

JAN/FEB 2012

Dedicated to the Exposition and Defense of the Reformed Faith

# The Outlook

VOL 62 ISSUE 1

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**Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.**  
—Genesis 5:24



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*“And the three companies blew the trumpets. . . and held THE TORCHES in their left hands, and THE TRUMPETS in their right hands. . . and they cried, ‘The sword of Jehovah and of Gideon’.” (Judges 7:20).*

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**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter  
the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus . . .  
–Hebrews 10:19**

*N*ew Year's Day is a time in which many people think they will turn over a new leaf. They begin the year with all kinds of New Year's resolutions: "I'm going to lose so many pounds;" "I'm going to cut down on caffeine;" and so on. We often make fun of resolutions, declaring that our New Year's resolution is that we will not make any more New Year's resolutions.

It is too bad that we make fun of people who make resolutions, because some of them are very serious about trying to change some part of their lives. This article seeks to look at some New Year's resolutions and what is behind those resolutions. How do we make commitments, and how serious are we about them? What kind of resolutions should we be making for 2012?

The author of Hebrews offers four resolutions that would be very good for us to adopt and make our own in the new year. Not only does he offer them to us, but he gives us three very good reasons to make these four resolutions ours.

2012

# Whereas . . .

We look first at why we should adopt the resolutions that Hebrews presents to us:

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**1** In Hebrews 10:19, the author tells us “we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.” That was quite a statement for the writer of Hebrews to make. In Jewish theology the presence of God was greatly to be feared. In Jewish piety it was natural to shrink back from the presence of God—so much so that the Jewish people feared to even speak the holy Name of God.

No one would ever think of going into the Most Holy Place within the temple because that represented the very presence of God. Entrance into the Most Holy Place was barred by a very thick, ornately-decorated veil. No one would enter. No one would even dare take a quick peek inside of the Most Holy Place.

Only once a year was the high priest permitted to enter into the Most Holy Place—and then only after elaborate rites of purification and donning the proper attire. So careful were the Jews about limiting entrance into the Most Holy Place that they established all kinds of precautions and rules about how even the one priest would enter. After all, what if the priest had a heart attack or fell and broke his leg while in the Most Holy Place? How would they get him out? To resolve that problem, the priest entering into the Most Holy Place would have a rope tied around his waist so that others could pull him out without ever entering the Most Holy Place themselves.

To these cautious people the author of Hebrews declared: “We have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place.” The Christian proclamation is that we can come into God’s very presence with confidence without fear. We do not need a rope tied around our waist, nor do we need the fancy rituals that once preceded entrance. We need only come. In fact, we may come with eager anticipation and with great joy.

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**2** The author of Hebrews tells us that the very thing that blocked our entry into the presence of God has been torn in two. Blocking entrance into the Most Holy Place was a great veil. This veil covered the place that represented the presence of God. Its purpose was to keep people out.

The good news of the gospel is that the death of Jesus Christ has torn the curtain from top to bottom. It was not some priest who accidentally tripped over the curtain and tore it. God, who so many years earlier had gone to great lengths to describe how the curtain was to be made, decorated, and cared for, tore the curtain from top to bottom.

The tearing of the veil from top to bottom symbolizes in a very dramatic way that the great barrier between God and man has been removed. Our sin, our guilt, and our shame have been removed by the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross of Calvary.

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**3** Hebrews tells us that Jesus is our “great high priest over the house of God” (10:12). The word “priest” means “bridge-builder.” The bold proclamation of the gospel is that Jesus has become the great bridge-builder between sinful man and the holy God. He is the Door, the Torn Curtain, and the Way into the presence of God.



# Therefore . . .

Since the above things are true and we may, indeed, have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place, the author of Hebrews encourages us to adopt the following resolutions:

---

**1** Let us draw near to God (Hebrews 10:22a). God has made the way clear for us to come into His presence through His Son, Jesus Christ. It was mind-boggling for the Jew to think that an ordinary person could ever enter into the presence of God. Yet, that is the privilege afforded us through Jesus Christ. It is given to us every Lord's Day as we enter into the Most Holy Place—the sanctuary—to worship God.

Unfortunately it is a privilege that is often taken for granted. We come late. We come dressed casually. We fall asleep. Can you imagine the priest standing before the altar dressed in less than formal attire? He would have been horrified at the thought of yawning in God's presence, let alone sleeping alongside the altar. It should be our joy and delight to worship the living God as He assures us of His love, mercy, and grace having been revealed to us in His Son.

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**2** The second resolution for 2012 is that we “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (Hebrews 10:23). Our hope is in the glorious truth that our God is a faithful God. He has been faithful in the past. He has provided us through the years with untold material blessings, but more, He has given us the greatest spiritual gift we could ever receive—access to Himself. The grand truth that we profess and hold to is reconciliation through God's only-begotten Son. There is no other Name under heaven by which we may be saved.

There are many who want to challenge that truth today, claiming to have another way to heaven, or that Jesus is but one of many ways to heaven. The Bible teaches very clearly that God has provided the perfect sin offering in His Son as the means of salvation. Not *a* means of salvation; *the* means of salvation! How shall we escape if we neglect the one true means that God Himself has provided?

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**3** The third resolution is that “we consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24). We need to be encouragers.

One thing that seems to be lacking in many people who profess to believe in Christ is that we fail to be a people who encourage one another. How seldom we say, “Thank you” to those who do so much for us. Too often we expect others to do things we would never dream of volunteering for ourselves: nursery, ushering, teaching. How often do we take the time to say, “I appreciate the ministry you are bringing to this church”?

At times we may also have a tendency gossip about certain fringe members of the church “who know better.” Hebrews calls us to show them love. How often have you offered to baby-sit for the single mother so that she can attend an afternoon Bible Study? How often have you talked to one of the teenagers in your church about the precious faith that you possess? How often have you offered to pick up the senior citizen of whom you have said, “If he can go to the coffee shop, he can be in church”?

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**4** Hebrews offers this sage advice to all resolution-makers for 2012: “Let us not give up meeting together” (Hebrews 10:25). There is no such thing as “Lone Ranger Christianity” where you can worship God all alone. William Barclay wrote, “There is no person who can live the Christian life and neglect the fellowship of the Church.” There is no such thing as a secret disciple of Christ.

Fellowship among believers provides strength and energy; it brings resolve and commitment. The church exists to nurture spiritual growth. To receive that spiritual growth you must be more than a member; you must be an involved member. That means doing something. To be absent from the church and its activities is against your own best interest.

God has kept His resolutions toward us. He has permitted us to enter His presence. He has granted us forgiveness through His Son. He has united us to Himself through the Holy Spirit. Out of thanksgiving to God for all He has done for us, let us resolve in 2012 to know God better by drawing ourselves to Him, remaining faithful to His truth, encouraging one another, and maintaining fellowship with the saints. Then our joy will be complete.

Dr. Harry G. Arnold presents the second of two letters—written to a Jehovah's Witness—pointing to Jesus as the eternal Son of God.

## LETTERS TO KATHRYN (2)

Dear Friend,

In my first letter I encouraged you to read the gospel of John and take note of how the disciple points to the deity of Jesus, God's only begotten Son. If you remember our conversation at all, you will recall that I also suggested that you also go through the First Letter of John in the same way—taking note of all references to Jesus as *Son of God*. It is not my intention to belabor the wealth of evidence for Jesus' divine Sonship. Nevertheless, I must say that I myself was surprised by the large number of references to Jesus as Son of God. Some references were explicit in their assertion of His Sonship, while others clearly implied it. So let's take a quick run through First John and see what we find. The evidence for Jesus as *Son of God* is revealed in the following passages. Be sure to follow along with me in your Bible as I list them.

1:3—“And our fellowship is with **the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.**”

1:7—“the blood of Jesus **his Son**, purifies us from all sin.”

2:22—“Who is the liar? It is the man who denies that Jesus is **the Christ**. Such a man is the antichrist—he denies the Father and **the Son.**”

2:23—“No one who denies **the Son** has the Father; whoever acknowledges **the Son** has the Father also.”

2:24—“See that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in **the Son** and the Father.”

3:8—“The reason the **Son of God** appeared was to destroy the devil's work.”

3:23—“And this is his [God's] command: to believe in the name of **his Son, Jesus Christ.**”

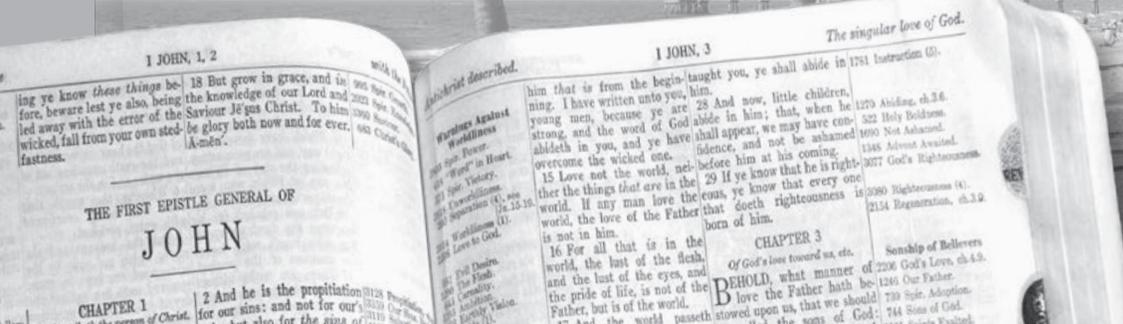
4:2—“Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ **has come in the flesh** is from God.”

4:9—“This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his **one and only Son** into the world that we might live through him.”

4:14—“And we have seen and testify that the Father sent **his Son** to be the Savior of the world.”

4:15—“If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the **Son of God**, God lives in him and he in God.”

5:1—“Everyone who believes that **Jesus is the Christ** is born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves **his child** as well.”



5:5—“Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is **the Son of God.**”

5:9—“We accept man’s testimony, but God’s testimony is greater because it is the testimony of God, which he has given about **his Son.**”

5:10—“Anyone who believes in **the Son of God** has this testimony in his heart.

Anyone who does not believe God has made him to be a liar, because he has not believed the testimony God has given about **his Son.**”

5:11—“And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in **his Son.**”

5:12—“He who has **the Son** has life; he who does not have the **Son of God** does not have life.”

5:13—“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the **Son of God** so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

5:20—“We know also that the **Son of God** has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true. And we are in him who is true—even in **his Son Jesus Christ.** He is **true God and eternal life.**”

There you have it, my friend. Some nineteen texts of Scripture with explicit references to Jesus as *Son of God* some twenty times, plus several other terms that imply His relationship to God as a Son to a Father (see, for example, 2:22a; 4:2; 5:1). I submit that this is rather hefty evidence in support of Jesus’ claims that He is the Son of God in human nature. With all this scriptural evidence before us, dare we still think of Jesus as merely the first created being, perfect but less than God? I think not! Rather, let us confess Jesus as Who He really is—God’s eternal Son Who took on human nature by the virgin Mary in order “to save his people from their sins” (Matthew

1:21). Then we too will be recipients of the apostolic greeting: “Grace, mercy and peace from God *the Father and from Jesus Christ, the Father’s Son . . . in truth and love*” (2 John 3). While we embrace God’s blessing, let us also be mindful of the apostle John’s admonition: “Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both *the Father and the Son*” (2 John 9).

All things considered, Kathryn, the cumulative evidence from the Gospel of John and the First Letter of John establishes the truth that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ is none other than God Himself who also took on human nature in the person of His Son. For this reason we give Jesus the same honor and worship as we give to God the Father. It was because Christ perfectly obeyed the Father’s will and fulfilled His earthly saving mission that the apostle Paul holds Him up as an example for Christians to follow in the conduct of their own lives. Thus, he writes to the Philippian believers about how their relationship to Jesus should affect their pattern of living:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

*Who being in very nature God,  
did not consider equality with God  
something to be grasped,  
but made himself nothing,  
taking the very nature of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
And being found in appearance as a  
man,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to death—even  
death on a cross!  
Therefore God exalted him to the  
highest place  
and gave him the name that is  
above every name,  
that at the name of Jesus every knee  
should bow,*

*in heaven and on earth and under  
the earth,  
and every tongue confess that Jesus  
Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father  
(2:5–11).*

Now you can understand, Kathryn, why Christians love to sing the Advent song, “Hark! The Herald Angels Sing.” Its second stanza so accurately describes the truth of the incarnation that I must set it before you now.

*Christ, by highest heaven adored,  
Christ, the everlasting Lord!  
Late in time behold him come,  
offspring of the Virgin’s womb.  
Veiled in flesh the Godhead see;  
hail the incarnate Deity,  
pleased as man with men to dwell,  
Jesus, our Immanuel.  
Hark! the herald angels sing,  
“Glory to the new-born King”  
(Charles Wesley, 1739, 1753, alt.).*

Having now considered the evidence for Jesus’ divine Sonship from John’s writings in his Gospel and Letters, there is still one more objection to Jesus’ divine Sonship that we must consider and answer. Just as some critics argue that Jesus never claimed to be more than an ordinary man, so other critics say that John wrote his Gospel perhaps sixty years or more after Jesus’ ministry and death. During that time, it is alleged, a wealth of “myth” developed about Jesus’ nature, and that is why John presents Him as God “in the flesh.” How shall we answer that charge?

One answer to that charge might be to note that John’s Gospel—rather than dealing with “myth” as the critics allege—reflects the developed maturity of apostolic teaching about Jesus. However, there is a still more definitive answer that can be given to the critics’ charge. Therefore, please give serious consideration to what now follows. You see, Kathryn, the Gospel of Mark is generally

considered to have been written very early after the events of Jesus' death and resurrection. Some scholars believe it may have been written as early as AD 40 and no later than AD 65.<sup>1</sup> Thus, a look into Mark's Gospel should give us insight into how believers in Christ regarded Him in the early years of church life. So let's take a quick look at what we find in Mark's Gospel.

Mark begins his Gospel this way: "The beginning of the gospel about Jesus Christ, the **Son of God**" (1:1). Now admittedly a footnote tells us that "Some manuscripts do not have *the Son of God*." Nevertheless, in the minds of the scholars, the textual evidence was sufficiently weighty to consider the phrase as likely to have been in the original manuscript. Mark then moves on quickly to the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. He records the following incident in connection with Jesus' baptism. "As Jesus was coming up out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: You are **my Son**, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." (1:10–11) Can anything be clearer than that in confirmation of Jesus as the Son of God? God Himself calls Jesus *my Son*!

In the second chapter, Mark calls Jesus the "Son of Man"<sup>2</sup> As Son of Man, Jesus exercises the power of

God Himself as He "forgives sin" (2:5); heals a paralytic (2:11–12); and proclaims Himself to be Lord even of the Sabbath" (2:28).

By chapter three, Mark records Jesus' growing popularity—with crowds of people following after Him, many seeking to be healed of various diseases. And Mark records this interesting insight into who Jesus really is when he writes: "Whenever the evil spirits saw him, they cried out, 'You are the **Son of God**'" (3:11). If the evil spirits confess Jesus as Son of God, do you think God expects anything less from us? Mark confirms the reality of this general statement in chapter three with a specific example of it in chapter five. When Jesus stepped out of a boat after crossing the lake, a demon-possessed man "fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, 'What do you want with me, Jesus, **Son of the Most High God**? Swear to God that you won't torture me.' For Jesus was saying to him, 'Come out of this man, you evil spirit!'" (5:6–8). Surely, if a demon-possessed man recognized Jesus as *Son of the most high God*, we also must own Him as such and bow our knees before Him in humble adoration and worship.

