture ready to give an answer.

Second, it is important to be ready to give an answer because the child of God's walk is very different from the walk of the world. You will undoubtedly be questioned concerning your faith when you are living according to the law of God. In love for God and his work of salvation, you must "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear" (v. 15). The last part of the verse is just as important as being ready to give an answer. With meekness and fear, or reverence, you confess your faith. Your faith is yours because of Christ alone, so never in pride should you seek to answer the attacks of the wicked. With patience and trust in God go forth confident in your faith and ready to confess Jesus Christ as your hope.

Third, confidence and trust in God is so very important for you as you seek to rightly know and confess the Scriptures. The word of God is hated by the wicked. The Christian walk is despised by the unbeliever. The Christian has always been, and will always be, the target of attacks by the world. That means you, believing Christian, will suffer on account of your faith and walk before God. In your own strength and in your own self-trust you will surely be dismayed by such vicious attacks. So, believer, knowing you will suffer on account of your love for God, go forth trusting that God is with you. "For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers" (v. 12).

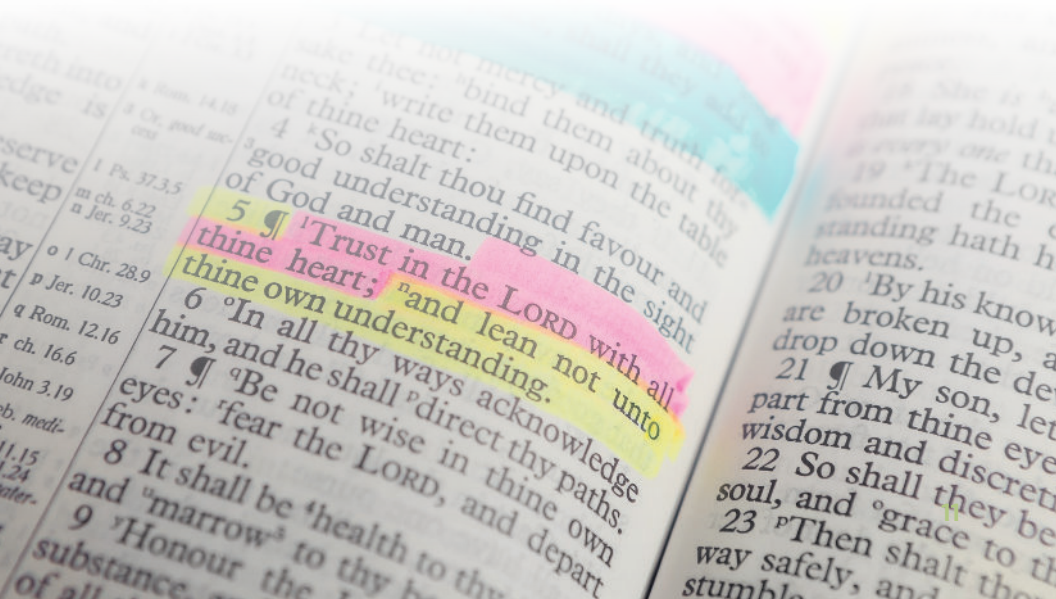
Knowing then that you will suffer, the calling is to suffer in *well-doing*. What is this well-doing? "For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: let him eschew evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue it" (vv. 10–11). You will suffer for exactly what God calls you as his child to do, which is seeking to do good and fleeing from the evil. Our comfort here is this: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (v. 18). The only just man to ever live was

1 The following quotations in the article are all from 1 Peter 3.

put to death for you and me, who are the "unjust" that Peter speaks of. You are following the example of your precious Savior when you suffer on account of well-doing. You are suffering for Jesus, who did no wrong but loved God perfectly. Find comfort in your Savior as you seek to imitate his perfect example.

This suffering for well-doing will have its effect on the wicked, "that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ" (v. 16). The evildoers and false accusers will be put to shame on account of your walk of faith and patient suffering. God will make sure his people are avenged for their suffering in well-doing. This ultimately will come when Christ sits in judgment on the last day. The evil accusers will suffer everlastingly in hell while the patient, suffering saint will receive blessings innumerable in heaven. There are brothers and sisters in Christ around the world already suffering intensely in well-doing. Pray for them, learn from them. The time will come for you and for me when our suffering on account of well-doing will grow more intense and fiercer.

Know the Scriptures, be ready to give an answer, trust in God for all things, and suffer as you do well, being fully confident that your God will see you are rewarded for the sake of Christ in your patient endurance of suffering. "But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled" (v. 14). Therefore, "be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deut. 31:6).



The regenerated and sanctified believer

Luke Van Baren

Believer, how often do you fall into sin knowing that what you are doing is wrong, but still pursuing the lusts of the flesh? Do you despair because sin at times is so prominent in your life? But do you also strive to glorify God in your life by living according to his word? Do you fall down before him confessing your sins? If these things are true of you, you aren't alone!

