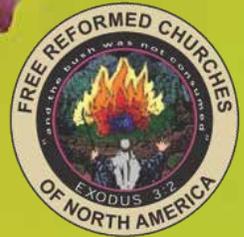


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THE MESSENGER

THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF NORTH AMERICA



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GOD-ORDAINED ROLES

“But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.” (1 Corinthians 11:3)

In our day of egalitarian confusion and compromise, we need to soberly consider the words of the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:3. This is no outdated cultural relic, but a glorious declaration of God’s created order and an immutable and binding law for all times and persons. How much more those who name the name of Christ?

This text sets before us a sacred hierarchy. We see the logic and beauty of God’s government in nature and grace. God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of man, man is the head of woman. To tamper with this is to defy the Almighty. To embrace it in complete faith and devotion is to walk in the path of blessing and obedience.

The term “head” (Greek *kephalē*) here signifies authority, not source or mere precedence, as those influenced by feminist cultural pressure would have us believe.

“The head of Christ is God.” The headship of God the Father over Christ here refers to the economic submission of the Son to the Father in His mediatorial office as Prophet, Priest and King. Christ submits as servant to the Father in free willingness, not from essential inferiority (John 14:28; Phil. 2:6-7).

“The head of every man is Christ.” As very God, Christ the Son of God is the eternal and sovereign Lord over everyone. He rules especially over His kingdom of grace as the incarnate God-man Mediator (Phil. 2:10-11). “Man” here refers to the male sex created for leadership in families and nations, though Christ’s headship clearly embraces all human beings, male and female.

“The head of the woman is the man.” Man by nature is appointed by God as the head of woman for uniquely carrying God’s dominion over creation and society through leadership. The logic of the text comparing Christ’s headship with man’s reminds us that Christ’s lordship over the church is the perfect model for the godly man as He sacrificially loves, rules, and gives Himself for His bride the church (Eph. 5:23-25). By implication, we are here taught that a woman’s rejection of and rebellion against man’s headship is contrary to God’s will, like if the church were to reject Christ’s headship rather than embrace and submit to it.

Paul here is confronting disorder in the Lord’s worship in which the distinction between the sexes was being confused and despised. He resolves this not by an appeal to culture but nature and natural law (1 Cor. 11:7-9). While Paul’s teaching concerning head coverings in worship is important in its place, we also

must recognize that Paul grounds his entire argument on the much more fundamental truth that patriarchy is a divine ordinance. The headship of man over woman is no arbitrary decree, but a reflection of God’s wisdom, woven into the fabric of creation and redemption. Is this a doctrine we believe and embrace as Christians?

All of Scripture speaks proclaims that patriarchy is a divine ordinance, not a human invention. From the beginning, God created man first, then woman as his helper. The woman was taken from his side to be his beloved companion under his authority (Gen. 2:18-22). Adam’s naming of Eve (Gen. 2:23) evidences his headship. Her creation for him (1 Cor. 11:9) confirms her role as his subordinate, not his equal in authority. The fall also bears witness to this order, for Eve’s deception came through her stepping out from under Adam’s protection (1 Tim. 2:13-14), and God’s curse reaffirmed male headship, albeit now marred by sin (Gen. 3:16).

Throughout the Old Testament, God’s covenant dealings are with patriarchs—Abraham, Isaac, Jacob—whose authority over their households is clearly commended by the Lord (Gen. 18:19). The priesthood was restricted to men (Ex. 28:1), and the kings of Israel were male, reflecting God’s design for leadership.

In the New Testament, Christ chose twelve male apostles (Matt. 10:1-4), and the qualifications for elders and deacons are explicitly male (1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). Paul’s prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men in the church (1 Tim. 2:12) and his command for women to keep silent in the assembly (1 Cor. 14:34-35) are not cultural accommodations but applications of the creation order, binding for all time.

The doctrine of patriarchy extends beyond the church to the home and society. Husbands are to rule their households well (1 Tim. 3:4-5), and wives are to submit to their husbands “as unto the Lord” (Eph. 5:22-24). In the civil sphere likewise, the replacement of men by women in positions of leadership is a sign of society’s spiritual decline and rebellion, particularly where the highest offices of authority are concerned (Isa. 3:12). Rejecting patriarchy is rebellion against God’s design, inviting chaos and judgment upon families, churches, and nations.

The doctrine of patriarchy is not a mere abstraction but a precious truth to be lived out in heartfelt obedience. The modern church, swayed by the spirit of the age, has largely abandoned this divine ordinance, embracing egalitarianism or a compromised complementarianism that softens God’s clear commands. For ourselves, let us resolve not to be mere hearers of the Word, but doers also.