Just as God spoke from heaven at Jesus' baptism, so Mark records that at the transfiguration—when "a cloud appeared and enveloped them"—indicating a manifestation of God's

presence, "a voice came from the cloud: This is **my Son**, whom I love. Listen to him" (9:7). Again, God speaks of Jesus as *my Son*. What further evidence of Jesus' divine Sonship do we need? God's very own voice and testimony should be more than sufficient to convince us.

Yet there is still more evidence to be considered as recorded by Mark's Gospel. As indicated earlier, Jesus referred to Himself by the Messianic title "Son of Man." That the term includes the idea of divine Sonship is evident from the powers that Jesus ascribed to Himself and also exercised as "Son of Man." Some aspects of these powers may be discerned in the following passages in Mark's Gospel.

9:9—"Jesus gave them [Peter & John] orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the dead."

9:31—"The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."

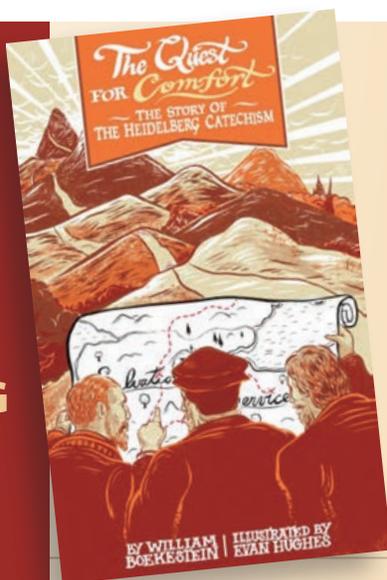
10:33—Jesus again predicts His betrayal, suffering, and death as the Son of Man. But He adds: "Three days later he will rise."

10:45—Jesus states that as Son of Man He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

10:47–48—Blind Bartimaeus addresses

# THE QUEST FOR COMFORT

## THE STORY OF THE HEIDELBERG CATECHISM



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Jesus by the messianic title “Son of David.” He cries out: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!”

12:35–37—Jesus taught that David, “speaking by the Holy Spirit . . . calls him ‘Lord.’ How then can he be his Son?” That is to say, therefore, that David spoke of Jesus, the Messiah, as God’s Son—worthy to be called Lord!

13:26–27—Jesus makes clear that He—as Son of Man—will be coming in clouds with great “power and glory” to effect the final and complete redemption of “the elect.” In this event Jesus is clothed in the “power and glory” of God. This corroborates Jesus’ words in

John 5:25–27—“I tell you the truth, a time is coming and has now come when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son to have life in himself. And he has given him authority to judge *because* he is the **Son of Man.**”

14:21 & 41—Jesus reveals that as **Son of Man** the betrayal by Judas did not take Him by surprise. As God’s Son and Messianic Son of Man, He was fully aware of all things.

In addition to all of the above evidence, Kathryn, we must not forget that Mark records the testimony of Jesus Himself—under oath—before the high priest. You will find that Jesus was asked point blank by the high priest, “Are you the Christ, the Son of the blessed One?” (Mark 14:61). The form of expression used by the high priest was the equivalent of one being put under oath in a court of law, which requires a truthful answer. So what the high priest was really saying to Jesus is something like this: “I charge you before God, [i.e. under oath] tell us if you are the Messiah, God’s Son” (See Matthew 26:63). To that question Jesus gave an unequivocal answer: “I am” (Mark 14:62). That Jesus affirmed His divine Sonship in His answer was

immediately understood by the high priest who then made the charge of “blasphemy” against Jesus (14:67).

Finally, let us not fail to note that Mark records the statement of the centurion who personally observed the events of Jesus’ crucifixion and death. Since he was in charge of the soldiers who carried out the crucifixion, this centurion observed carefully all details surrounding it, especially noting Jesus’ words and the manner of His dying. What the centurion observed evoked from him this unsolicited testimony: “Surely this man was the **Son of God**” (15:39). Remember, dear friend, that Mark is recording what happened at the time of Jesus’ death, long before any time had passed to allow for “myths” to develop about Him. Mark is here recording history as it was happening. And this is the testimony of an unbiased observer, one who was neither a disciple of Jesus nor a member of the group of Jewish leaders who opposed Jesus. The centurion was a Roman, and likely a pagan at the time, who gave his unbiased testimony about Jesus and His being God’s Son—just from what he had observed from the events about the cross. That’s a powerful testimony! This is the kind of witness that lawyers love to have testifying for them in a court of law—unbiased, simple, and direct eyewitness testimony. Such is what the centurion gave at the cross of Jesus.

So what have we learned from Mark’s Gospel? The same truth about Jesus as John presented at a later date when he wrote his Gospel of John. Mark begins his Gospel by affirming Jesus as **Son of God**. He continues by recording events of Jesus’ ministry that reveal Him as exercising powers that belong only to God—forgiving sin, calling Himself Lord of the Sabbath, using the Messianic title “Son of Man” in reference to Himself, casting out demons, accepting the divine title

“Lord” as applying to Himself, and positively affirming under oath that He is God’s Son. Further, not only did God affirm Jesus as His Son, twice over; even a Roman centurion could observe His divine nature in the manner of His dying.

And so, Kathryn, you may put to rest whatever critics may say about some supposed “myth” of Jesus being considered Son of God only after some time had passed. The truth is that Jesus has always been confessed to be God’s one and only eternal Son by those who have come to know Him by the power of His Holy Spirit. With the apostle Peter, the church has always confessed Jesus to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16). The Scripture is clear both from its earliest record in the Gospel of Mark and from its latest record in the Gospel of John—Jesus is God’s Son and Lord!

Our responsibility now is simply to receive, believe, and obey this gospel in order to be saved and become heirs of salvation and life everlasting.

May God grant you, dear friend, the gift of faith and salvation in Christ, the Word made flesh.

*Cordially yours in Christ’s behalf,*

Dr. Harry G. Arnold  
Portage, Michigan

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1. For dating of Mark’s Gospel, see Hendriksen, William; *NTC—MARK*, pages 14–16.

2. “Son of Man” was Jesus’ favorite designation of Himself as the God-sent Messiah.

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# Life, Liberty and Little Ones: A Biblical Response to Abortion

Rev. Paul  
Brace

Shoot the doctors? Attend every pro-life demonstration? Yell and scream “murder” whenever abortion is even alluded to? Often these are the accepted, or expected, responses to the abortion issue within the evangelical community.

But we dare not have the mentality of, “Us versus them.” “They” are all around us. “They” are the women we know and love. There have been over 52 million abortions in the U.S. since *Roe v. Wade*. The Center for Bio-Ethical Reform calculates, “An estimated 35% of all women will have at least one abortion by the time they are forty-five years old.” This statistic brings the issue close to home. Statistically, one in three of your female neighbors has had an abortion. One in three of your female co-workers has had an abortion. One in three of the women in your own family has had an abortion. And one in three of the women in your church has had an abortion. Perhaps you are the one in the three. Other factors will impact the figures, but the fact remains, most of us have regular contact with someone who has had an abortion.

Nor can we speak of abortion as some political or moral concept, removed from any personal element. If you would hesitate to call a woman a murderer to her face, consider, if you are within earshot of three women whenever you declare abortion to be murder, you are doing just that. How, then, should the church and Christians respond to this issue that affects each of our neighborhoods, each of our families, and each of

our churches? The answer is to understand the nature of abortion, its impact on the mothers, and the true gospel we preach.

## The Bible and Abortion

There is no eleventh commandment that clearly states, “Thou shalt not abort a baby.” However, there are plenty of passages in Scripture that are relevant to this topic.

First, the Bible is clear about the full, living, humanity of the fetus. John the Baptizer, for example, leapt *in utero* when his pregnant Aunt Mary came to visit. He was responding to Christ, even as a fetus. Or consider Jeremiah 1:4–5: “Now the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.’” The personhood of Jeremiah far preceded his birthday. Life begins in the womb, not on the birthing table.

Second, the Bible prescribes punishment on those who cause even accidental abortions. Exodus 21:22–23 speaks of a situation where a woman is injured in a fight, leading to labor. If the child dies, the death penalty may come on the man who caused it.

Third, the biblical creation mandate is to multiply on the face of the earth. Those who intentionally seek to reduce the population through abortion are attempting to overthrow God’s command. Examples could be multiplied, but the Bible does speak to the issue. Abortion ends a human life; thus the sixth commandment does apply. It is a sin against the child

and it is a sin against the divine Giver of life.

## The Bible and Post-Abortion Women

Let’s stop and think about the effect an abortion has on the mother. No woman grew up dreaming of that special day when she could get an abortion. No, that’s a dreadful day, one she can’t forget. As the law of God remains impressed on the hearts of all persons, she knows the act is wrong and is filled with regret and guilt afterward (Rom. 2:14, 15). You don’t need to shout, “Murderer!” She quietly tells herself that on a regular basis. She doesn’t need a reminder of God’s law. She needs to know God’s grace!

The Bible is not the revelation of an angry God and His impossible law. It is the revelation of the gracious God, His righteous law, and His solution for sin; all sin, even sixth commandment sin.

Consider the very meaning of grace. Grace is God’s unmerited favor, His goodness toward you that you haven’t earned. God does not forgive sins on the basis of a payment plan. You can never work hard enough to pay off the debt that sin has created between us and God. Instead, grace and forgiveness are God’s free gift through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on your behalf. Paul says in Rom 11:6, “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.” God can forgive, no matter how big the sin, because His forgiveness does not need to be earned. It is a free, gracious, gift.



## Christian Priorities

How then should we respond?

If you have had an abortion, acknowledge to God that it was a sin. But also trust in Christ for the forgiveness of all your sins as you turn to Christ and accept His sacrifice on your behalf and His lordship over your life.

For all of us, remember that the victims of abortion are all around us. There are two victims in every abortion: the baby and the mother. These women don't need more guilt poured on them. They've got plenty already. What they need is the gospel of grace. They need someone to have compassion, to abandon his hypocritical self-righteousness, and tell them of the forgiveness and grace of Jesus Christ!

As an individual, family, or congregation, there are ways you can help. Skip that next rally and volunteer at your local crisis pregnancy center. These facilities exist to help pregnant women choose life and post-abortive women to find hope and forgiveness in Jesus.

There are centers in need of your help. Get involved bringing the hope of Christ to those who need it most. Seeking to save unborn lives and to change laws are worthy endeavors.

But may we never forget that the primary mission of the Church is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ—to doctors who perform abortions and even to those mothers who have had them.

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But does this apply to abortions? If you've had an abortion, could God possibly forgive you? Consider what the most important men in the Bible (aside from Christ) all have in common. How are Moses, David, and Paul alike? They were all murderers! Moses killed the Egyptian (Ex. 2:11–15). David murdered Uriah (2 Sam. 11:14–21). Paul persecuted and killed Christians as a habit (Acts 7:58–8:3)!

Those three had one other thing in common, too. They found grace and forgiveness from God, even for their murders. They did not—could not—earn forgiveness. But God was gracious. This is the message of the biblical gospel. God can forgive sins, even abortion, even your abortion.

### The Bible, Post-Abortion Women, and Jesus

But how can the righteous Judge forgive sins? Does He simply look the other way? No. The answer is Jesus! Jesus, God Himself, became human (without ceasing to be divine), and perfectly kept God's law. There was no sin in Him. Then He died on the cross, offering Himself as a sacrifice for the sins of others, fulfilling the purpose of the Old Testament's sacrificial system.

As the Lamb of God, He took the sins of all who will believe on Him to the cross on their behalf. He bore God's wrath and curse for those sins. He died. But on the third day, God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His throne in heaven, thereby showing that God accepted Christ's sacrifice for our sins. And now, those who believe in Jesus receive Christ's righteousness, as He received our sin.

This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:21: "For our sake he made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God." How would you like to trade your bank account, mortgage, and credit card debt for Bill Gates's bank account? This is a faint reflection of what happens when you turn to Christ. He takes your sin to the cross. You get His sinlessness applied to your account. Your sin is wiped away—even the sin of abortion.

Can this be true, considering how great a sin abortion is? Listen to Paul the murderer: "Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 5:20–21). No sin is greater than the grace of God!

# Bible Studies on Romans

## Lesson 5: God is Our Judge, Romans 2:1–11

Rev. Wybren H.  
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**R**ecently I received a brochure from the public school system that explained why they had a full time policeman on staff. Yes, it was true that weapons were as commonplace as cell phones in this inner-city school. Yes, it was true that there had been a stabbing or two, but the students were basically good. They just needed some positive influence to reinforce their behavior.

Enter the law of God. The Jews knew they did not keep the law perfectly. They knew they some needed mercy from God, but they still saw themselves as basically good. It is as if they would automatically get a 90% on the final exam. All they needed was a small curve in their favor to get it up to 100%. And they had it; after all, they were Jews. An occasional sacrifice at the temple, the donning of phylacteries, and praying at the proper time would ensure God's good favor on them.

On the other hand, the Gentiles were basically bad. Once in a while there would be a Rahab or a Ruth, but they were the exception to the rule. All Jews knew that they were fundamentally righteous and that the Gentiles were fundamentally wicked and condemned.

### No Excuse

Like Nathan in the Old Testament (2 Samuel 12:7), Paul begins the second chapter of Romans by shouting, "You are the man!" After spending a full chapter on how "they" are without excuse, Paul turns the tables on his readers and writes, "You are without excuse." He declares that,

although godless and wicked people certainly face the wrath of God, those who pass judgment on them must be careful, lest they face the same. Everyone who lives in stubbornness and with an unrepentant heart is storing up the wrath of God for himself. Everyone who lives in sin is worthy of death—no matter what his upbringing may be. This holds true not only for the godless and wicked, but also for those who loudly and self-righteously condemn others.

Paul seeks to remove from the church the concept of salvation by works. In this chapter, he prepares the way for the basic premise of the gospel: that all are guilty before God, and that all—Jew and Gentile alike—need to be reconciled to God by the one way He has provided—His Son's atoning sacrifice on the cross.

The Jew had no difficulty condemning the Gentiles for their wickedness. In the apocryphal book, *The Wisdom of Solomon*, the Jews were taught that the wrath of God was only on the Gentiles. After all, the Jews were in possession of God's law and knew God's will and therefore would not be judged by God. The Pharisees were harsh in their judgment of the tax collectors, prostitutes, and others who did not keep the law. Their own pride, lust, and avarice, however, they overlooked. By doing so they condemned themselves. They are no better than those whom they judge. Their sins stem from the same totally-depraved nature.

We must be careful, however, not to speak too harshly of the Jews, for then we would equally guilty. How often we can condemn bad behavior in

others while practicing the very same things ourselves. As fallen creatures, we are often blind to our own faults; yet we quickly condemn those very same sins in others. Others are argumentative, but we have strong convictions. Others have anger issues, but we are enthusiastic. Others are guilty of lying, while we are good salesmen. People who drive slower than we do endanger us "normal drivers," and those who drive faster than we do are a menace on the road. Rationalizing sin does not change the fact that it is still sin. As sin, it brings God's righteous judgment on us.