The Christian's life in this world is a constant struggle. The fact that you have a struggle shows you have faith. The desire to glorify God is only possible through his act of regeneration and sanctification in you. By nature, we are all dead in sins, but by Christ's work we are also made new. We can strive to live a new and holy life, actively pursuing God's glory. These two doctrines—regeneration and sanctification—are extremely important and greatly affect the believer's life and experience on this earth.

By nature, humanity is totally depraved, deserving the holy and just wrath of God. Because of the original sin of Adam, every person who is born is immediately worthy of damnation in hell. But adding to that, fallen man goes about his life sinning in every action that he does. He indulges in self, glorying in his own accomplishments. He can do no good by himself, and everything that he does plummets him deeper into the darkness and despair of sin. The God of justice sees and judges these sins. How brazen are men who should be petrified and cowering in absolute terror for the sins they have committed!

But even in his justice, God has chosen to love certain of these sinful creatures completely out of his beautiful grace. He has regenerated them, giving them new hearts, which makes them see the sinfulness of this world and turn from it. We understand *regeneration* as

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being reborn into the knowledge of our Lord and Savior, which is only possible through our Father's wondrous and efficacious act of salvation. But it is so much deeper when we see Christ's role. According to Rev. Ronald Hanko, regeneration is "the giving of Christ's life to a lost sinner."[1] The sinner who was infinitely lost in sin, desperation, and darkness has been redeemed and is free from the power of Satan and sin. Christ's perfect sacrifice has atoned for his life, making him justified before the law of God. This freedom from judgment is granted out of sheer grace to complete wretches based on Christ's deep love and compassion toward his people.

Sadly, the regenerated believer knows what is right but still falls into sin—often. We can empathize with Paul when he says, "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). This is an experience common to all of us! We know what is right, but temptations seem to keep following us until we give in. They then consume us in the moment, leaving us feeling ashamed and useless, not deserving of God's grace.

Even in this, however, we know that our sins are forgiven and that they do not control us. While the believer is not invincible in his struggle against sin and temptation, regeneration means he is dead *unto* sin (Rom. 6:11). Sin no longer holds him in bondage as it has been conquered by Christ. Instead, he is alive in Christ, who has given him the knowledge to recognize the difference between evil and good.

In addition to giving us the ability to recognize sin, God is pleased to sanctify us, providing us with the ability to show him thankfulness by growing in faith and obedience. Sanctification is the act whereby God has given us "a faith that worketh by love, which excites man to the practice of those works which God has commanded in His Word."[2] Our wonderful and glorious God has given us the ability to live in thanks toward him through an *active* faith. This is opposed to the idea of a *passive* faith, in which we are mere "stocks and blocks" through whom God does good works. We can, out of a true faith, perform good works, glorifying and thanking God through them! We can serve our community, helping the other members of the body of Christ. We can actively live a life of purity, fleeing from sin. How beautiful a truth is an active faith!

There are some who say, "How could you claim that a man can do good works? By saying that man can do good, you are implying that

1 Ronald Hanko, *Doctrine according to Godliness* (Jenison: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2012), 188.

2 Belgic Confession 24, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 53.

man has a part in his salvation." This claim shows a misunderstanding of biblical truth. The only way that we have sanctification is if we are already justified by God. Our sins have already been paid for and we are seen as pure in God's eyes. Our works have nothing to do with that process. Sanctification and justification are two separate doctrines, which shouldn't be confused. We live a life of good works out of thanksgiving for the amazing work God has done in us, not to benefit ourselves. In the end God has worked sanctification in us, so we can have no pride in anything we do.

A beautiful life for the Reformed believer flows out of the gifts of regeneration and sanctification. He sees the world on one side, in all its darkness and despair, and on the other side, the light of God's grace shining down on him. He then lives an antithetical life. He flees from the wicked culture around him and the sin that it so blatantly promotes. It is, however, extremely hard for a young person to take this stance, being surrounded by the world on every side, especially through social media and influences from college and work acquaintances. In this world it is easy to forget God until Sunday comes around. Satan knows what he is doing.

Child of God, will you take charge of your life and the Reformed doctrines you hold so dear, fleeing from sin and instead glorifying your God? Don't let who you are in Christ be covered up. Say instead, "I am a child of God, able to do good works through God's amazing works of redemption and sanctification! 'He took me from destruction's pit, from out the miry clay; he set my feet upon a rock, and steadfast made my way.'"[3] What thanks we should give! Let our joy and thankfulness bubble over within us for this wonderful gift our Father has given us!

3 No. 108:2, in *The Psalter with Doctrinal Standards, Liturgy, Church Order, and added Chorale Section*, reprinted and revised edition of the 1912 United Presbyterian *Psalter* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1927; rev. ed. 1995).

The revelation of God's image

Gabriel Overbeek

Different Christian denominations hold to distinctive doctrines and practices. One significant distinction between groups of Christians, even in the Reformed tradition, is in how they describe God's image, namely his attributes, his countenance, and how each of these aspects affect the manner in which we praise him. How we interpret the doctrine of God's image must solely depend on his infallible word, in which he reveals to us what kind of God he is and how we must honor him with respect to his person.