Men of God, have you embraced your God-given calling to leadership with courage and humility, or have you abdicated your role? Repent of cowardice and effeminacy, especially of failing to lead your wives and children in godliness. Cease your passivity, allowing the burdens and responsibilities of leadership to fall on the shoulders of your wife. Model for your family Christlike submission by respecting and submitting to authority in church and society yourself. Repent of all harshness and bitterness towards your wife and children, ruling as tyrants rather than as Christ, who loved His church unto death. Take up the authority God gave you to lead, teaching your household the Word, disciplining with love, and standing firm against our degenerate culture. Seek spiritual strength through personal prayer and study of God’s Word. Flee from the soul-destroying rot of pornography and sexualized entertainment. Confess your sins before God and your family, keeping your heart ever before the throne of grace.

Daughters of the King, have you submitted to your husbands or fathers as unto the Lord, or have you bought into Satan’s lie that submission is weakness? Repent of such rebellion in seeking to usurp male authority in home or church (1 Tim. 2:12). Repent of neglecting your high calling as wives and mothers, trading the nurture of children for worldly ambition. Embrace your God-given role with joy, adorning the gospel with a meek and quiet spirit (1 Pet. 3:4).

Are our households ordered according to God’s design, or conformed to the world’s pattern? Let us repent of allowing for the erosion of the husband’s headship and the wife’s submission. Fathers, repent of neglecting family worship, tolerating sinful entertainment and conduct in your home, and not seeking to win the hearts of your children to the Lord. Mothers, repent of prioritizing careers over the home, for God calls you to be keepers at home (Titus 2:5). Train your sons to be godly leaders and your daughters to be virtuous helpers, that our homes may be “little churches” reflecting

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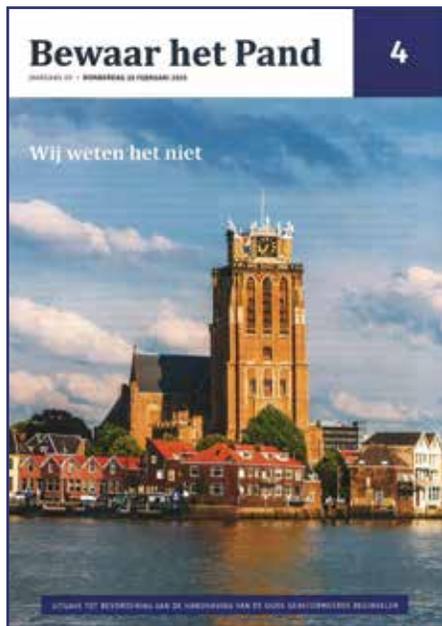
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MEDITATION

God's glory.

Are our churches upholding the masculine calling of leadership or have we begun to bow to cultural pressures? Let us unapologetically embrace and defend the biblical requirement for male-only eldership and diaconate as a federation, that our worship may be pure and our doctrine sound for future generations. Pastors, do not give in to fearfulness by avoiding “controversial” texts like 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Corinthians 11 for fear of offense. Elders, be wise stewards of God's order by modeling loving respect and kindness to all church members without compromising male leadership.

The broader culture has cast off God's order with open defiance. Our nation must repent of exalting women to roles of civil leadership in the place of men, contrary to God's design (Isa. 3:12). As a nation, we must repent of mocking biblical masculinity, labeling it “toxic.” We must repent of undermining the family through policies that incentivize women to forsake the home. As Christians, let us repent of our failure to proclaim God's truth in the public square. We must call the nations to return to God's order, where men lead with strength and women flourish in their God-ordained roles.

The teaching of patriarchy in 1 Corinthians 11:3 is no burdensome yoke but a good gift from God our Creator and Redeemer. It is the way of order, blessing, and harmony. Yet we stand guilty before God, having rebelled against His design in thought, word, and deed. Let us, therefore, fall upon our knees in true repentance, crying out for mercy through the blood of Christ. Let men rise as godly leaders, women embrace their sacred calling, families reflect God's order, churches uphold biblical worship, and society hear the call to return to God's truth.