There is no such thing as "relative truth," nor is there any such thing as "relative sin." God does not call black "white." He will not excuse or overlook sin just because the one who commits it is in the covenant. Sin is sin, and God will judge it as such in every human being regardless of race, color, or creed. The author of Hebrews writes, "It is appointed once for man to die, and then the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). No one will escape; everyone is without excuse, no matter how loudly he may condemn the sin that he sees in others. If all your deeds are as filthy rags, it will not excuse you to say that your neighbor's rags are dirtier. God's judgment is based on truth. Just as the Jews were not immune from God's judgment, neither are we, just because we are Reformed. We have no more immunity than do the Gentiles or the pagans. Either we are declared righteous through the gospel of Jesus Christ, or the wrath of God rests on us.

## Longsuffering and Judgment

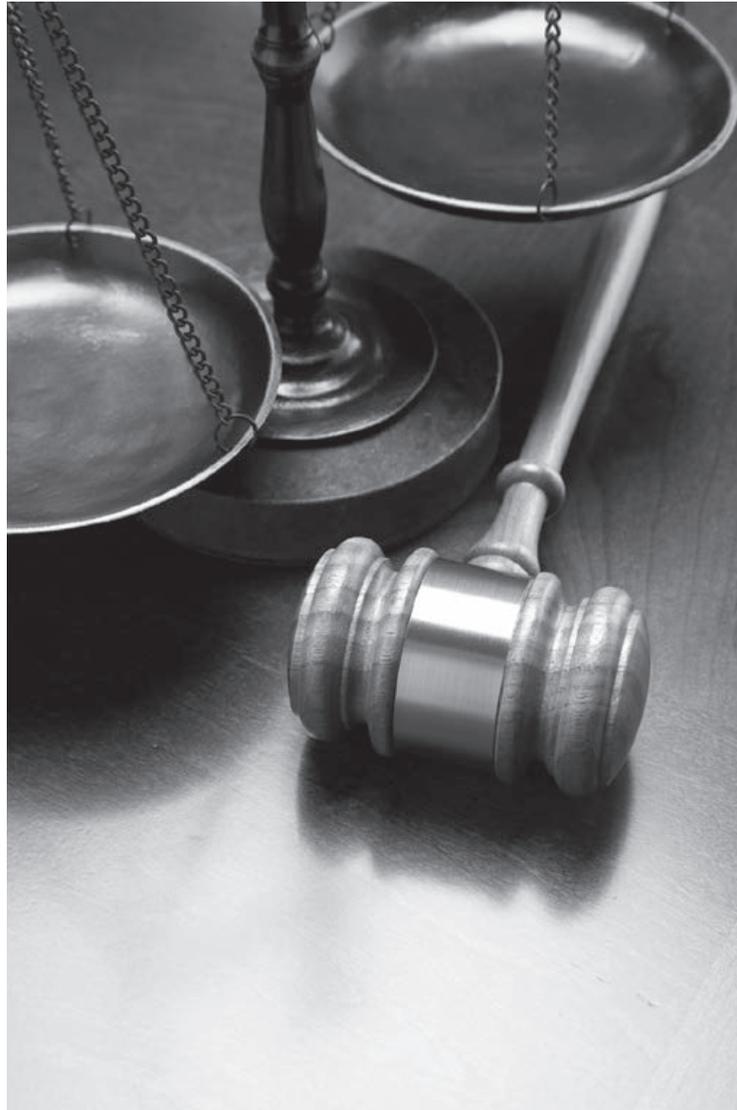
Seldom do people understand the depth of their own sin and the certainty of divine judgment on their sin. Christians and non-Christians alike will certainly acknowledge that they are sinners. After all, nobody is perfect; to err is human. Yet, even as we admit that we are all sinners, we refuse to acknowledge that the wrath of God is on our own particular sins. Instead, it is argued that God's wrath is reserved for the heinous sins that we read about in newspapers. It is reserved for people like Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, and Judas Iscariot.

Should we become convinced of our sin, we attempt to escape the judgment of God. We run to the false teachers who appeal to God's character and love. They point us to His kindness, tolerance, and patience (v. 4). Books such as Rob Bell's *Love Wins* teach that God is longsuffering and will not punish anyone. Like Satan when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness, they misquote Scripture to their advantage, claiming that "The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in love" (Psalm 103:8).

The simple fact that God does bring judgment on sin should cause those who follow such teachers to see the folly of their logic. First of all, anyone who studies history or watches the news can attest to the temporal punishment of God. The pride of Edom became her downfall (Obadiah 3, 4). The great Roman

Empire collapsed not because of the outward attacks from enemy armies but because of its own moral decline. Can the same be said of North American countries? Certainly the wrath of God "is being revealed" today (Romans 1:18).

The wrath of God also "shall be



revealed" (Romans 2:5) to those who choose a life of self-righteousness and do not turn to Christ for the forgiveness of their sins. No sin will escape the wrath of God. It is always paid for, either by Christ, by whose wounds we are healed, or by the sinner who rejects Christ as he suffers eternal condemnation.

While we glory in the truth of a compassionate, longsuffering God, we must be careful not to misuse it. Those who promote such a false assurance misinterpret the generosity of God. The call is not to sin all the more that grace may abound, but rather to repentance. The goodness and kindness of God should lead to a

change of heart. Rather than pride, we should be filled with humility that God would be so gracious as to save us in spite of our sin. As Paul describes the horrible downward spiral of sin and the impartial judgment of God, we should acknowledge that there is no hope to be found in ourselves—it is by grace alone, in Christ alone.

## Good Works

In chiasmic<sup>1</sup> form, Paul writes about those who with selfish ambition do not obey the law and therefore face judgment (Romans 2:8, 9) and those who do good works and receive undeserved glory and honor (Romans 2:7, 10). Some see these verses as promoting salvation by works and in opposition to Paul's theme of salvation by faith alone through Christ alone, but grace

is the very theme that Paul begins to promote with these verses.

Taking these verses in context with the rest of Romans, Paul reasons that the deeds of every individual who ever walked on this earth will be weighed on the scales of God's righteousness and be found wanting. Wealth, power, nationality, and lineage will count for

nothing. Church affiliation will count for nothing. The standard will be the same for all—did you obey the law of God perfectly? By His law, “God will give to each person according to what he has done” (Romans 2:6). The reward for those who do good is eternal life; for those who pursue evil: eternal condemnation.

Since all are found wanting—guilty before God—all of mankind will face the eternal wrath of God if left to their own good works. That is exactly why the just must live by faith. We are not to come before the judgment seat with our own deeds, but clothed in the perfect obedience of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, “God made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21). By making Christ the perfect sin offering for us, God declares us righteous in His sight.

Christian behavior, then, becomes an outpouring of our faith. Like James, Paul reasons that true faith produces good works. Some may do good works motivated by self ambition. They pursue their own good. They resist the right and yield to wrong as they boast in their own merits. Upon them is the wrath and judgment of God. Those, however, who seek to bring honor and glory to God, do good works, not to attain

salvation; they desire to express their thanksgiving to God for the salvation He has provided. By grace they are declared righteous and obtain the eternal and incorruptible gifts of God.

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1. Chiastic structuring is a literary device used to build up to the main point and then back off from it in the reverse order (so that the parts ‘cross over’ like the members of the letter *Chi*—X).



## Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. What made the Jews think that God would be more lenient with them than He would be with the Gentiles?
2. What does Paul say to those who think they are better than others? How are covenant children in the same danger as the Jews?
3. How is God longsuffering?
4. What two kinds of judgments are there? How is God’s judgment being revealed today?
5. What is the purpose of God’s patience toward the sinner?
6. What is the motivation of those who do good/evil? What is their reward?
7. Can anyone be saved without good works?
8. Does salvation by faith alone promote loose conduct?
9. Does the thought of God’s eternal wrath frighten you? Why or why not?

# Bible Studies on Romans

## Lesson 6: Guilty before God, Romans 2:12–29

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Growing up watching Westerns on television brought with it the notion that there was a certain “honor among thieves.” In at least one episode every season the hero would have to infiltrate a town that had no sheriff and was run by the bad guys wearing black hats. Sure, there was the barroom brawl with chairs flying everywhere, but no outlaw would ever think of stealing from another one. And when the hero rode into town, they teamed together against him, rather than have one of their own brought to justice.

A certain amount of fair play is instilled in us when we are very young. We expect a certain kind of behavior, even when there is no written law to guide such behavior. How many times haven't parents heard words similar to these come from the mouths of their children: “How would you like it if I did that to you?”; “That's my seat, I called it first”; “Give me some of your orange; I gave you some of mine”; and of course they are all finished with the words, “That's not fair!”

### Gentiles

Through general revelation, be it by nature or instinct, already from childhood, we know certain things are required of us, even though we may have no specific knowledge of the law. Paul writes that the things required by the law—not the law itself—have been written on the hearts of the Gentiles. There is very little difference between having the law of God written on our hearts and having a sense of morality written on our hearts. The two overlap one another on several points.

Even the most wicked of dictators who send out their armies to pillage villages have a code of ethics within their own household. They would be horrified at the suggestion that a loyal servant be put to death for no reason, because “that's just wrong.” Our own culture has decided that it is perfectly legitimate to kill a baby in the womb, but will prosecute a doctor who smothers a baby a few seconds after birth.

Some may point to the most hardened of criminals and claim that they have no conscience or sense of morality. I would contend that the first time a person commits a heinous, sin his conscience does cry out against it, but that cry is ignored. Over time, as the individual suppresses his conscience it becomes weaker and may even disappear, to the point where the individual can no longer distinguish right from wrong.

We don't have to look at hardened criminals to know this is true. We need but look at ourselves. In how many different ways haven't we suppressed our consciences (and God's law) in an effort to justify worldliness, our lack of awe toward God and worship, and a host of other sins. Review the Sermon on the Mount and the Heidelberg Catechism's explanation of the Ten Commandments and see if they do not prick your conscience. Even as confessing Christians we commit heinous sins against God, yet we see ourselves as decent, moral, and upright individuals.

That is precisely the point that Paul is trying to make. With or without the law, we stand accused before God because we have suppressed that which God has made clear through general revelation (Romans 1:19). The Gentiles would be found guilty before God, not because they had the written law, but because they have enough of the law in their consciences to convict them.

### Jews

If general revelation is enough to leave us without excuse, how much more so those who have received a special revelation from God? Those who had received the law and boasted in their relationship with God would be judged by that very law in which they boasted. It would not be enough to have only heard the law; it would be a matter of having done the law. After all, the law was given that man should obey it.

The Jews believed they had every advantage given to them. In their spiritual arrogance, they claimed the following special privileges given to them by God:

1. *They were Jews.* This name, short for “Judah,” means “Jehovah be praised” and was a constant reminder that *they* were the race chosen by God to bring praise to Him.
2. *They had the law.* The great Jehovah had chosen them to be recipients of the law. This, they thought, gave them special standing before God. For many, keeping the law did not mean obeying it as much as it did holding it in their possession.



3. *They knew God's will.* As the recipients of the Torah and prophetic writings, they were able to discern God's plan for the ages. And of course, that plan included the idea that, in time, the Jews would rise to world power with one like King David sitting on the throne in Jerusalem.

4. *They were enlightened.* As God's favorite, they were able to make superior moral judgments. All the other nations were outside of their privileged circle and ignorant, foolish, or infants. They had the advantage over the Gentiles in knowing what was right and what was wrong.

5. *They were to teach the nations.* God had given them the duty to be a light in the darkness and tell the world about Him. In that way, God would bless those who blessed them and curse those who cursed them.

If these were not enough, the Jews had one final argument that set them apart from the heathen Gentiles and placed them in favor with God. They were circumcised. The rabbis taught that no circumcised person would ever be sent to hell. This outward mark of God's covenant assured them that the

promise of salvation was guaranteed to them. They were convinced that as children of Abraham, and as participants in the sacraments and rituals performed by God-appointed priests, they were safe within their "Jewishness." There was no salvation apart from them.

Paul, however, writes that nothing could be further from the truth. Although circumcision was a sign of God's covenant relationship with Israel, it was a symbol of faith. Abraham, for example, was justified before he was circumcised. For circumcision (or any other rite) to secure salvation, one would need to obey perfectly the entire law.

Paul then points out that the conduct of the Jews is not in line with their knowledge of God's law or with their teaching of that law to others. He appeals to their consciences. This is the same approach that Jesus often took when He would expose the hatred, covetousness, hypocrisy, and irreverence that filled the children of Abraham. The behavior of the Jews was such that even the Gentiles spoke evil of them. The Jews, no more than the Gentiles, could claim exemption from God's judgment on the basis of heritage or personal holiness.

## Christians

Ever since Romans 1:18, Paul has been bringing two groups of people before God's judgment. The verdicts on both the Gentile and the Jew come with frightful certainty. As for the Gentile who is without the law: *guilty*. As for the Jews who have the law: *guilty*.

All too often Christians find themselves with the same mindset as the Jews. After all, we can claim special privileges given to us:

1. *We are Christians.* We have been anointed to be prophets, priests, and kings for the kingdom of God. We wear that label with honor and, all too often, with pride, seeking to bring glory to ourselves rather than God.

2. *We have the Word of God.* Unlike in the persecuted church where Bibles are scarce, in North America we are blessed to have multiple volumes of God's Word in our churches and homes. In too many homes, however, they are neglected and unread. The family altar and devotions at mealtime are becoming a thing of the past.

3. *We know God's will.* Scripture clearly teaches it. We pride ourselves in knowing it. After all, we go to a church that still reads the Ten Commandments every week. And yet, we fail to love God with heart, mind, and soul; we fail to love our neighbors as ourselves.

4. *We are enlightened.* We bravely fight against abortion and other evils by giving generously at dinners and other fund raisers. We visit the Creation Museum and shake our heads at those who believe in an old earth. While we are eager to defend the truth, we seldom talk to people about our faith in Jesus Christ and the need to trust in Him for salvation.

5. *We are to teach the nations.* Jesus demanded that His followers “go and make disciples of all nations” (Matthew 28:19). We establish wonderful Christian schools and invite non-Reformed parents to send their children. Then, in order to attract more students, we take the word “Reformed” out of the school’s charter.

If all else fails, we have been baptized and are in the covenant. Like the Jews with circumcision, many Christians think their baptism is a golden ticket to heaven. Some of the most difficult visits made by elders are to wayward members who assume their salvation because their membership resides in some long-forgotten church. Just as the law had to be kept perfectly by those who were circumcised to obtain salvation, so also with baptism. Just as the Jews could not rely on their circumcision to save them, Christians can not rely on their baptism.

We shake our heads at the obscenities of the world and think ourselves better than the unbeliever—and all too often, better than those who attend other churches. While we as Christians abhor and condemn the excesses of worldly people, Paul points out that we are guilty of the same evils. Who of us would dare say that he has not sinned against the law of God? Paul seeks to remove the kind of morals and self-righteousness that seeks to rely on good works for salvation. This is what the apostle

wants to drive home in order to alert us to another righteousness—a righteousness from God that is not of the law but of faith.

We can only be reconciled to God through the atoning sacrifice of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. He was both circumcised and baptized, thereby placing Himself voluntarily under the law, obligating Himself to keep it perfectly. Through His perfect obedience, He fulfills righteousness for us. Having received a true righteousness outside of ourselves, we may no longer boast in ourselves but in Him who has saved us by clothing us in His righteousness.