It is imperative that in studying God's image, we first define what this means. Lord's Day 3 of the Heidelberg Catechism explains God's image as his communicable attributes, namely true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.[1] What is meant by the term "communicable" is that God's people, having been created in his image, reflect his character by receiving from God the aforementioned three attributes (Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10). The believer has a true knowledge of who God is, has the ability to be righteous and perform good works, and stands apart from the rest of the world as a holy individual, consecrated to God. Although the elect child receives these attributes in Christ Jesus, God alone is the perfect example of them. He is not only the flawless source of these attributes, but in his very nature he *is* true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness.

Having a *true knowledge* of God means that we know him rightly as he has revealed himself in his word and acknowledge him with meekness as our sovereign Lord. To know God, we must have a correct understanding of his divine will. By God's gracious saving love to atone

1 Heidelberg Catechism A 6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 85.

Gabriel is in his senior year at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI. He worships with his family at Byron Center Protestant Reformed Church

for our sins in the blood of Jesus Christ, true knowledge of him is restored in the hearts of his people. This knowledge makes us both able and willing to consciously align ourselves with God's will, acting out of the wisdom he grants us.

For a struggling believer, it can be extremely tempting to question the will of God in his or her life. Those who fall into difficult circumstances might charge God with being unfair and forsaking them. While it is true that God tries his people with difficult tests of their faith, it is never valid to *critically* examine God's will. The basis for our unwavering trust in God's ways is his own perfect *righteousness*. The Psalms are full of wonderful descriptions of this attribute of our Lord. To summarize multiple verses of the Psalms into one statement, all of God's ways are right and he is just and upright in his judgments (Ps. 19:8; 119:137; 145:17).

When Christ walked this earth, he was totally without sin, obeying every command in the law of God. Through his death on the cross, we are also made righteous, having been imputed the perfect righteousness of Christ himself. Through the work of regeneration, we begin to live out of the new man of righteousness within us, fighting against the old man of sin that still clings to us by nature. When we reflect the person of Jesus Christ through the strength of God invested in us, we are truly righteous!

Scripture spares no words when describing the *holiness* of God. Passages such as 1 Samuel 2:2 remind us, "There is none holy as the LORD." A similar theme is found in the vision of Isaiah 6:3, where the angels sing, "Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts." To better understand this attribute, it would be beneficial to first grasp what exactly is meant by the term *holiness*. As used in the Bible, holiness refers to the absolute perfection of God that sets him apart from his creatures. Because God is perfect, every act he performs is continually good in every way and therefore beneficial to his children. This is the confession of the elect child of God who says with absolute certainty, "Without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation."[2]

God's attributes are all beautiful parts of his image and serve as comfort to his people. However, his perfect holiness leaves absolutely no room for sin, and our true knowledge of the Creator leaves us without an excuse for our natural wickedness. Because our Lord will never allow sin to go unpunished, he sent his only begotten Son to take upon himself the sins of our flesh. Our God is a gracious God, and his love for us is as a father's love to his children (Ps. 103:13). He would not

2 Heidelberg Catechism A 1, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 83.

suffer us to be condemned to the fires of hell, but rather he raises us up to our home in heaven as part of his spiritual family.

With this knowledge of God in mind, we are caused to humbly bow down and emulate Jesus Christ's own character. The life of a believer must be devoted to holiness, which is no coincidence when we consider the words of Genesis 1:27, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Christ is the perfect example of living a holy life, so we must strive to be like Jesus in our everyday walk. In this way we better worship and grow closer with our Lord.

What we must take away from the analysis of God's image is a much more appreciative understanding of his graciousness as Creator. From his ability to destroy us because of our sin and his unselfish choice to save us by the blood of his Son, to the extraordinarily undeserved love he exhibits to us as our Father, our God truly is an awesome God! His wonderful work of giving us his image demands our praise. Our view of God governs our holy walk, which must be lived entirely out of the truth of his word. Through his word we are continually reminded that God created us in his image by grafting us into Christ and giving his Spirit to live within us.

The comfort of double predestination

Isaac Van Baren

The topic on which I have been asked to write, though not exclusively a Protestant Reformed distinctive, is a fundamental one for the Reformed faith. After all, in the Canons of Dordt election is called "the fountain of every saving good, from which proceed faith, holiness, and the other gifts of salvation, and finally eternal life itself."[1] This doctrine of election is paired with the doctrine of reprobation in the broader topic we call *double predestination*.

To find comfort in the doctrines of double predestination, we must first be sure to know what it is, and what it is not. It is *not* to be mocked or discarded as a doctrine that people "used to believe." This is the mistake of many contemporary Reformed Christians willing to sacrifice a beautiful component of Reformed theology on the altar of cultural acceptance and "tolerance." It is not either merely a foreseeing of God, meaning that he observed from eternity who would believe and then chose only them for salvation. This is the error of the Arminians, whose many other subtle errors pertaining to predestination are identified and undone in the Canons of Dordt.

Positively speaking, double predestination is the sovereign foreknowledge of God by which he determines to save some in his grace to everlasting life, and to condemn others in his righteousness to damnation. Your fate, and mine, is predetermined. What comfort! Rightly understood, this decree "to holy and pious souls affords unspeakable

1 Canons of Dordt 1.9, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 157.

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consolation."[2] Let's look at the doctrine of election and draw out four comforting truths from it. Then we will also draw out comfort from the doctrine of reprobation.