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## Points to Ponder and Discuss

1. Give examples of people having a “law unto themselves.”
2. Why will those who sin apart from the law perish?
3. Is it possible to lose moral discernment? What is the meaning of 1 Timothy 4:2–3?
4. What advantages did the Jews have over the Gentiles?
5. How did those advantages help or hinder the Jews?
6. How did the Jews view themselves? the law? their relationship with God?
7. Why will those who are under the law (Jews and religious people) perish?
8. Can anyone claim to have lived a righteous life before God?
9. How can a Christian be guilty of bringing dishonor on the Name of God?

## Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him. —Genesis 5:24

If there is one person mentioned in the Bible who has always intrigued Christians, it is Enoch. Especially that comment made about him in Genesis 5:24, “and he was not, for God took him,” has struck Bible readers and led them to wonder what kind of man Enoch was and what God did for him.

However, this unusual experience of Enoch is actually not the most important feature of his life, nor the one on which we should focus most of our attention. Rather, how Enoch lived on earth should impress us even more than how his earthly life ended. The key truth God wants us to remember about him is summed up in the simple description: “Enoch walked with God.”

### Who was Enoch?

Enoch first appears in the biblical record in a rather morbid chapter. For if one reads Genesis 5, which contains the first biblical genealogy and lists the descendants of Adam till Noah, several things impress. One is the lengthy lives these ancients lived—most of them over 900 years. The other is that their lives, though lengthy, all ended in death (except for one). It is clear that the Holy Spirit is telling us that the world was a different place after Adam’s fall. It was a world where human life was long and difficult and led finally to the grave—a far cry from the perfect bliss of the original state of man in the garden of Eden.

It was into this fallen world that Enoch also was born and where he had to spend his days. Genesis 5 says little factually about him. It mentions the name of his father Jared and the name of his son Methuselah. And it mentions how long he lived on earth—365 years.

However, Enoch is mentioned in two other places of Scripture—both in the New Testament. The Letter of Jude, vv. 14 and 15, informs us that he was the seventh generation from Adam, and more significantly that he was a prophet, who spoke of God’s judgment to fall on the ungodly and their depravity. This indicates that,

already in Enoch’s time, the world had become a wicked place. It was becoming ripe for the awful judgment of God to come in the worldwide flood of Noah’s time. But God was already warning sinful man through the proclamation of Enoch.

The other reference to Enoch in the New Testament is in Hebrews 11—the noted “heroes of faith” chapter. There, the inspired author cites the two main truths about Enoch brought out in Genesis 5, namely, that Enoch walked with God and that God took him. But Hebrews expands on what we read in Genesis 5, specifically citing the faith of Enoch and the manner in which God took him, by translating him, so he did not pass through death.

### Enoch’s Walk with God

Let’s focus, however, on that most important characteristic of Enoch’s life singled out in Genesis, as well as in Hebrews 11. He “walked with God.” The phrase occurs twice in Genesis 5, first in verse 22, which says: “Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters.” Enoch was 65 years old when his oldest son, Methuselah, was born.

Does Scripture mean that Enoch’s walk with God began at that point in his life? Did he undergo some kind of

conversion experience upon the birth of Methuselah? We cannot say for sure. But for the last 300 years of his earthly life, Enoch walked with God. And so, this marked the essential nature of his life. That's why verse 24 sums it up simply as: "Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him."

What does it mean that Enoch "walked with God?" Does it mean that Enoch went literally strolling with God, as God did with Adam and Eve in Paradise? I do not believe so, even though God can and did appear at times in human form to talk and walk with men. But the phrase "walking with God" must be understood in a spiritual sense. It is a typical biblical expression for the relationship God's children have or should have to Him. The Bible speaks, for example, of our obligation to walk in the truth, or walk in the light, or walk in the ways of the Lord.

### **Trust in God**

There are three main actions involved in walking with God. One is trust in God or faith in Him. This is, in fact, the basic requirement for walking with God. The prophet Amos once asked the question: "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" That means we must be reconciled to God. To be sure, it is our covenant God who has initiated this agreement to walk with us. For it is not in the sinner's nature to want to walk with God. It is God who sent His Son to walk with us and among us on earth, so that by His life and death He might draw us to God.

At the same time, walking with God demands faith on our part. As Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 5:7, "we walk by faith, not by sight." And the writer of Hebrews, in chapter 11:5, also makes a point of mentioning Enoch's faith: "By faith Enoch was taken up

so that he should not see death." And that verse ends: "Now before he was taken, he was commended as having pleased God," which leads the writer to continue in verse 6: "And without faith it is impossible to please him [God]." That tells us clearly that basic to Enoch's walk with God was his faith in the Lord. He had a firm trust in the true God who had revealed Himself to Enoch.

And in the same way, any person today who desires to walk with God must have a true faith in Him. God does not walk with unbelievers. He walks with His saved people. Indeed, their faith in Him and in His Son is not only a one-time act, but a daily, ever-present attitude. We should walk with God by faith each day and moment.



## Communion with God

So, Enoch's walk involved faith. And secondly, it involved fellowship or communion with God. When two friends walk together, they do so to enjoy each other's company. They find delight in sharing their thoughts and experiences. They speak together, laugh together, and commiserate together. They confide in each other—often at a deep level.

That's also how it should be when we walk with God. And no doubt this was true of Enoch. He confided in God. He spoke to God. He expressed His love for God, His need of God, and His dependence on God.

The one Person who walked closest to God on earth was unquestionably His own Son, Jesus Christ. He enjoyed perfect communion with God. It was a most intimate fellowship the Savior had with His Father. Jesus desired and needed that fellowship, and therefore would regularly draw apart from the crowds and His own disciples to spend time with His Father.

Walking with a friend involves a two-way communication—speaking and listening to one another. The same is true for walking with God. It involves our speaking with God—which we do, and which Enoch did, and even Jesus did, by means of prayer. But fellowship with God also demands listening to Him—which we do, and which Enoch did, and even Jesus did, by meditating on God's revealed Word and will. A Christian cannot walk with God unless he is faithful in prayer and diligent in the reading of God's Word.

## Obedience to God

But a third and equally necessary element of walking with God is obedience. The apostle John emphasized that in 1 John 1:6: "If we say we have fellowship with Him

while we walk in darkness, we lie, and do not practice the truth." One cannot walk with God and live in sin.

It is, of course, the case that God's people still sin—even daily. Yes, the best of saints have but a small beginning of true obedience, and such sin hinders our walk with God. Even so, we can still walk with Him, when we confess our sins and receive His forgiveness and seek to abide by His will.

We can be sure that Enoch—who was a sinner, no doubt—needed to confess His sins daily as he walked with God. But as a forgiven sinner he had the desire and will to obey God. The overall pattern of His life was one of pleasing God.

The lesson of Enoch's life for all believers in Christ is that they walk in obedience to God's commands, as we read in 2 John verse 6: "And this is love, that we walk according to His commandments."

How can we walk with God? And how can our walk be closer with Him than what it is? Think of Enoch. Walk by faith, walk in fellowship, and walk in obedience to our covenant Lord.

## Enoch's Reward

Where did Enoch's walk with God lead to? How did it end on earth? The Bible tells us it occurred in a most unusual fashion. After a life of 365 years—which seems incredibly long for us today, but was short for his time—Enoch's earthly journey ended. Genesis 5:24 tells us only: "and he was not, for God took him."

"And he was not" is not very specific. We say of persons who die: "They are no more." And the phrase "God took him," is also one still used today to speak of a person taken by God in death. However, the context of Genesis 5 makes what it says about Enoch distinctly different from what happened to the other ancients

mentioned in the chapter. Of each of them, it is said: "and he died."

There was obviously something very different about the end of Enoch's earthly life. And that difference is made very clear in Hebrews 11:5: "By faith, Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death." In other words, God took Enoch to heaven without his passing through the gates of death. It was, of course, a miracle. For death must take place for sinners to enter the perfection of heaven. It is the way our sinful natures and sin-corrupted bodies are removed.

For Enoch that happened without death. So, we call this "Enoch's translation." It was not only that he was transported to heaven without dying (as Elijah also would experience later). It also means Enoch was instantly perfected and glorified, so he was suitable for his life in heaven. This was God's reward for Enoch's walk with Him—not of Enoch's deserving. Yet, it was a gift to him of God's gracious design, a special blessing of God to this saint of old.

God's children today may not receive such an unusual reward. But our ultimate reward is the same. Those who believe in Christ and walk with God can also anticipate the blessing of being transported into His presence and receiving the gift of perfect life with Him—in soul when we die, in soul and body when Christ returns and our bodies are raised to life immortal.

In the eternal creation, all the saints will walk in perfect joy and fellowship with their God.

**Rev. James Admiraal** is a retired pastor in the URCNA. He served most recently as pastor of Cornerstone URC in Hudsonville, MI. He also served for several years on the board of Reformed Fellowship.

**T**There are a lot of questions swirling around URC circles about the new songbook and the committee's work on the hymnal. The proposed new hymnal is intended to be just that: a new hymnal! We understand that some might wish this to be a replicated Blue Psalter Hymnal. The committee, however, is working from the understanding that this songbook will span more generations by adding some newer songs along with some of the older and well-loved songs. Mainly we are striving to have it be a hymnal that more closely reflects our Reformed creeds and confessions. It will be a songbook in which the Psalm songs more closely reflect the Scripture texts and do not just loosely paraphrase God's Word. Below are some of the most frequently asked questions concerning the hymnal. If you have access to the URCNA website you may have read these Q & A's before. If not, some of your questions concerning the Hymn Proposal may be answered below. To read the complete list of the Q & A's visit URCNA website at [www.urchna.org](http://www.urchna.org)

**Q. It seems that that Hymn Proposal (hereafter, HP) is inconsistent in how it deals with archaic language (for example, "thee" and "thou" changed to "you" and "your"). In some traditional hymns the older language is retained but not in others. Why is that?**

A. The Committee's general policy in dealing with archaic language is to replace as much of it as we can with ordinary, contemporary English. This is in line with Guideline #5,

namely, to sing God's praises using "intelligible" words. We think that using understood, modern language is especially important for our children and young people in our churches. It also helps those who are new to the Christian faith.

However, sometimes older, archaic words are so rooted in a hymn that to change those words would be to lose something of the richness of that hymn. For example, "Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah" would sound very strange if we were to sing, "Guide me, O Great Lord God." In that hymn (HP #176), and a several others like it, we are recommending retaining the traditional text.

In other cases, some lines in some hymns end with a "thee" or "thou" or another more archaic word and are necessary for the rhyming of the next line(s). To change these words would require rewriting an entire line. In those instances we recommend retaining the traditional wording. Some examples are "My Jesus I Love Thee" (HP #207), "Ah, Dearest Jesus, How Hast Thou Offended" (HP #131), etc.

**Q. We notice that the HP has changed some of the notes and the keys in which some hymns are written in the blue Psalter Hymnal (bPH). Why is that?**

A. In many instances, we believe the bPH sets hymns at an unnecessarily high key. We know of many organists and other musicians who typically lower the key when they are playing the hymn in a worship service. So we have adjusted many songs to a lower key. Our preference is that the notes

of a hymn would go no higher than a high D and no lower than the A below middle C.

**Q. Why does the HP include some selections from the bPH psalm section? Isn't this supposed to be a hymn-only proposal?**

A. Many of the psalm-songs found in the bPH do not follow the biblical psalm line-for-line, or even verse-for-verse. Some of them are paraphrases. In our report to Synod 2010 we mentioned how our Committee probably will find other psalm-songs in the bPH to be paraphrases. Rather than omitting a well-known psalm-song altogether, we think some of these can be easily incorporated in the hymn section of the new songbook.

**Q. Why are some children's songs included in the HP?**

A. As a Committee, we believe that young children are part of the worshiping church, and, therefore, we should include songs that children can more easily grasp. Additionally, we would hope that this new songbook will be used at home and in family worship.

**Q. When it's all said and done, for the countless hours and thousands of dollars spent, wouldn't it have been better to let each church choose its own songbook from the several songbooks in print? Or, couldn't each church publish its own supplemental songbook?**

A. It was Synod Hudsonville (1999) that formed our Committee. That synod gave our Committee our mandate to produce a new songbook

for our churches. Ever since that time, synods have upheld and reaffirmed that original decision. Synods have had many opportunities to reverse that decision but they have not. On the contrary, by a strong majority the delegates at our most recent in London, Ontario (2010) specifically approved the publication of a new, official songbook for our churches.

While that should be reason enough, there are other good reasons for publishing an official songbook, instead of having churches printing their own collections of songs. Here's the reasoning found in part of our report to Synod London:

"Please note that when we speak of adopting an 'official songbook,' we are not raising the matter of using additional songbooks, or a supplemental collection of songs. As things currently stand, Article 39 of our Church Order allows for consistories to approve hymns not found in the official Psalter Hymnal. In this section of our report [*to Synod London*] we are simply discussing whether all our churches must have *at least* one songbook as their official songbook, the songbook that all URCNA churches will use in common.

[*About this matter*] we spoke with Dr. Bert Polman of the Calvin Institute for Christian Worship. He concludes that the absence of any formal rationale for an official songbook probably reflects the unspoken assumption among Reformed churches that having an official songbook needed no argumentation. In other words, in the past it was simply assumed that Reformed churches, as well as many other federations, would develop and use an official songbook. Each federation would choose songs representing its own history,

theology, and liturgical principles, and would collect those songs in their official songbook. So we find official songbooks of the Methodist Church and the Lutheran Church and the Presbyterian Church. So also, the Christian Reformed Church always had her own official songbook throughout her entire history. This is simply the way it was, and no rationale for an official songbook was needed.

**Q. Why is the name "Jehovah" replaced by some other name for God in some of the hymns in the HP?**

A. The Songbook Committee, along with the Canadian Reformed "Book of Praise" committee, requested advice about the best rendering of the covenant name of "Yahweh" (YHWH) from several Old Testament (Hebrew) scholars. We received responses from Dr. Cornelis Van Dam of the Theological College of the Canadian Reformed Churches, and from Prof. Mark Vander Hart of Mid-America Reformed Seminary. Both of these scholars encouraged us to avoid the term "Jehovah" as much as possible.

The term "Jehovah" first appears in the medieval church and arises out of a misunderstanding of the Hebrew text. Here's what happened: When reading the Torah, the Hebrew name of God, YHWH, was not pronounced by the Jews, and so when they came across the name, they would automatically say "Adonai" (meaning "Lord") or sometimes "Elohim." Later, when vowel markings were placed under the Hebrew letters, the ancient vocalizers put the vowels of "Adonai" under YHWH in order to remind the reader to say "Adonai." What happened in the medieval context was to take the consonants YHWH of the written text and read this with the vowels of "Adonai"—thus "Jehovah" or the alternate spelling "Iehoua."

This means that "Jehovah" is actually a phonetic corruption of God's name.

Based on the advice of the scholars we consulted, our committee thinks it best to find replacements for "Jehovah" wherever possible. In this we are also following the practice of the "Trinity Hymnal" (1990 edition), the "Book of Praise," and other songbooks used by most confessionally-orthodox Reformed churches.

In conclusion, the Psalter Hymnal committee asks you to bear with us, as the Hymn Proposal is a work in progress. All seven classes of the URCNA submitted communications to the committee by their deadline of October 31, 2011. The committee, which consists of one representative from each URCNA classis, met in a three-day meeting November 1–3, 2011, at Faith United Reformed Church in Holland, Michigan. At this meeting the committee continued their work on the selection of Psalm songs and began the process of revisiting many of the hymns as requested by the seven classes. The committee has reviewed all the communications sent to them by the seven classes and is making many adjustments as requested by the classes to produce a hymnal that reflects the worship of our churches to the praise and glory of our triune God.