First, election is a decree of God, and God is *unchangeable*. This means the election of every one of God's people is unchangeable. No elect child of God has ever (or ever will) perish! "The LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deut. 31:6). The promises of God, which are sure and everlasting, will certainly come to pass. The onslaught of our spiritual enemies on the battlefield of faith, mighty though they may seem, will not overcome us. Springing "from faith in God's promises, which He has most abundantly revealed in His Word," is our assurance that we "shall finally obtain the victory."[3] Do not fear defeat in the spiritual warfare you face!

Second, the elect cannot even be led astray. A sign of Christ's coming, and of the end of the world, will be the deception of many by many false teachers (Matt. 24:3–5, 11). But it is impossible that the elect of God be deceived (v. 24). Perhaps you doubt your ability to discern right from wrong, good from evil, and truth from lie, especially when issues are complex and not at all clear. That is fair, for true wisdom and understanding are not something we have naturally; they are gifts from above (James 1:5, 17). We cannot rely on our own understanding for such discernment. But as a sheep in the fold of Christ, you will hear his voice through gospel preaching, and you will know him. "And a stranger will [you] not follow, but will flee from him: for [you] know not the voice of strangers" (John 10:5). Do not fear the last days!

Third, election is *unconditionally* established upon the merits of Christ, and he does not lose those whom the Father gave him. "And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day" (John 6:39). Jesus is the shepherd of one hundred sheep who goes after the one that was lost. He is the housekeeper possessing ten coins who seeks diligently to find the one that was lost. He is the father who rejoices at the return of his prodigal son (Luke 15). Do not fear, for Christ will never lose you!

Fourth, when the number of the elect is complete, our "full deliverance shall be perfected, and there [we] shall receive the fruits of [our] labor and trouble which [we] have borne. [Our] innocence shall be known to all."[4] That is to say,

2 Canons of Dordt 1.6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 156.

3 Canons of Dordt 5.10, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 175.

4 Belgic Confession 37, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 79.

God will glorify all those whom he predestinated, called, and justified (Rom. 8:30). The golden chain of our salvation shall not be broken. Do not fear the final judgment!

Many Reformed believers are content to end the discussion of predestination at election. But there is also comfort for the child of God in the doctrine of reprobation. "[We] shall see the terrible vengeance which God shall execute on the wicked, who most cruelly persecuted, oppressed and tormented [us] in this world." Vengeance belongs to God, and he will repay. What strikes fear into the hearts of the ungodly is "most desirable and comfortable to the righteous and the elect."[5]

The perspective of eternity provided by the psalmist Asaph in Psalm 73 is one we can share in order to understand God's decree of reprobation. When we attempt to understand the prosperity of the wicked upon seeing how "they increase in riches" (v. 12), we may be tempted to say that our lives of cleansing and innocence, plagues and chastening are all for nothing. Painfully we enter the sanctuary of God, and there are reminded of their end. "Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction. How are they brought into desolation, as in a moment! they are utterly consumed with terrors" (vv. 18–19).

Last, and most importantly, we must see that God's purpose in reprobation serves his purpose in election. This stands out in the story of Moses and Pharaoh (Ex. 4, 5). A helpful commentary on this history is given by the apostle Paul in Romans 9: "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth" (vv. 17–18). Against the backdrop of Pharaoh's just destruction is more clearly seen the grace of God shown to Moses, who was himself no more deserving than Pharaoh of God's grace (Ex. 33). The hardening of Pharaoh's heart brought God's wrath upon the people of Egypt, and at the same time was the means of accomplishing the deliverance of the chosen people of Israel. In this we see how God's decree of reprobation served his will in election.

Take comfort in God's "profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin!"[6]

5 Belgic Confession 37, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 78–79.

6 Canons of Dordt 1.6, in *Confessions and Church Order*, 156.

Friends with non–Protestant Reformed people

Is it spiritually dangerous for a young believer to have friends from other denominations/faiths? How should we interact with family members we value who hold different faiths, for example Roman Catholics?

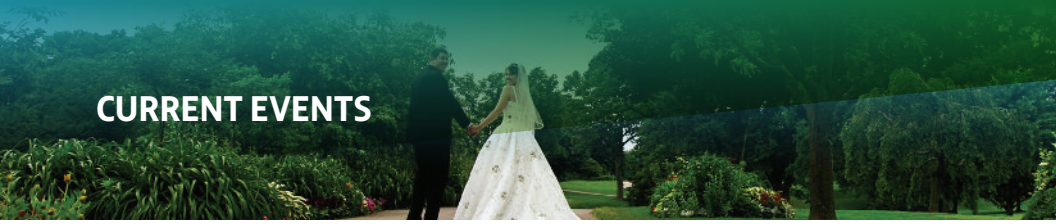
Spiritual danger really amounts to this: Is it a temptation to sin? Is friendship with a non–Protestant Reformed person an enticement to sin? Undoubtedly, friendships for young believers are extremely important. A friend should be what Jonathan was to David: a confidant (someone whom David could trust, one with whom he could share his thoughts, concerns, troubles, and fears), someone who held him accountable (who was not afraid to correct him and rebuke him when he was wrong), and someone who encouraged him in the Lord. For example, Jonathan "strengthened his hand in God" (1 Sam. 23:16). Not only did Jonathan strengthen David's hand, but he did so "in the Lord," which means that Jonathan reminded David of the Lord's promises.

A friend, then, is not only someone with whom we "hang out." Whether we play basketball or go fishing, or go for walks in the park, true friendship involves more. A true friend encourages and strengthens us in our faith, exhorts us to godly living, and warns us against sin. A true friend says, when the beer or wine is brought out (and the people there are too young to drink legally), "Let's not do this" or even, "Let's leave; we shouldn't be here" and takes his friend home. A true friend says, when the movie is suggested, "No, that would be offensive to our Lord and Savior," and suggests a more wholesome activity. A true friend calls or texts when his fellow young person is unexpectedly missing from church: "Brother/sister, where were you? We missed you." A true friend says to a hurting brother/sister, "Can I help? I am praying for you," and he prays. And sometimes he doesn't know what to say, so he sits with his friend and listens, while his friend is comforted by his presence. A true friend says to his fellow young person who goofs off in catechism or young people's society, "Don't do that. Let's have respect for God's word and for the one who brings it." A true friend rebukes the bully and defends the victim of bullying, befriending the lonely kid who is left out of things.

Friendship with people outside of our church family is not necessarily dangerous. In fact there are, how sad to have to write it, in our Christian high schools those who are a worse influence than Christians in a different denomination. We in the Protestant Reformed Churches are not the only Christians and we should never think that we are. Nor should we even give the impression that we think that we are. Our denomination, as thankful as we are for it, is not the only Reformed denomination. If you meet young people from other denominations, you might discover that they know what the Heidelberg Catechism is, that they have catechism classes, and that you can discuss the Bible with them. And I hope your discussion is not only an argument. You can certainly encourage one another in the Lord even if you worship in different congregations on Sundays.

Interacting with those who hold other faiths is a different question, though. Different faiths are not the Christian faith. A Protestant Reformed young person and a young person from the United Reformed Churches, let's say, have the same faith: they both confess that Jesus Christ is their only comfort. But a Roman Catholic is different because Roman Catholicism is not biblical Christianity. The differences are great between a Reformed Christian and a Roman Catholic. But even though we cannot fellowship with Roman Catholics because of their false gospel of works, we must treat them with kindness and respect, and seek to bring the gospel to them. If we are unkind to them and condescending in our behavior, we will never have the opportunity to explain to them the gospel of grace.

Onderwijzer



The assault on marriage and the family

Students of Mr. Van Uffelen's Worldviews class

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth (Genesis 1:28).

The blessing and command of Genesis 1:28 has been under assault ever since the fall of Adam and Eve. Sadly, this is no longer shocking to us. The blatant acceptance with which our society reports its own moral decline, however, continues to give us pause. Rather than explaining the topics this month, we give you the opportunity to read it straight from the voices around us. Below are excerpts regarding two related topics that we cannot ignore.

"The Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) was a United States federal law passed by the 104th United States Congress and signed into law by President Bill Clinton" in 1996. The law was "intended to define and protect the institution of marriage" by banning federal recognition of same-sex marriage and narrowing the definition of marriage to the union of one man and one woman. DOMA also permitted states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages granted in other states.[1]

Controversial as it was that we needed a law to "defend" marriage almost twenty-seven years ago, less shocking is the fact that most pundits knew it was only a matter of time before this law would be overthrown. Fast-forward to December 2022.

1 "Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA)," Legal Information Institute, Cornell Law School, last updated September 2022, https://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/defense_of_marriage_act_(doma).

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> On Tuesday, December 13, 2022, the President signed into law: H.R. 8404, the "Respect for Marriage Act," which establishes statutory authority for same-sex and interracial marriages and repeals provisions of law that once prevented any State or territory from being required to give effect to a same-sex marriage from another State or territory.[2]

Helping us to understand the nature of this decision, the history of laws leading up to this decision, and the underlying purpose is this explanation from Ryan Thoreson of the Human Rights Watch.

> US courts have long recognized a constitutional right to marry. In 1967, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* that bans on interracial marriage were unconstitutional, extending the right to marry to interracial couples nationwide. In 2015, in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the Court similarly struck down bans on same-sex marriage and affirmed that same-sex couples enjoyed a constitutional right to marry.