**Denise Marcusse** is a member of Faith United Reformed Church in Holland, MI, and a member on the Psalter Hymnal Committee, representing Classis Michigan. She is also an accompanist and choir director, youth leader, and Bible study leader at her church. She has a passion for music and a desire to produce a songbook that will be used for the glory of God for many generations to come.

# Psalter Hymnal Committee Report

**T**he URCNA Psalter Hymnal Committee completed a very productive and comprehensive meeting, working November 1–3 at the facilities of Faith URC in West Olive, Michigan. The Psalter Hymnal Committee (the Committee) worked through more selections of Psalms, tackled communications from the URC classes on the Hymn Proposal (HP), and dealt with many other matters. Here are some highlights from the meeting.

## Psalms

Much of the Committee's work the last several months has consisted of choosing Psalm songs. Resulting from this meeting, the Committee has now chosen psalm renditions up through Psalm 100. The Committee's priority is to choose complete texts that are faithful to the words of Scripture, set to singable, appropriate, and beautiful music. The full text of each Psalm is included at least once in the proposal so far, with some secondary versions being included that contain a partial Psalm text or paraphrased version.

Many sources are being consulted for this work, and in keeping with its mandate to produce a new URCNA psalm/hymnbook (as opposed to merely revising or editing the CRC-copyrighted blue *Psalter Hymnal*), the Committee is drawing from many excellent sources. However, the Committee has been sensitive to especially evaluate the psalms in the blue *Psalter Hymnal*, and has included some of the best as primary or paraphrase versions.

**Hymns.** Thanks to each classis submitting Hymn Proposal communications by the October 31

deadline, the Committee was able to begin the second draft of the HP. After organizing these suggestions, the Committee started working on suggested removals. For example, the Committee concurred with the removal of 21 of the 22 hymns that three or more classes suggested be removed, with the 22nd to be discussed at a later meeting. The Committee is very grateful for the work of the churches and classes on the HP, and is working diligently to ensure proper consideration of each communication.

## Ecumenical Relations

In keeping with its mandate to consult with churches that the URCNA has entered into corresponding relations, the Committee welcomed Rev. Danny Olinger, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church's General Secretary for the Committee on Christian Education, to a portion of the meeting. The OPC's General Assembly has overwhelmingly approved the motion to work with the URCNA on a joint psalm and hymn book. The URCNA Committee is recommending collaboration with the OPC to Synod 2012 for the purpose of a common psalm and hymn book to be used in a wide array of Reformed churches across the world. Rev. Olinger's visit was for informational and relational purposes.

## Copyright and HP update

Now that the second draft of the HP has commenced, the Committee requests that churches discard all of their Hymn Proposals. Songs in the HP that are covered under CCLI license can continue to be used by

churches which have purchased a license.

## Looking Ahead

The Committee continues to work faithfully on the psalms and hymns through online meetings, asynchronous collaboration online, and regular face-to-face meetings. Online meetings (via Skype) take place every three to four weeks, with asynchronous online work taking place in between meetings. The next face-to-face meeting of the Committee is planned for Spring 2012, Lord willing.

For more information on the Psalter Hymnal Committee and its work, visit the FAQ section of the URCNA Psalter Hymnal Committee Public Page at [www.URCNA.org](http://www.URCNA.org)

Submitted by the URCNA Psalter Hymnal Committee:

Rev. Randal Lankheet, Chairman  
(Classis Southern Ontario)

Mrs. Angeline Vanderboom,  
Secretary

Prof. Scott Finch (Classis Western  
Canada)

Rev. Christopher Folkerts (Classis  
Pacific Northwest)

Mrs. Denise Marcusse (Classis  
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Mr. Joel Pearce (Classis Eastern U.S.)

Rev. Derrick Vander Meulen (Classis  
Southwest U.S.)

Mr. Daniel Zylstra (Classis Central  
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**I**n his reflection on the biblical doctrine of man, Bavinck provides an extensive, and at times rather complex, treatment of the doctrine of image of God. Consistent with the Bible's emphasis on the creation of man as the crown and apex of God's work in creating the world, the Bible teaches that what distinguishes man as a creature is his being created in the image of God. While the entire world in its own way exhibits and reflects the glory of its Creator, human beings alone bear God's image. Among all of God's creatures, "only man is the image of God, God's highest and richest self-revelation and consequently the head and crown of the whole creation, the *imago Dei* and the epitome of nature, both *mikrotheos* (microgod) and *mikrokosmos* (microcosm)" (RD 2:531).

Considering the importance of the biblical teaching that man as creature is alone created in God's image, it is rather remarkable that the account of creation in Genesis does not say a great deal about wherein the image of God consists. Throughout the Old Testament, and even in the New Testament, we are not provided with an extensive explanation of the nature of this image. In some passages like Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10, we are indirectly taught that the work of redemption in Christ entails the renewal and restoration of the image, which was broken and marred through the fall into sin. Redemption is a work of re-creation, and therefore a work of restoring and perfecting human beings in the image of God. But the Scriptures never give us a single, fulsome definition of the image of God.

Before addressing directly the nature of the image of God, particularly within the framework of the history of doctrine, Bavinck offers a few comments on the language of "image" and "likeness" in Genesis 1:26. Though some theologians and traditions draw a sharp distinction between these two terms, Bavinck argues that there "is no essential distinction to be made between them" (RD 2:532). If there is a slight difference in emphasis between these two terms, "image" refers to the idea of man as an "ectype" in relation to God who is the "prototype." Man bears God's image as a being that corresponds in some way to God, who is the original model or prototype against whom his nature and being is to be measured. The term "likeness" is a more fluid and less substantial term, suggesting

that man bears some similarities to God his Creator. Both terms together teach us that man alone among all of God's creatures bears a striking resemblance and correspondence to God in whose image he has been created.

While the Scriptures are rather reserved in their explanation of the way man bears God's image, there are, in Bavinck's estimation, at least three broad emphases in the scriptural data on the image of God.

First, the terms "image" and "likeness" do not refer to anything in God himself, but to something that is in humankind. When the Bible speaks of man as an image bearer of God, it is not referring to some particular aspect in God that is properly his "image" or "likeness" and to which man corresponds. For example, when man is described as God's image bearer, the image refers to all the ways in which man resembles the triune God in all his attributes and perfections. We are not to think, therefore, that man bears God's image merely in resembling the eternal Son of God. Rather, man was created, as the Genesis account's use of the plural "us" intimates, after the image and likeness of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

Second, the biblical descriptions of the image of God, limited though they may be, do not refer narrowly to some particular feature of man's nature that bears a resemblance to God as the original prototype. No such restrictions on the way man bears God's image are evident in the

scriptural testimony. Because no such restriction exists in the comparison or likeness that the Scripture draws between God and man whom he has created in his image, the scriptural view implies that “the whole human person is the image of the whole Deity” (RD 2:533). In every legitimate aspect of human life, we may discern some or another way in which man uniquely resembles God and exhibits his likeness. In the scriptural representation of the image of God, we are taught that man *is* an image bearer of God in the totality of his being, nature, and calling. Whether in the exercise of dominion over the creation under God, or in the active conformity of man to the holy will of God—in the fullness of his nature and calling, man bears the image and likeness of God.

And third, Bavinck notes that the Bible teaches that the Son of God in his incarnate life and ministry especially reveals to us what it is to bear the image of God. For this reason, the redemption of God’s people through Christ aims to conform them wholly to the image of the Son (Rom. 8:29). The absence of scriptural definitions of the image of God does not leave us in the dark so far as the meaning of the image is concerned. When believers ultimately see God in the state of consummation, they know that they will be “like” him, for they shall see him as he is (1 John 3:3). In union with Christ, such believers will have been wholly conformed in body and soul to the likeness of Jesus Christ.

### **Defining the Image**

In the history of Christian theology, a variety of different definitions of the image of God have been offered. Some theologians identified the image of God with man’s freedom of will or ability to conform or not



conform to God’s moral will. Others stressed features of human nature such as human rationality. Still others emphasized man’s dominion over the creation as the distinguishing feature of human life in relation to God and other creatures.

In his review of the history of reflection on the image of God, Bavinck identifies two broad types of definitions of the image of God that emerged in the period prior to the Reformation. Both of these types of views proceed from the conviction that a sharp distinction needs to be drawn between the terms “image” and “likeness” of God.

The first example of this type of viewpoint, which Bavinck terms “naturalism,” argues that God created man after his image, that is, “as a rational being, in order that man himself would acquire likeness with God in the way of obedience and receive it in the end as his reward from God’s hand” (RD 2:534). This view, which was taught, for example, by Pelagius in the early church and the Socinians at the time of the Reformation, claims that man’s original state was a kind of childlike state of innocence and moral indifference. Only as human beings exercise their free wills and rational faculties in a way that conforms to the moral law of God do they eventually come to bear a “likeness” to God. Bavinck terms this view “naturalistic” because it assumes that man has the native ability to move from an original natural state as an image bearer of God to a higher state of moral and rational excellence in which he comes to bear a likeness to God.

In all the various expressions of this naturalistic type of viewpoint, including even evolutionary naturalism, Bavinck argues, the Scriptures’ teaching that man was originally created in a state of excellence and moral integrity is compromised. The Bible’s teaching is

that man was created in the image and likeness of God, in a state of moral integrity in which he was able to please God and resist the temptation to disobey God. The naturalistic view of the image and likeness of God, therefore, denies the biblical distinction between man's original state of integrity and his subsequent loss of original righteousness through the fall and disobedience of Adam.

The second example of this type of viewpoint, which Bavinck terms "Roman Catholic supernaturalism," also distinguishes between the "image" and "likeness" of God. In the Roman Catholic tradition, a distinction is drawn between man's *natural* state as a rational and moral creature who was created in the image of God, and man's *supernatural* state as a glorified and ethically perfected creature whose final destiny is to enjoy likeness to God. Before the fall into sin through Adam, man as a natural creature first possessed the image of God, and then by the "superadded gift" of "original righteousness" also was granted a "likeness to God." After the fall into sin, man continued to possess the image of God as a natural creature, but no longer retained the "likeness" to God that was originally granted as a "superadded gift." In this scheme, fallen man retains the natural image of God in an unimpaired and uncorrupted condition. Man's natural constitution as a moral and rational creature, though burdened with a natural propensity to give in to the lower fleshly passions (concupiscence), remains intact despite the fall into sin. However, having lost through sin the superadded gift of original righteousness, man can now only regain the "likeness" to God that he once possessed by cooperating freely with the grace of God.

In Bavinck's evaluation of Roman Catholic supernaturalism, he identifies several unbiblical features of this view.

First, the Roman Catholic view implies that God's supernatural grace was required even before the fall into sin to elevate man above his natural condition as an image bearer of God to the higher state of likeness to God. In the biblical representation of the fall into sin, however, we find that man was originally created in the image and likeness of God and did not yet require God's grace in order to be elevated to a higher state of blessedness in fellowship with God. Though perfect obedience on the part of Adam in the pre-fall covenant relationship was the required condition for the fullness of human blessedness, Adam was created holy and able to obey God, which obedience did not require a superadded gift of elevating grace.

Second, in the Roman Catholic doctrine of supernaturalism, God's grace after the fall is not a "restorative" or "reparative" and "perfecting" grace, so much as it (even as it was before the fall into sin) an "elevating" grace, which raises man from a lower, natural state of being in the image of God to a higher, supernatural state of being in the likeness of God. The grace of God in this conception remains what it was before the fall into sin: a superadded divine gift that raises man from a natural to a supernatural state.

Hence, according to Rome, grace is a supernatural gift as such and not incidentally (*per accidens*), not only because of sin. Sin has not in any way changed the nature of grace. Perhaps grace has been increased by sin; but both before and after the fall it was identically the same, namely, an *elevation* [of man] *above nature*. That is its character and essence. Christianity, accordingly, may also

still be a religion of redemption; but preeminently it is not a *reparation* but an *elevation* of nature; it serves to elevate nature above itself, that is, to divinize humanity (RD 2:547).

And third, the Roman Catholic doctrine diminishes the significance of the fall into sin and its consequent corruption of human nature. Because fallen man continues to possess the image of God and retains the proper use of the faculties of free will and intellect, he is able to "cooperate" with the elevating grace of God and thereby properly merit salvation and eternal life. Rather than the fall into sin pervasively corrupting man and all his natural faculties, the fall only resulted in the loss of certain supernatural gifts that are regained in redemption. Thus, in the Roman Catholic doctrine of the image of God, fallen human beings retain the power and ability to cooperate freely with God's elevating grace in order to merit and obtain the glory of likeness to God. Just as Adam was able to merit blessedness in communion with God by cooperating with God's elevating grace, so believers are able to merit blessedness after the fall by cooperating with God's grace. In this way, the biblical distinction between the pre-fall covenant of works and the post-fall covenant of grace is obliterated. Salvation, whether before or after the fall into sin, comes when human beings, cooperating with God's grace, truly merit the blessedness of a higher, supernatural state in fellowship with God.

### **The Reformation View of the Image**

In the Reformation view of the image of God, Bavinck observes that the Roman Catholic distinction between man's natural state and supernatural state is rejected. Contrary to the idea that man as an image bearer of God before the fall into sin needs

**...it is a sovereign and unmerited grace in Jesus Christ, whose work of redemption restores believers to favor with God and renews and perfects them in holiness.**

a “superadded gift” of original righteousness to possess a “likeness” to God, the Reformation taught that man was created from the beginning in the image and likeness of God, and that his original righteousness was an integral feature of his humanity in the state of integrity. The Roman Catholic *dualism* between man as a natural image bearer of God and as a supernatural likeness to God is in principle rejected. Furthermore, the Roman Catholic insistence that God’s grace is an “elevating” grace, which raises man from a natural to a supernatural state by virtue of his free cooperation with God’s grace, is also repudiated. For the Reformation, the grace of God is a grace that, after the fall into sin, restores and perfects believers for fellowship with God. Such grace does not enable human beings to merit the blessing of salvation. Rather, it is a sovereign and unmerited grace in Jesus Christ, whose work of redemption restores believers to favor with God and renews and perfects them in holiness.

One of the principal objections of the Reformation to the Roman Catholic doctrine of the image of God was its failure to reckon with the serious consequences of the fall into sin. In the Roman Catholic scheme, man retains his integrity after the fall as an image bearer of God. As a natural being, man remains able to exercise his will and intellect within the natural realm of life without any need for God’s grace in restoration and renewal. Within the natural sphere and common things of life, human beings are able to perform their duties and carry on with the ordinary affairs of natural life rather well.