Thoreson continues:

> The Respect for Marriage Act will ensure that interracial and same-sex marriages are statutorily protected even if decisions like Loving and Obergefell are ultimately overturned. While it does not require every state to solemnize these unions, it requires all states to recognize and respect any interracial or same-sex marriages that are validly performed in other states. It also ensures that the federal government will treat such marriages as legitimate, which provides crucial protection in areas like immigration, taxation, and access to federal benefit programs.
>
> The bill exempts nonprofit religious entities from having to provide facilities or services for the performance or celebration of a marriage, but, crucially, does not create sweeping exemptions that would allow these entities to discriminate against LGBT people in adoption and foster care, health care, and other domains.[3]

Ironic hardly describes how a group committed to protecting human rights considers protecting same-sex marriages as a "crucial safeguard." That is, unless you realize that our society has provided an answer for the future of human procreation as well. Though perhaps a ways off in the future, here is what that answer looks like.

2 "Press Release: Bill Signed: H.R. 8404," The White House, December 13, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/legislation/2022/12/13/press-release-bill-signed-h-r-8404/.

3 Ryan Thoreson, "US Congress Protects Right to Marry," *Human Rights Watch*, December 8, 2022, https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/12/08/us-congress-protects-right-marry.

> EctoLife, the brainchild of Berlin-based Hashem Al-Ghaili, a biotechnologist and science communicator, is a concept based on over fifty years of groundbreaking scientific research.
>
> In theory, they will be able to grow 30,000 babies a year in their lab, and Al-Ghaili believes the facilities would allow infertile couples to conceive a baby and become the true biological parents of their own offspring.
>
> But they also plan to offer an "Elite Package", that would allow you to genetically engineer the embryo before implanting it into the artificial womb - with everything from eye and hair colour to strength, height, and intelligence as choices.[4]

This is a brave, scary, and completely wicked new world we are living in. To ground us in a proper perspective, we end by quoting selections from Prof. Russell Dykstra's article in 2016 on "Marriage for Life: A Blessing." We are reminded that God's word is true yesterday, today, and forever.

> The godly marriage is an inestimable blessing. This is not only the personal experience of God's people through the ages, it is the testimony of Scripture. Proverbs 18:22 declares, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the Lord." The Lord understood the need of the man, for in day six of the creation week the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The psalmist sings of the blessedness of the man that fears the Lord: "In thy wife thou shalt have gladness, she shall fill thy home with good" (PRC Psalter, #360). Solomon, with the wisdom given him by the Spirit of Christ, exhorts husbands, "Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which he hath given thee under the sun" (Eccl. 9:9).
>
> Genesis 2:22–24 demonstrates that God instituted marriage in the creation week, making it to be a creation ordinance. As a creation ordinance, it is law for all peoples, races, and cultures as long as this creation endures. God's institution of marriage rules out marriage being man's invention. Marriage is not the product of society or of the church. God ordained the form this relationship must have, namely, one man and one woman for life.
>
> God instituted marriage with a view to His covenant. Marriage

4 John Bett and Dean Murray, "Terrifying 'artificial womb facility' where parents can pick their baby's traits," *Mirror*, December 13, 2022, https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/weird-news/terrifying-artificial-womb-facility-parents-28720237.

is not established merely for good order in society, though it has that function, for God is the God not of confusion but of good order (1 Cor. 14:33, 40). The marriage institution serves the good of the covenant by establishing families. The blessing of covenant families with father, mother, and children points to the covenant relationship God forms with His people. He is our Father, Christ is our Lord as older brother, and all God's chosen people are His children. In a godly covenant family, the members learn to live the covenant life together, and in this way experience something of the life of God's covenant of grace.[5]

God's word, God's truth, and God's institutions are under assault, though we have no need to worry or to fear. At the same time, however, we should know how to understand and respond to the world around us, protecting ourselves from its lies so that we are not tempted to "play God" by redefining his command for marriage and his blessing found in the Christian family.

5 Russell Dykstra, "Marriage for Life: A Blessing," *The Standard Bearer* 92, no. 14 (April 2016): 317.

Holy living in a hostile world

Rebekah Buiter

The idea of being a pilgrim and stranger means that we are not welcome in this world. As a follower of Christ, we follow in his suffering, which includes being hated by the world. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you. Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than

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his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:19–20).

With this theme in mind, Peter wrote his two epistles to the scattered strangers across the Roman world. Through persecution, God's people had been scattered throughout Judea, Samaria, and beyond, bringing with them their witness of the gospel (Acts 8:1–4). It did not take long for the gospel to reach every corner of Asia Minor. By the time that Peter wrote, there were established churches in all the different provinces. Not only were the Jews hostile to Christianity in these places, but so too was the Greco-Roman world. Peter wrote to encourage new Christians in their walk as believers, spurring them on to holiness and godly living while warning them of false teachers and doctrines.

Peter describes these false teachers as anarchists: they "despise government" and are "not afraid to speak evil of dignities" (2 Pet. 2:10). This same mentality is prevalent in the world today. Many don't hesitate to mock and ridicule our current president. Some conservatives readily claim all government is evil. On the other hand, some liberals condone acts of violence and lawlessness in the name of "social justice." In this both groups are condemned by God's word.

In contrast, Christians have a radically different position on authority and government. Following Christ's example, we "honour the king" (1 Pet. 2:17) and submit ourselves to the laws of federal, state, and local authorities. If our temptation is to appeal to the Constitution as an excuse to not submit, Peter reminds us that our submission is not contingent on the integrity of any authority figure. Our obedience is due "not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully" (2:18–19; see also 3:13–17; 4:12–16).

False teachers then and now soothe their consciences by claiming that Jesus is not coming back, and that the world will continue as it always has. However, just as God did not spare the angels that sinned, or the old world before the flood, or the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, neither will Christ spare these false teachers, "whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not" (2 Pet. 2:3). Just as the flood and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah were salvation for Noah and Lot, Christ's return in judgment is salvation for the church (v. 9). Therefore, even though the world is hostile to God's people, we should not despair but look forward to Christ's coming and the new heavens and earth (3:12–13).

Peter asks an important question in 2 Peter 3:11: "Seeing then that

all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?" This points us back to 1 Peter 1:16, which states, "Be ye holy; for I am holy." To be holy means to be separated from sin and dedicated to God in every aspect of our lives.

But how can we be holy when we are constantly bombarded with the filth and evil of this world? The tempting answer is to try physical isolation of ourselves and our families by fleeing modern culture and technology like various Anabaptist communities (the Amish, for instance) have done. What we forget is that sin and evil are not just "out there," but also in our own hearts. No matter how physically separate we are from the world, we cannot escape the world of iniquity that is part of our own sinful human nature (1 Pet. 2:10; 4:1–3; 2 Pet. 1:9).

And yet the people of God can be holy. Peter outlines how this is possible in 1 Peter 1:19–23. We must be born again by the word of God, which makes us conscious of our redemption in the precious blood of Jesus. From this redemption flows a faith in the risen Christ, who sanctifies us by his Holy Spirit. The rest of 1 Peter and 2 Peter 1:5–10 show how this holiness is manifested in concrete ways by believers living unto Christ.

Being holy in a hostile world is not easy, but it is worth it in the end, "for so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2 Pet. 1:11).

Date	Read	Study	Psalter
June 8	1 Pet. 1:1–2	What description does Peter give those to whom he is writing?	323 v. 2
June 9	1 Pet. 1:3–5	Where do these strangers belong?	203
June 10	1 Pet. 1:6–9	What is the purpose of trials in our earthly life?	202
June 11	1 Pet. 1:10–12 Acts 8:26–40	Do you search the Scriptures like the Old Testament saints, desiring to understand Christ's sufferings and exaltation?	48 vv. 1–2, 5–8
June 12	1 Pet. 1:13–16	What should be the Christian's response to such a gracious salvation?	407
June 13	1 Pet. 1:17–20	How was our redemption accomplished?	232
June 14	1 Pet. 1:21–25	How sure is your salvation? How do these verses help prevent any uncertainty you might have in your mind?	332

June 15	1 Pet. 2:1–3	How are you going to grow in sanctified living?	333
June 16	1 Pet. 2:4–8 Rom. 12:1–2 Ps. 118:22–23 Eph. 2:20–22	What is the church? What is her purpose?	133
June 17	1 Pet. 2:9–10	How does the church come to be?	237
June 18	1 Pet. 2:11–16	How does the church conduct herself while on the earth?	125 v. 1
June 19	1 Pet. 2:17–25	How is Christ's suffering an example to us when we are treated unfairly?	216
June 20	1 Pet. 3:1–7	What does holiness look like for husbands and wives?	360
June 21	1 Pet. 3:8–13	What does holy speech look like?	24
June 22	1 Pet. 3:14–22	What is an "answer of a good conscience toward God"?	143
June 23	1 Pet. 4:1–11	Are you trying to blur the differences between you and the world, or are you okay with being seen as strange when you don't indulge in excessive or riotous living?	271
June 24	1 Pet. 4:12–19 Heb. 11:23–27	Whose opinion of you matters most?	217
June 25	1 Pet. 5:1–4	What important place do elders have in the church when it comes to holy living in a hostile world?	223
June 26	1 Pet. 5:5–9	What instruction does Peter give to the "younger" in the church? How does this apply to yourself?	322 v. 1
June 27	1 Pet. 5:10–14	What comfort can you take from Peter's closing benediction?	246
June 28	2 Pet. 1:1–4	How do we receive these precious promises?	326
June 29	2 Pet. 1:5–11	Why is it important to add temperance to knowledge?	101 vv. 4–5
June 30	2 Pet. 1:12–15	Why must we constantly be reminded of "these things," even "though ye know them, and be established in the present truth" (v. 12)?	325

July 1	2 Pet. 1:16–21	How is the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit a "more sure word of prophecy" (v. 19) than even the eyewitness of Peter?	33 vv. 1, 5
July 2	2 Pet. 2:1–9	How do verses 1–2 make Peter's message in 2 Peter 1:12–21 all the more urgent and important to understand?	21 vv. 1–2
July 3	2 Pet. 2:10–19	Make a list of characteristics that Peter uses to describe these false teachers. Do you see correlation to modern-day false teachers?	21 vv. 3–4
July 4	2 Pet. 2:20–22	What warning is there for teachers who go astray in their doctrine and walk of life?	146 vv. 1–4
July 5	2 Pet. 3:1–7	How will we combat the twisting and misapplication of God's word in these last days?	146 vv. 5–8
July 6	2 Pet. 3:8–10	How is it longsuffering for us to go through persecution? Wouldn't it be better to be raptured first?	188
July 7	2 Pet. 3:11–18	"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be"?	265

Origen

Prof. Doug Kuiper

No survey of the apologists would be complete without noting Origen (c. AD 185–253).