Contrary to this benign view of the consequences of the fall into sin, the Reformation taught the radical corruption of human life and the frightful deformation of the image of God in fallen human beings. Though Reformed theologians generally retained a distinction between the image of God in a broader sense (fallen human beings remain human and continue to possess many excellent faculties by God’s preserving grace) and in a narrower sense (believers are being restored after God’s image in true knowledge, righteousness, and holiness, in conformity to God’s will), they taught the radical and pervasive corruption of all human beings after the fall. For the Reformers, the grace of God in Jesus Christ is a sovereign and restorative grace that restores believers to fellowship with God and perfects them in the righteousness and blessedness that was lost through the fall into sin. In Bavinck’s words, the Reformation view taught that the image of God, that is, original righteousness, was inseparable from the idea of man as such and that it referred to the normal state, the harmony, the health of a human being; that without it a human cannot be true, complete, or normal. When man loses that image of God, he does not simply lose a substance while remaining fully human. Rather, he becomes an abnormal, a sick, a spiritually dead human being, a sinner. He then lacks something that belonged to his nature, just as a blind man loses his sight, a deaf man his hearing, and a sick man his health. In Rome’s view a human being can lose the “supernatural righteousness” and

still be a good, true, complete, sinless human, with a natural justice that in its kind is without any defect (RD 2:551).

In the course of his summary of the Reformation view of the image of God, Bavinck makes an important observation about a subtle difference that emerged between Reformed and Lutheran theology on this question. In Lutheran theology, a feature of the older Roman Catholic dualism between man’s existence as a natural and a supernatural being was retained. According to Lutheran teaching, the image of God—original righteousness—is completely lost through sin, and is only restored through the grace of redemption in Christ. No distinction is drawn between the image of God in a broader and a narrower sense. Moreover, in the Lutheran view, fallen sinners who have lost the image of God are still able to “do much good” in a natural sense and within the natural kingdom (RD 2:554). Though Lutheran theology denies the possibility of fallen human beings performing any spiritual good, it does allow for a considerable ability on the part of fallen human beings to perform much natural good without the restoring and renewing work of God’s grace. The importance of Bavinck’s discussion of this difference between Lutheran and Reformed theology at this point, warrants quoting him at some length.

In this [Lutheran] theology the lines of demarcation between the spiritual and the worldly, between the heavenly and the earthly, are so sharply drawn that the result is two hemispheres, and the connection between nature and grace, between creation and re-creation is totally denied. The supernaturalist [or dualist] view is still at work here; the image of God stands alongside

nature, is detached from it, and is above it. The loss of the image, which renders man totally deaf and blind in spiritual matters, still enables him in earthly matters to do much good and in a sense renders him independent from the grace of God in Christ . . . [In Reformed theology] sin, which precipitated the loss of the image of God in the narrower sense and spoiled and ruined the image of God in the broader sense, has profoundly affected the whole person, so that, consequently, also the grace of God in Christ restores the whole person, and is of the greatest significance for his or her whole life and labor, also in the family, society, the state, art, science, and so forth (RD 2:553–4).<sup>1</sup>

## Conclusion

Bavinck concludes his treatment of the doctrine of the image of God by returning to a point made at the outset. Human beings do not “have” or merely “bear” the image and likeness of God. Rather, human beings were created to *be* the children of God who exhibit in their entire existence and life the image and likeness of God. The image and likeness of God, therefore, must extend to the “whole person.” No legitimate feature of human existence and life as created by God can be arbitrarily excluded from what it means to bear God’s image.

While all creatures display *vestiges* of God, only a human being is the *image* of God. And he is such totally, in soul and body, in all his faculties and powers, in all conditions and relations. Man is the image of God because and insofar as he is truly human, and he is truly and essentially human because, and to the extent that, he is the image of God (RD 2:555).

In his elaboration on this point, Bavinck discusses several features of human existence and life that together exhibit the image and likeness of God. These features include, most notably: the human soul (or psyche);

the human faculties (emotions and passions, desire and will, thinking and knowing); the virtues of knowledge, righteousness, and holiness in conformity to God’s law; and even the human body. In each and every feature of human life in its integrity and wholeness, as well as in its complexity and diverseness, human beings are the image and likeness of God. And since redemption entails nothing less than the restoration and perfection of the whole of human life in communion with God, all of these features of human life will ultimately be perfected in the fullness of God’s kingdom.

Since Bavinck closes his treatment of the image of God with a beautiful and lyrical summary of his position, I will close by quoting him at length:

Thus man forms a unity of the material and spiritual world, a mirror of the universe, a connecting link, compendium, the epitome of all nature, a microcosm, and, precisely on that account, also the image and likeness of God, his son and heir, a micro-divine-being (*mikrotheos*). He is the prophet who explains God and proclaims his excellencies; he is the priest who consecrates himself with all that is created to God as a holy offering; he is the king who guides and governs all things in justice and rectitude. And in all this he points to One who in a still higher and richer sense is the revelation and image of God, to him who is the only begotten of the Father, and the firstborn of all creatures. Adam, the son of God, was a type of Christ (RD 2:562).

1. Though it is anachronistic to put it this way, Bavinck offers in his criticism of the Lutheran view of the image of God an insightful assessment of what today is sometimes called the “two kingdom/natural law” view. Bavinck’s point is that, just as sin pervasively corrupts all of human life “before God,” so God’s grace in Christ restores and perfects *all of human life under Christ’s lordship*. To be restored and perfected as an image bearer of God is not to be elevated to a higher plane of supernatural life and existence, but to be perfected in the fullness of natural (that is, creaturely) human life in communion with God.

**Dr. Cornelis Venema** is the President of Mid-America Reformed Seminary in Dyer, Indiana. He is also a contributing editor to *The Outlook*.

## NAPARC Report

by Rev. John Bouwers, Jordan, Ontario, with Rev. Harry Zekveld, Strathroy, Ontario

### November 2011

The 37th annual meeting of the North American Presbyterian Reformed Council (NAPARC) was held on November 15–16 in Atlanta, Georgia in the Mission to the World (MTW) building of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). About an hour before our meeting was scheduled to adjourn on Wednesday, we were forced to take a break and move to the center of the building for safety. It wasn't long before the tornado warnings were lifted, so that we were able to finish our meeting together in a spirit, not of turbulence, but of great harmony and fellowship.

A significant portion of every NAPARC meeting is spent calling each denomination or federation to present a report on the well-being and activities of its synod and congregations. Opportunity is given to the delegates from the other churches to ask questions, offer encouragement and/or advice, and also to voice challenges. Prayer is then offered in turn for each denomination. This year also we enjoyed a rich time of hearing about the work of the Lord in and through each of the denominations, including joys and hardships, both at home and on the mission field. We were thankful to hear of abundant blessing on Reformed mission work being done in places like China, Pakistan, Sudan, Uganda, and Ethiopia. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church appealed to the member churches



of NAPARC for help in providing missionaries for its Uganda mission. The Korean American Presbyterian Church informed all the NAPARC churches of the actions taken at its 2011 General Assembly to warn its churches of two harmful charismatic movements, namely, the *International House of Prayer* (IHOP) and the *New Apostolic Reformation*, which “promote religious practices and convictions that are not consistent with the teachings of our church’s confession and therefore it is not fit for our church members or ministers to participate in or collaborate with them.” The delegates from the Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America informed NAPARC of a report on homosexuality adopted by its 2011 Synod. The report is excellent both with respect to biblical accuracy and pastoral wisdom and is being made available to all the churches. Our prayer is that the Lord will use this forum for reporting to help our Presbyterian and Reformed churches in North America grow in faithfulness to the Lord and His Word.

This year the meetings of NAPARC were particularly significant and blessed in that we were challenged to give concerted attention to the commitment the member churches make in the constitution and basis of NAPARC, namely that the respective federations ought to “hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.” The churches were asked to affirm their agreement in principle that this should remain a basic objective of NAPARC. While a few of the bodies represented expressed some misgivings about the

practicality of working towards such an objective immediately, all of the delegations affirmed their agreement with the concept in principle. That we have a calling to pursue the fullest unity possible with each other should indeed remain a principal focus of NAPARC.

As part of the proceedings we heard two excellent speeches. The first, by Dr. L. Roy Taylor, Stated Clerk of the PCA (the body that hosted the event this year), was entitled “A Reformed Perspective on the Catholicity of the Church and Church Union” and the other on the same basic topic by our own Dr. Robert Godfrey was called “A Reformed Dream.” In this engaging speech, Dr. Godfrey developed the theme of an article he had written over ten years ago where he had proposed a large General Assembly of Churches that might bring together all of the churches of NAPARC under one ecclesiastical umbrella. The proposal is both bold and modest at the same time. It is bold in that, as Dr. Godfrey envisions, it would allow for a fairly rapid coming together of confessionally Reformed and Presbyterian Churches in one ecclesiastical arrangement. It is also modest in that it would not require any body to give up its distinctives. The idea would be that each body (for example, the URC, the OPC, the RPCNA, the CanRC, etc.) would continue, at least at first, to function with their own synods and distinctives. The hope and encouragement would be that this would allow for more cooperation, such that over time even greater and greater unity might one day be achieved under the blessing of God. No individual group of churches within the broader assembly would be compelled, however, to give up its particular distinctives.

The proposal was met with much appreciation by the delegates. A motion was made and adopted to refer this matter for further study to

the NAPARC Committee of Review for reporting at the next meeting of NAPARC. Any forthcoming recommendations would first have to be approved by NAPARC and then brought to the synods of each of the twelve member churches of NAPARC.

NAPARC is comprised of twelve member bodies: the Associate Reformed Presbyterian Church (ARP), Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), l’Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ), Free Reformed Churches (FRC), Heritage Reformed Congregations (HRC), Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), Presbyterian Church in America (PCA), Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC), Reformed Church of the United States (RCUS), Reformed Presbyterian Church in North America (RPCNA), and our own United Reformed Churches in North America (URCNA).

Our United Reformed churches will host the next meeting at Mid-America Reformed Seminary in November of next year, Lord willing.

While in Atlanta, our URC Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity (CERCUC) also enjoyed meetings among ourselves and with the committees of five other federations before, during and after the meetings of NAPARC. Our meetings with the CanRC, the RPCNA, the HRC, the OPC and the FRC were all good meetings in helping us to continue to work together at the challenges and opportunities of moving forward in our relationships with these churches. Eight of our own URC representatives were present from all over North America so we had opportunity to renew fellowship and to come to know and appreciate one another better. So much of what we do in the realm of ecumenicity is about making, maintaining, and building on our relationships with each other. It was a great blessing to

be able again to reflect on the unity we do have, to give thanks for the change and reconciliation the Lord is working with His Word and Spirit, and to come to enjoy that unity more and more deeply. It is our prayer that the Lord will continue to allow that unity to come to greater and greater expression in more visible and concrete ways.

More information about NAPARC can be found on the NAPARC website at [www.naparc.org](http://www.naparc.org).

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## **NAPARC: Something to Get Enthused About?**

by Rev. William Pols, Edmonton, Alberta

**November 2011**

CERCUC/NAPARC: How many people who read these initials in the bulletin even knew what they stand for? Probably not many, right? Many of you probably thought, “The minister is going away on supposedly important business, but we really don’t know what he is doing.” Especially when it comes to “ecumenical relations,” this is often perceived as something that ministers are involved in, but it hardly gains the enthusiasm, or perhaps even the interest, of most members of the congregation.

Both CERCUC and NAPARC have to do with issues of unity with other denominations. CERCUC is the URC’s “Committee for Ecumenical Relations and Church Unity.” NAPARC is an organization that has been in existence for 35 years. The initials stand for “North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council.” It is not a denomination, but a broad organization to which many denominations belong. These include denominations with which we have close sister church relations, such as the Canadian Reformed Churches (CanRC), the Orthodox

Presbyterian Church (OPC), the Reformed Churches in the United States (RCUS), and l’Eglise Reformee du Quebec (ERQ). Other member denominations of NAPARC are the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA—of which Crestwood Presbyterian Church is a member), the Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America (RPCNA), the Presbyterian Reformed Church (PRC), the Heritage Reformed Congregation (HRC—to which Dr. Joel Beeke belongs), the Free Reformed Church (FRC—whose mission work to the Achi Indian Missions we have supported so long), the Korean American Presbyterian Church (KAPC), and the Associate Presbyterian Church (ARP). We have what is called “phase 1” relations with these other churches.

Observers to NAPARC included representatives from the Korean Presbyterian Church in America, the Protestant Reformed Churches, and the Bible Presbyterian Church. (The two last mentioned both have congregations here in Edmonton).

It may interest many of you to know that the Christian Reformed Church also used to belong to NAPARC, but was expelled some years ago because of its views of Scripture, particularly in the matter of ordaining women to the offices of minister and elder. This shows that NAPARC is not such a loose organization as to include any churches or even all who profess to hold to the Reformed or Presbyterian confessions.

So why does the minister go to NAPARC or even serve on the CERCU for that matter? The reasons are important. Some weeks ago, we considered the need to show love for one another in the form of humble service as taught in John 13 and Philippians 2. This obligation is not only ours as individual believers; it also has to do with who we are as a church and how we relate to other churches.

The body of Christ is very large, and we need to honor that, rejoice in that, and show it in our attitudes and actions. Purposes of NAPARC, according to its constitution are to:

*advise, counsel, and cooperate in various matters with one another and hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice.*

These purposes were pursued and demonstrated in a wonderful way in Atlanta, Georgia on November 14–16. On Tuesday afternoon, delegates from each denomination reported on their respective churches. Missionary endeavors, relations with other churches, positive growth or successes, as well as challenges and weaknesses were shared. After each report, a delegate from another denomination led all the brothers in prayer for their sister churches. This was a wonderful time of fellowship and a powerful expression of the unity we have in the faith.

The purpose of NAPARC to *hold out before each other the desirability and need for organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice* received special attention at this meeting. Organic union means full union as in one federation. In a discussion of this purpose of NAPARC, the delegates of some churches expressed some misgivings about this as a priority. However, all the churches affirmed the value of this statement in our constitution.

A highlight of the NAPARC meeting was an address by Dr. Robert Godfrey, President of Westminster Theological Seminary (and URC minister). Dr. Godfrey challenged the member churches of NAPARC with “A Reformed Dream” he had published already about ten years ago. This dream is of a united Presbyterian and Reformed church federation, made up of multiple denominations

holding to the Reformed confessions under one uniting organizational structure. In such an organization, the federations or synods that make up its membership would be able to maintain their respective church orders and government, without interference by the broader uniting assembly or synod. Yet such an umbrella structure would serve as a testimony to the world of our unity, and provide meaningful assistance and cooperation among the churches. It would also exercise real ecclesiastical authority, at the least in receiving or rescinding the membership of churches on the basis of their adherence to the Reformed Confessions.

Without dissent, a motion was approved to give Dr. Godfrey’s proposal to an existing committee of NAPARC (Committee of Review) for further consideration in order to come with recommendations at the next NAPARC meeting.

Is this something to get excited about—or at least enthused about? Brothers and sisters, let me assure you that if you had been present at this meeting, you would likely think so. It is not possible for all the members of the congregation to experience what ministers and elders often share in the efforts and enjoyments of true, biblical unity with other churches of the same faith. To a certain extent, we ask you to “take our word for it” that this is powerful and important to care about. The reason I am reporting this to you is an attempt to convey something of that importance and to enlist your interest, prayers, and support for such ongoing efforts. Be sure that the pursuit and practice of true unity in the faith is pleasing to the Lord and honoring to His Name.

What else happened at the NAPARC meeting? Here is where CERCU comes in. Not only were our URC delegates (Revs. R. Pontier, J.

Bouwers, B. Boekenstein, and myself) members of CERCU, most of the committee members were present there in Georgia (Revs. T. De Rooy, H. Zekveld, G. Bero, and elder Al Vermeer). This served two purposes. First, it allowed us to meet formally as a committee together while we were there on a few occasions. Second, it provided a convenient place for CERCU to meet separately with the respective ecumenical committees of these other member denominations. Such separate meetings were held with the RPCNA, the CanRC, the FRC, the HNC, and the OPC. In each case, meaningful discussions were held, and in many instances, further plans were made for positive steps toward greater cooperation and unity.

Especially encouraging were our meetings the brothers from the Heritage Reformed Congregations and the Canadian Reformed Churches. As some of you know, the Heritage Reformed Congregations are churches that left the Netherlands Reformed Congregations years ago. This was largely over the fact that one of their leading ministers, Dr. Joel Beeke, was judged to be too free in his gospel preaching. In other words, he was breaking out of the hyper-Calvinism that has characterized the Netherlands Reformed Churches. These brothers showed a tremendously positive and brotherly spirit in affirming their desires to grow closer together.

Also remarkable were our meetings (two) with representatives of the Canadian Reformed Churches. It is incumbent on us to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in the great progress that has been made over the past fifteen years or so in our relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches. It was especially moving to hear one of their senior ministers testify to the great changes that had occurred in his thinking over the years about church unity. He came

to see how the Holy Spirit has been, and is working in churches in ways he didn't fully appreciate previously. For those of you who remember or were involved in controversies in the CanRC over Rev. Sam DeBruin's views of the church, it is significant that the above-mentioned minister expressed changes in his thinking since then, and remarked that if DeBruin knew what was happening now, he would be amazed.

In conclusion, let me share (and develop a bit) a few more ideas that Dr. Godfrey addressed in his speech. He explained that the existence of denominations in itself involves a testimony to a broader spiritual unity of the church. In the history of the church up to the time of the Reformation, the universal view was that there could be only one true organized church. But an assumption underlying the existence of denominations is that the church is not limited to one such denomination. (For example, our identity as United Reformed Churches does not involve the claim that we are the only true churches). Building on this, Dr. Godfrey also suggested that the only truly valid reason for existing as separate denominations is the judgment that other denominations are not faithful in some important area. To state it differently, we regard those other denominations to be under our "discipline" in the sense that our posture towards them is one of critical admonition, and limited or no fellowship. We have not "excommunicated" them (ultimate discipline) as false churches, but we are in such a relationship of discipline (pen-ultimate discipline) that we justify our separation from them on this basis.

If this is the case, we have to be sure that the reasons for such separation (or discipline) are indeed of a serious nature. For example, we cannot be joined with Baptists in organic unity

because they fail to honor God's covenant and baptize their children. But what about those churches that differ over minor matters of certain emphasis, historical distinctives, or traditional practices? If we seriously subscribe to the same Reformed or Presbyterian confessions, what are the grounds for continuing our "discipline" toward them?

These observations served as Dr. Godfrey's introduction to his "Reformed Dream" proposal. They serve also to provide a good argument in favor of seeing any kind of umbrella structure uniting different Reformed and Presbyterian denominations only as a means to a greater end. Indeed the real goal of such progress in ecumenical organization should be *organic union of churches that are of like faith and practice*.

Brothers and sisters, our sincere desires, prayers, and efforts should be for a growing, broad union of churches of like faith and practice. Give thought to the significance of our membership in NAPARC. This is something for which to celebrate and be thankful to God.

As to our current situation as a congregation, and as a member church of the URCNA, we should be especially interested and eager for organic union with those churches that are already closest to us in faith, practice, and proximity. Tremendous progress has been made over the years toward union with the Canadian Reformed Churches in particular. There are challenges in the way, and the process may yet be long. But let us be willing, eager, prayerful participants in the process.

One of the characteristics of true humility and love among Christians is to "esteem others better than ourselves." If we were to show such humility and love as churches in relationship to other churches, this would go a long way towards the

growing realization of our Lord's prayer "That they all may be one . . . that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21).

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## Western Ministers Conference Report

by Rev. Ralph A. Pontier

### November 2011

Over sixty participants attended the annual Western Ministers' Conference held this year from Tuesday through Thursday, November 1–3. The venue, for the third year in a row, was the Cedar Springs Christian Retreat Center in Sumas, Washington, an accommodating and restful setting resplendent with fall color against the back drop of snow-capped Mt. Baker (see photos at [www.portraitsoffaitth2.blogspot.com](http://www.portraitsoffaitth2.blogspot.com)). Attendees included twenty Canadian Reformed ministers and thirteen United Reformed ministers. Most ministers brought their wives and with the wives came a few newborn infants.

The main speaker was Rev. Alan Strange of Mid-America Reformed Seminary who spoke four times on the "Privilege of Ministry" looking at the "Privilege of Pardon," the "Privilege of Preaching," the "Privilege of Prayer" and the "Privilege of Pastoring."

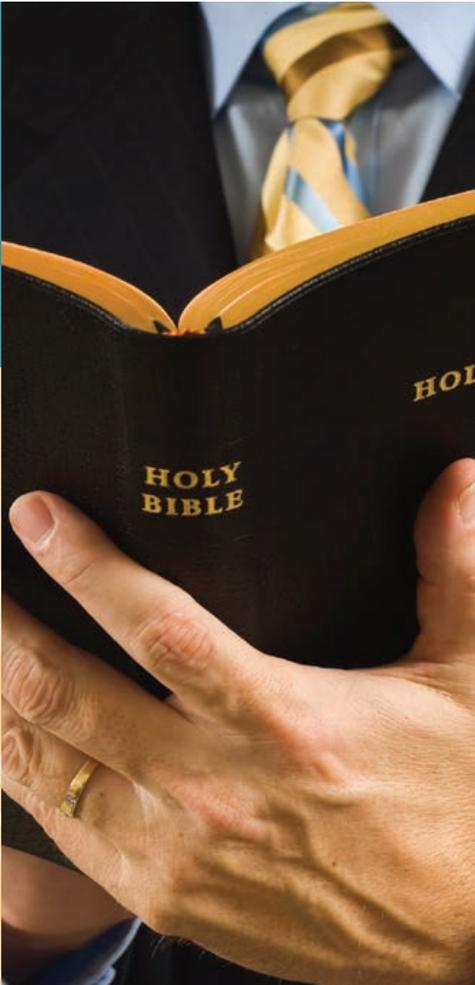
On Tuesday evening he focused on the privilege of pardon, a blessing enjoyed by all Christians. Rev. Strange looked at 1 Timothy 1:12–17 and the description the apostle Paul gives of himself both apart from the grace of God, "the foremost of sinners" and as a recipient of the overflowing grace of God, "one who had received mercy." Without a profound awareness of our nature apart from Christ, we will never fully appreciate who we are in Christ, for those who have been forgiven little, love little. He went on to show how Paul breaks forth into doxology in that text at the thought of

how undeserving he was of the grace that had been given him.

On Wednesday morning, Rev. Strange led the group in an examination of 1 Thessalonians 2:1–17, which describes how the Thessalonians received the preaching of Paul and others, "not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God which is at work in you who believe." He emphasized the need to truly honor preaching as the God ordained means of spiritual growth; to see it as a divine act where God gives a mouth to the preacher and ears to the hearers and works by the Spirit to create and strengthen faith. He emphasized the importance of the preacher's life as that which demonstrates the truth of what he preaches. Paul's preaching was palatable to his people because he lived what he preached. He lived as a sinner saved by grace. The congregation must see Christ in the life of the preacher. Godliness does not validate the minister, but God's people are more apt to receive the word of God from a man who lives

a godly life. That does not mean that the minister does not sin, but that the congregation sees him fighting against sin.

Later Wednesday morning, Rev. Strange spoke on the privilege of prayer using Acts 6:1–4 as his text. The apostles' desire to be released from waiting on tables was not due to arrogance but to an awareness of the importance of prayer and the ministry of the Word. He described prayer as communion with the living God, which is a remarkable thing, that we, who are among the chief of sinners, have communion and fellowship with the holy God. He is too pure to look on sin. But we are in vital union with the living God through the Holy Spirit. We have the Spirit as a life-giving Spirit in a way not known before Pentecost, giving us full and free access to God, not just once a year through the high priest on the Day of Atonement. The Holy Spirit makes us abide in Christ and intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. God loves the prayers of



## Dutton United Reformed Church, Caledonia, Michigan, is seeking a full-time pastor.

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e-mail: [office@duttonurc.org](mailto:office@duttonurc.org)

His saints because they come to Him through Christ.

Rev. Strange said that prayer is what drives all the other means of grace. If the Spirit does not make effectual the means of grace, then nothing happens. Grace does not work automatically or mechanically, by going through certain motions or rituals. He described Calvin as the theologian of the Holy Spirit who showed how the Spirit makes real in our lives the work of Christ. Prayer is what we need to get things moving. We need to be people of prayer as we have not been. We need to pray, asking God to help us to want to pray and know what to pray for. If you do not feel like praying, you should pray that you will want to pray, and that you will see the need to pray.

On Wednesday evening, Rev. Strange spoke for the last time on the privilege of pastoring. He used John 13:1–20 as his text, which describes Jesus washing the feet of His disciples. Christ washing His disciples feet was emblematic of His whole life of humility, in which He took the form of a servant even unto death on the cross (Philippians 2:7–8). Likewise we are called to serve one another, and the whole range service that Christians are called to do for one another is a type of foot washing. We are to humble ourselves and wash the disciples' feet by ministering to the needs of the saints. We are to love the saints in words and actions. Love the saints, accepting them just the way they are, the way a husband loves his wife with an unconditional love, not a conditional love. Such a love sanctifies the wife and makes her beautiful. If a pastor communicates to the congregation, "I'll love you when you become better," the people will think that is the way God loves them. If we don't practice and demonstrate unconditional love, we deny election, which is unconditional love.

On Thursday morning, Christine van Halen-Faber, Ph.D., Principal and Dean of Students at Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College, spoke on the topic, "Teaching and Reaching: Pastor as Pedagogue." She lectured on the importance of the role of the pastor as catechism teacher. Classroom time is an important opportunity to pastor members of the church. Most pastors do not go into the ministry because they want to be catechism teachers, but they should welcome the opportunity for pastoral interaction with a significant segment of the congregation. She emphasized the need for catechism teachers to get to know their students and take an interest in all the various aspects of their lives. Teachers should also take note of the way the students learn. Some are visual learners (learn by seeing), some auditory learners (learn by hearing), and some kinesthetic learners (learn by doing). Those who doodle or who can't sit still may be kinesthetic learners, and they should not be prevented from doodling, for it may stop them from learning. Teachers should utilize the fact that attention is the greatest in the first ten minutes and the last few minutes (which is also true for many sermon listeners). She warned against successive reading of verses or paragraphs of the text of the lesson since students only pay attention to the section they have to read and do not listen to what others are reading. She discouraged the use of written tests in catechism because it makes it too much like school, and those who do poorly are tempted to think that they have no faith. She recommended an article in the July 27, 2011 *Christian Renewal* by Rev. Kevin De Jong, "The Secret of Reaching the Next Generation." De Jong advocates: "Grab them with passion, win them with love, hold them with holiness, challenge them with truth, and amaze them with God."

On Thursday afternoon, she took some time to speak of her childhood, growing up in the manse. She is the oldest child of Dr. Jelle Faber. Dr. Faber pastored Reformed congregations in Deventer and Schiebroek-Hillegersberg-Centrum, the Netherlands, from 1952–1969. He then served as Professor of Dogmatology and Principal at the Hamilton Theological College (now seminary) from 1969–1989.

One hour on Thursday morning was devoted to a book talk where several ministers gave a brief recommendation of a book they had read recently. The wives met separately for their own book talk. There was also an hour on Wednesday afternoon devoted to helping about a dozen ministers who own a Bible program—called Logos 4—learn how to use the program more effectively for Bible study and sermon preparation.

The best feature of the conference was the time together. Warm fellowship among like-minded colleagues in ministry is a great encouragement. There was also a half hour before breakfast on Wednesday and Thursday where about half the men met to pray for one another. Canadian Reformed and United Reformed experienced the reality that we are one in Christ and that we are all committed to bringing the same Reformed faith to a needy world around us.

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## **Classis Eastern U.S.**

UNITED REFORMED CHURCHES  
IN NORTH AMERICA

Office of the Stated Clerk

### **Summary Report for October 18–19, 2011 Meeting**

With God's help, Classis Eastern United States has made good on its pledge to work for more intimate relationships between churches that are geographically distant. A visible monument marking our desire for

greater unity was the second annual pre-classical education conference, *Semper Reformanda* (always reforming). These conferences serve as an opportunity for delegates, members, and other guests of the Eastern churches to learn together how to carry out the task of shepherding in the church of Jesus Christ.

Warming up with a panel of several pastors from the Classis (Rev. Kuiken, Rev. Eenigenburg, and Rev. Boekestein), the event began with discussion on practical ways to facilitate church growth. The delegates weighed different opportunities for developing a welcoming worship environment and as well as a practical approach that makes the most of our efforts in local evangelism.

Following the panel, the organizers welcomed the key-note speaker, Dr. Timothy Z. Witmer (author of *The Shepherd Leader* and professor at Westminster Theological Seminary). Dr. Witmer led four main sessions developing the theme: "What Does a Healthy Church Look Like?" He shared valuable biblical insights on the character, conduct, relationships, and practices of faithful shepherds of God's flock. Throughout his multi-media presentation, Dr. Witmer challenged church leaders to do the prayerful, practical, gospel labors that lead to health and well-being for God's church. With a down-to-earth and accessible speaking style, Dr. Witmer focused his listeners on large- and small-scale means for knowing, feeding, leading, and protecting the sheep.

The next morning began early with a presentation by Rev. Brian Lee (Christ Reformed Church, Washington D.C.) on the use of technology in ministry. The presentation focused on the best and most advantageous use of internet communication to create awareness about the church and its activities in the community. Dr. Lee answered questions and offered step-by-step examples concerning

the use of Facebook advertising, web development, and other aspects of online church communication. Time ran out long before the delegates ran out of interested questions, and the dialogue will continue.

With all the pre-game activity completed, the delegates took up the official business of the Classis, beginning with devotions, prayer, and singing led by Rev. William Boekestein (Covenant Reformed Church, Carbondale, PA). Under his able chairmanship, the delegates deliberated many pressing matters, which included some of the following:

### **Filling Our Needs:**

God is filling our churches by supplying men for three vacant pulpits within the Classis. The recently installed Rev. David Klompfen has filled the church in Wayne, NJ. Mr. Aaron Verhoef has accepted a call to the searching church in Newton, NJ. He will soon undergo an ordination examination. And Mr. Stephen Wetmore (stated supply of the URC in Cape Coral, FL) has sustained several sections of his candidacy examination and will complete his examination after the turn of the year. Lord willing, it appears that our Classis will be filled again within the next six months!

### **Granting Our Desires:**

God has graciously answered our prayerful desire and early preparation for new church plants in the Eastern US by providing a generous gift of one-and-a-half million dollars given for that specific purpose. The Classical Church Planting Committee has begun interviewing potential church planters and launched initial advertising into our previously designated areas of interest.

### **Building Foundations:**

Messiah's Reformed Fellowship, led by Rev. Paul Murphy, has announced its desire to officially organize and federate with the URCNA. Lord

willing, their congregation will be provisionally received into Classis Eastern US at its next meeting in January of 2012.

### **Singing Joyfully:**

The delegates unanimously approved three overtures related to the proposed hymnal portion of the URCNA song book. This feedback will now travel on to its place at Synod 2012.