His life

Origen was born in Alexandria, Egypt. Clement of Alexandria had founded a school there, which taught catechumens and prepared men for ministry. This school was known for teaching the allegorical method of interpreting Scripture, which will be explained below. When Clement fled because of persecution, Origen became president of this school. This was the year AD 203, and Origen was only eighteen!

Intellectually, Origen was up to the task. As a child he was able to memorize long passages of Scripture and other writings. And he wondered what these meant. When appointed president of the school, he worked hard to master Hebrew, theology, and the teachings of heathen philosophers. Under his leadership the school grew, training many future church leaders.

Eventually, the bishop of Alexandria charged Origen with heresy. He was deposed and excommunicated, and later founded another school in Caesarea.

His teachings and writings

As an apologist, Origen defended Christianity against its detractors. His lengthy work *Against Celsus* uses Scripture to refute every argument of the pagan Greek philosopher Celsus, down to the details. It becomes tedious to read at times but was one of the greatest apologetic works of the day.

Origen also wrote the first notable theology book of his day, *De Principiis*. Because he lived before the Council of Nicea (AD 325) had established the doctrine of the

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Trinity, much theology was not yet developed. Still, Origen defended the doctrine of the Trinity and taught a doctrine of Scripture and how to interpret it.

He also wrote commentaries on many books of the Bible, and even compiled one of the first "parallel" Bibles—a Bible in which six Bible versions appeared in parallel columns: Hebrew, Greek, the Septuagint, and the translations of three men.

But Origen's weakness in this work was gigantic: he interpreted Scripture *allegorically*. This means that he found spiritual meanings in Scripture that really aren't there. For example, Israel's deliverance from Egypt and wilderness wandering is a type, or picture, of Christ saving us from sin's bondage and of our spiritual pilgrimage in this world. But these spiritual lessons and applications come out of the entire narrative.

By contrast, Origen tried to find spiritual meaning in every single word or phrase. Exodus 12:37 says that Israel left Rameses and came to Succoth. Origen rightly notes that the name "Succoth" comes from a word that means "tents." Origen then allegorizes: "When, therefore, leaving Egypt, you have dispelled the moths of all corruption from yourself and have cast aside the inducement of vices, you will dwell in tents." And what is it to dwell in tents? This "indicates that he who hastens to God is free and has no impediments."[1]

This kind of Bible interpretation became popular for over a thousand years; in fact, some Christians use it today. But it is not the way God meant us to understand the Bible. Scripture teaches us about the gospel of Jesus Christ and our salvation, about our heavenly hope, and about how to live to God's glory. But it teaches this by its very words, not by meanings hidden behind the words.

His legacy

In his apologetic work, which was his greatest positive service to the church, Origen is an inspiration to us. He, with all the apologists, encourages us to defend the Christian faith against those who oppose it.

But mostly Origen is a warning.

First, he is a warning to beware of any who do not interpret Scripture soundly. The Bible itself warns against such (2 Pet. 1:20; 3:16). Remember, young people, that a wrong method of Bible interpretation can lead you astray. Reading Origen's commentaries will not help you understand Scripture. Our seminary specifically opposes Origen's method of Bible interpretation.

Second, he is a warning against mixing the world's knowledge and wisdom with that of Scripture.

1 Origen, *Homilies on Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 278.

Origen's dogmatic work is tainted with secular philosophical ideas. God reveals truth to us apart from worldly philosophical methods.

Third, he is a reminder that young people ought not yet be given leadership positions in the church. Maybe Origen's youth was not the reason why he went astray. At any rate, elders and church leaders are not to be novices (1 Tim. 3:6); they must be mature, experienced men who have shown themselves capable and faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Church news

Ruth Baas

Baptisms

Oliver Daniel, son of Dan & Erin Drnek Byron Center, MI

Hugh Steven, son of Tyler & Laura Langerak Byron Center, MI

Vivian Sage, daughter of Ethan & Tina Lanting Crete, IL

Natalie Jo, daughter of Jordan & Kara Reitsma First Holland, MI

Zeke Matthew, son of Derek & Leanne Cnossen Hudsonville, MI

Jacob Gerritt, son of Ben & Heidi Soodsma Randolph, WI

Aubrey Ruth, daughter of Ben & Laura Lubbers Zion, MI

Confessions of faith

Jordin France Grace, MI

Leah Mowery Loveland, CO

Julia Howerzyl Redlands, CA

Rylan Petroelje Southwest, MI

Anna Bouma, Kaitlin Groenhof, Annika Hulst Unity, MI

Weddings

Justin Bosveld & Sadie Smits
Crete, IL

Matthew Kleyn & Crysta Bos
Loveland, CO

Photo: *Zion Protestant Reformed Church, submitted by Ruth Kaptein*

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