### **Opening Doorways:**

The Classis received greetings from Rev. Howard Sloan of St. Paul Reformed Church (independent) of Bedford, PA. Expressing his joy at the relationships he has built with URCNA pastors, Rev Sloan announced his desire to lead his congregation into federation with the URCNA.

### **Future Preparations:**

Classis Eastern US prayerfully looks forward to God's good work in our midst. Plans for a full classical pulpit exchange, a joint meeting with the OPC New Jersey Presbytery, several examinations, a Third Annual Pre-Classical Conference, a profitable Synod 2012, and church-planting developments are all well on their way. May God receive all the glory, and give us the fruit of our labors!

We invite all the churches to rejoice in God's generous provision for his people here in the Eastern United States. Pray that God would help us to reach the giant population of this coastal region with the message of the gospel. And ask the Lord to grant our desire to connect the dots on the map between our churches until we see new congregations rising up from the tip of the Florida Keys to the northernmost points on the coast of Maine!

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Andrew D. Eenigenburg

Stated Clerk

Classis Eastern USA

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## **Classis Western Canada Neerlandia, October 13–14, 2011 Summary Report**

On October 13 & 14, 2011, Classis Western Canada convened at Neerlandia, Alberta. Since classis usually meets annually, it is always a special time for the delegates as they are able to give expression to federative unity. Ministers and elders alike are appreciative of the fellowship, unity of faith, and the ability to discuss ecclesiastical matters in the context of many wise counselors.

Synod London 2010 had instructed all consistories who desire to communicate with the Songbook Committee to do so by way of overtures via their respective classes. The agenda for the classis therefore consisted of several overtures that made recommendations to the Songbook/Psalter Hymnal committee with regard to adding or removing songs from the proposed songbook for use in the URCNA.

The Lethbridge consistory presented two overtures to be sent on to Synod 2012 with regard to the mandate of the songbook/Psalter Hymnal committee. Their first overture asks that Synod 2012 direct the committee to significantly modify and restrict its approach to the implementation of a new songbook and consider ways by which there may be the least amount of unrest and concern preceding and subsequent to the implementation of a new songbook. Some of the areas of concern where Synod 2012 is asked to direct the Songbook/Psalter Hymnal Committee to modify and restrict its approach include the modification of gender-neutral language, their recommendation to discontinue the use of the name Jehovah, the many word changes in the proposed book that appear to be unnecessary or trivial, the multitude of changes presently proposed which

will make it very difficult for those who have memorized scores of songs over the years, the arbitrariness or inconsistency in the process of changing selected songs, and finally that some of the proposed songs have little or no track record, tradition, or established durability in the Reformed churches. Among the delegates there appeared to be considerable agreement and unity in discussing the content of this overture, and when it came to the vote it passed unanimously.

The second overture from Lethbridge requests that Synod 2012 instruct the Songbook/Psalter Hymnal Committee to proceed toward the publication of a songbook for the use of the URCNA without further delay, to develop a songbook that has as its basis the 1976 edition of the CRC Blue Psalter Hymnal, that it include the synodically-approved liturgical forms, that the songbook committee minimize changes as much as possible in the new songbook, and that the committee develop a transition process to the new songbook similar to the transition process undertaken by the CRC when the blue Psalter Hymnal was produced. This overture too was adopted unanimously.

Abbotsford sent an overture requesting Synod 2012 establish regional synods, but this overture was defeated. Classis adopted Abbotsford's second overture, requesting that Synod 2012 approve the collection of two reading sermons with appropriate songs from each URCNA minister, to be posted to a secure section on the official URCNA website.

Several consistories sought the advice of classis. Some of these were informal, where consistories were seeking wisdom on how to address various struggles being dealt with in their consistory and/or congregation. Other requests for advice were more formal, where according to the church order, consistories were

seeking concurring advice or advice to proceed with discipline.

The clerk notes with sadness that this year classis dealt with a higher number of instances where consistories were seeking the advice of classis as they sought to move toward the exclusion of baptized members. This step of discipline is usually requested when an adult who has not made profession of faith shows little or no interest in the church and lives a worldly lifestyle. While these consistories are to be commended for their willingness to call and hold these baptized members accountable, it was sad to hear the number of baptized members who in life and practice are demonstrating their stubbornness to joyfully embrace the gracious promises of God signed and sealed to them at their baptism, but who instead are falling for the temptations of the world. On a positive note, one delegate shared with the classis his consistory's joy that where they had sought similar advice at a previous classis, they now saw the fruits of discipline and reported that repentance had become evident and lifestyle changes took place in the lives they were concerned about.

Classis was able to conclude its work by noon on Friday. The next classis is scheduled to convene in New Westminster, BC in either March or October 2012.

In service to Christ,

Rev. William Van der Woerd

Clerk for Classis Western Canada  
(URCNA)

# Proverbs 2: Living in the World without Being a Part of It

Michelle Brandsma

Living the life of a young Christian adult is not a passive existence. God requires total devotion to Him and active involvement in our walk with Christ so that we can better understand Him and live our lives in complete service to Him. Proverbs 2 teaches us that, to understand God, we need to learn, follow, and use wisdom to the fullest extent. The more we learn about God, the more we can make ourselves different from the world and live according to His image. Applying discretion and wisdom aids us in living a life that is distinct from the world.

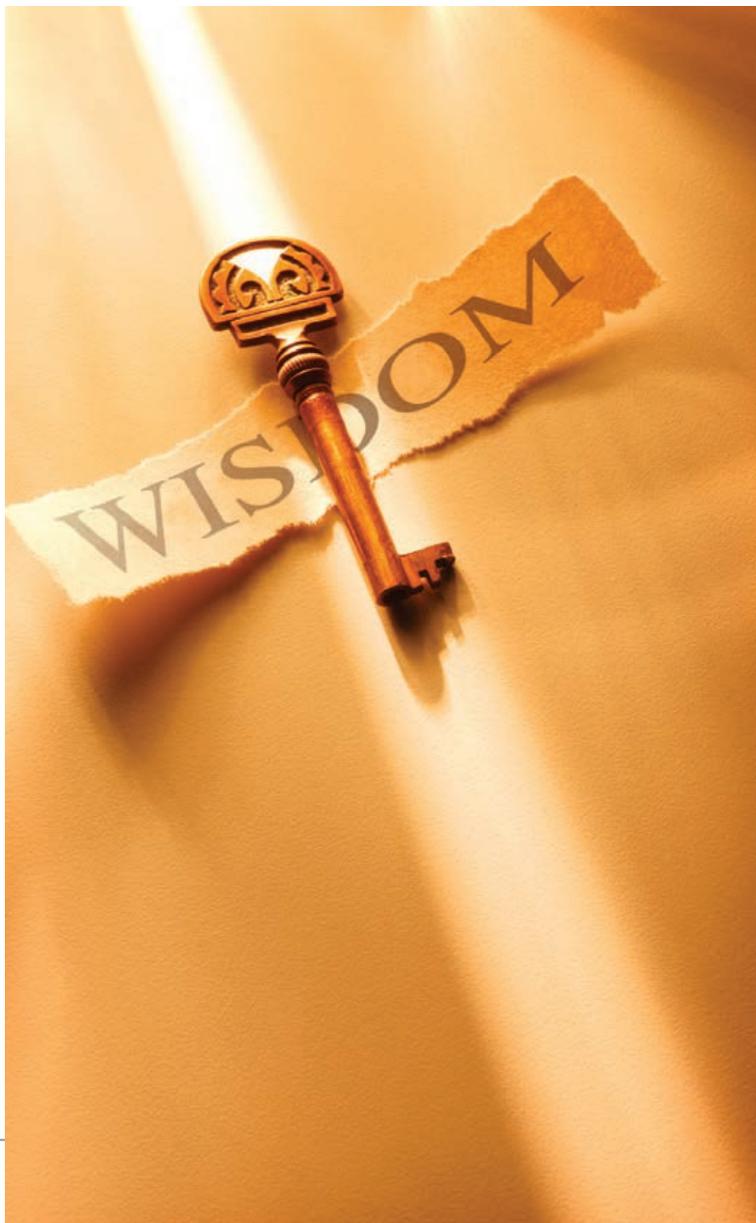
Unfortunately, wisdom and discretion are apparently rare traits in today's society. The author of this particular proverb, Solomon, writes that "wicked men delight in doing wrong" (v. 14). In secular young adult circles (in places that range from university, to work, to bars and clubs), this statement rings truer than ever. During this stage of life people encounter many new challenges and temptations. When we look at the lives of worldly people, it can be hard to see the problem in their style of living. It is difficult *wanting* to be different from the world. However, we need to remember our call to be the "salt of the earth." John 15:19 states, "If you belonged

to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." Avoiding indulgence in worldly things can be terribly hard, but God chose us to be His shining lights to the rest of the world. Despite all the changes and pulls in various directions on us as a young adult, we must use the wisdom of God to keep ourselves morally clean.

Where does this wisdom come from? Ephesians 1:15-17 says: "For this reason, ever since I heard about your

faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of Wisdom and revelation, so that you may know Him better." The core of our wisdom comes from the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus sent to us after He ascended into heaven. Solomon writes: "From His mouth come knowledge and understanding" (v. 6). God Himself gives wisdom to us. He *wants* us get to know Him better. And so, from the Spirit we gain the desire to read our Bibles, pray, and have communion with other believers. Knowledge is gained through involvement. As this proverb implies, listening to wisdom requires more than hearing it and walking away. It requires active participation. Prayer and heartfelt consideration are necessary to even begin understanding God.

Knowing God helps us to realize the duties He has set for us to perform. To keep ourselves close to Him, we must learn as much as we can through continual prayer and engagement in Scripture. Listening to wisdom, we can eventually discern right from wrong, which enables us to carry out



our faith every single day. Acting according to His higher purpose allows us to show our thankfulness to Him for sending His Son. Because of Jesus' sacrifice, we should *want* to learn as much as we can about Him in order to serve Him to the absolute best of our ability.

In this proverb, Solomon reveals the incredible weight wisdom has in life. Having wisdom and applying knowledge to our actions can bring us success in life. Solomon stresses, as evident in the title given to this particular proverb, the moral benefits of wisdom. The Devil plays on our weaknesses, making it more difficult for us to keep on the straight and narrow path. While God wants us to succeed, the Devil wants us to fall. Immorality, the proverb tells us, eventually leads to destruction.

Unfortunately, seeing how foolishness and immorality leads to destruction is hard and often even difficult to believe. We see people making their own decisions every day, living only according to themselves, with no thoughts as to what God would want or require of them. Often, these choices seem to lead to instant gratification and worldly success. Temptation sometimes gets the best of us, even though we try to live completely chaste and moral lives. It can be so difficult to turn our backs on the world and take the "moral high road." Proverbs 2 urges us to fight this battle; as we continue to learn as much as we can about God, it becomes that much easier to act like we belong to Christ.

This proverb, written by the wisest man who ever lived, is an introduction to the rest of the Proverbs. Before moving on to specific aspects of wisdom, the author wishes to explain

the reasons one should be wise, why it is important to the walk of the righteous to keep to the ways of the wise and utilize discernment. Reading this proverb, we learn how vitally important a deep understanding of God is to our daily walk with Him.

**Michelle Brandsma** is a young adult living in Lethbridge, Alberta. She is a member of the Lethbridge Reformed Church (URCNA).

## Go to the Ant, O Sluggard: A Meditation on Proverbs 6:6–19

**Taylor Brandsma**

In high school, slacking off on one assignment will not greatly influence your grade. So, what is the point in working too hard on it? If you do badly on a test because you did not study, you can always make up for it on the final exam. There is no point in trying too hard and over-exerting yourself; you have other things you would rather do, anyway. If the teacher is talking, it doesn't really matter; your desk is in the back of the room and he can't hear you. Besides, you have the best story to tell your friends.

We have no problem sleeping in until late in the morning (or even into the afternoon) because we have nothing pressing to do. Sometimes we show up late to class, if we show up at all. We find all kinds of ways to avoid all kinds of things we really don't want to do.

At present, our sloth will not directly result in poverty as it does for the person in Proverbs 8:11. We still live with our parents, so everything we depend upon is placed in front of us. Even though we may grumble about having to buy our own clothes, we know that we already have much more than we need. Our parents still ensure that we are daily provided with ample food and a warm bed. Even our education is still paid for by our parents. Returning the favor by helping out around the house would be boring and would in no way entertain us.



For those of us who work, it's mostly a routine job, somewhere that we only go through the motions in order to attain money for our own personal spending or saving for university. It's not a career, and certainly not something we plan on doing for the rest of our lives and, therefore, not really worth overexerting ourselves. It is simply a means to an end.

Our society promotes a "me, me, me" priority chain. If there is nothing in it for us, there is no point in engaging in the activity. One of the top songs of last year was a song about someone who felt lazy and decided to stay at home all day, watching TV and lazing about. No harm done. Is this really the type of thought that we should be promoting and the lifestyle we should be following?

While this carefree lifestyle is extremely inviting and enjoyable, we are reaching the point in our lives where we must begin to take responsibility for our actions. Before we know it we will be in university or living on our own. Soon we will be responsible for our own income and survival. We will no longer be able to leach off our parents for our daily comforts.

Before we reach this stage we must learn responsibility for the little that we already have. As the parable of the shrewd manager says, "Whoever

can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much" (Luke 16:10). We must make every effort to do well with what we are in charge of now, even if that only means finishing your homework and listening in class, or helping to prepare supper, so that we can learn a sense of responsibility that we will carry with us for the rest of our lives.

We must work at everything that we do with all that we have. Colossians 3:23 encourages us to work at everything, not for ourselves, nor for men, but for God. It is God who gave us the ability to work, relax, and even live. It is only right that we should thank Him for our existence by making the most of the gift of life that He has given us. God created us for His glory (Isaiah 43:7), and by working hard in all that we do, we are fulfilling our purpose in life.

By giving everything our all, not only do we glorify God, but we can display our faith to the rest of the world. Matthew 5:16 says, "In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." Even simple things, like our attitudes as we help people, can have lasting impacts on the people we meet. It takes little effort from us but can cause reflection for others, and at the very least, can make their day a little better.

*6 Go to the ant, O sluggard,  
Observe her ways and be wise,*

*7 Which, having no chief,  
Officer or ruler,*

*8 Prepares her food in the summer  
And gathers her provision in the  
harvest.*

*9 How long will you lie down, O  
sluggard?  
When will you arise from your sleep?*

*10 "A little sleep, a little slumber,  
A little folding of the hands to rest"—*

*11 Your poverty will come in like a  
vagabond  
And your need like an armed man.*

*12 A worthless person, a wicked man,  
Is the one who walks with a perverse  
mouth,*

*13 Who winks with his eyes, who  
signals with his feet, Who points with  
his fingers;*

*14 Who with perversity in his heart  
continually devises evil, Who spreads  
strife.*

*15 Therefore his calamity will come  
suddenly; Instantly he will be broken  
and there will be no healing.*

*16 There are six things which the  
LORD hates,*

*Yes, seven which are an abomination  
to Him:*

*17 Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And  
hands that shed innocent blood,*

*18 A heart that devises wicked plans,  
Feet that run rapidly to evil,*

*19 A false witness who utters lies,  
And one who spreads strife among  
brothers.*

**Miss Taylor Brandsma** is a senior at Immanuel Christian High School. She attends Trinity Reformed Church (URCNA) in Lethbridge, Alberta.

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