In this way, we will show we are unashamed of God's Word. “Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (Mark 8:38). 11

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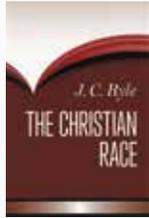
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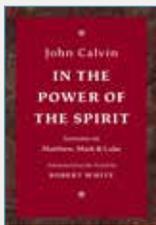
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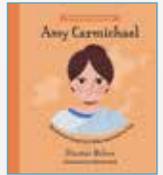
The Not So Loving Side of Gentle Parenting: A Biblical Plea to Parents By Justin L. Miller

"A new Trojan horse took baby steps into the nursery and has now launched big steps into the church family—"Gentle Parenting." It is likely this novel parenting philosophy has been adopted by families in your church body. The author holds that the parenting models of modern psychology are, quite simply, bankrupt to the core. What we need in our day is a return to the authority and sufficiency of Scripture in matters of family life, childrearing, and discipline. Above all, our children must understand that they have violated God's law and that they need the gospel. Biblical parenting, then, is gospel parenting. By focusing on biblical authority, the paradigm of God as the perfect Father, the centrality of family worship, and the necessity of getting to the heart, Miller ably critiques gentle parenting and offers instead the wise, practical, and loving model of God's Word. Parenting is a blessed stewardship believers are called to carry out for God's glory in His Word. Justin L. Miller is a husband, father, pastor, and, most importantly, a follower of the Lord Jesus. The book is most heartily endorsed by Dr. Joel R. Beeke, Mark Chanski, Dr. Jim Newheiser, Dr. Sam Waldron, and Dr. Conrad Mbewe. Softcover, 133 pages, Free Grace Press **RBS Price \$21.00**



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DAILY DEVOTIONS —THRILL OR CHILL?



There can be no Christian life without communion with God. That communion is nourished through His Word and by prayer. In the private, daily rhythms of devotion—reading the Scriptures, meditating on their truth, and responding in prayer—we draw near to the living God. The Lord Jesus instructed His disciples: “But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly” (Matt. 6:6). What is more beautiful than this: God stooping to speak to us through His Word and inclining His ear to hear our cries.

Yet how easy it is to drift from this vital habit. Seasons of neglect in private devotion often come not with loud rebellion, but with silent drift. Who doesn’t suffer from busy days, tired minds, forgotten priorities? The loss, however, is not only of a habit but of spiritual vitality, discernment, and joy. The soul grows lean and backsliding grows strong.

Thus, the question is: Are daily devotions a thrill for you, or are they marked by a chill?

Scripture

When God regenerates us, He makes us desire the sincere milk of the Word (1 Pet. 2:2). God’s Word is, after all, not merely a book. It is the voice of the living God. When we open the Bible each day, we are meeting the God of covenant mercies. The means of grace, preaching and the sacraments, are wonderful and essential. But private devotions are also a vital means through which the Spirit works in our souls.

For example, in Psalm 119:147–148 we read: “I prevented (anticipated) the dawning of the morning, and cried: I hoped in thy word. Mine eyes prevent (anticipate) the night watches, that I might meditate in thy word.” He rises early to seek God’s face and retires at night in God’s presence. Wisdom says in Proverbs 8: “Blessed in the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, waiting at the posts of my doors” (v. 34). This is the secret to a fruitful Christian walk.

The true child of God finds real delight in God’s Word. “How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!” (Ps. 119:103). The Word is not only instructive—it is satisfying. The Bible comforts the afflicted, rebukes the proud, assures the fearful, and refreshes the weary.

When the Holy Spirit makes the Word living and powerful in our souls, even one verse can satisfy our souls. Private devotions thus become not a chore but a joy, a feast to our souls, full of Christ.

Guard against Sin

David prayed, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Ps. 119:11). The Word stored in the heart becomes a sword against temptation and a lamp in the darkness (Ps. 119:105). Daily devotions train the soul to see sin as sin and grace as grace.

The Word of God is also a shield against doubts that might unsettle our minds. We should expect fiery doubts hurled at us from the evil one. Christ Himself used the Word of God against the temptations Satan shot at Him (Matt. 4:1-10). God’s truth should be our truth and shield (Ps. 91:4). In his doubt, Asaph turned to spiritual memory and meditation for help and comfort. What a help God’s Word is to the many assaults and attacks God’s people endure!

Prayer

Scripture and prayer belong together. As we read the Word, we listen to God. As we pray, we speak to Him. This holy dialogue makes up the soul of devotion. The Puritans often prayed their way through the Scriptures. They would read a portion, meditate upon it, and turn its truths into prayer and praise.

Fed by Scripture, prayer becomes specific, rich, and personal. We confess particular sins exposed by the Word, plead particular promises, and rejoice in particular mercies. As Paul wrote, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly... in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Col. 3:16).

What a thrill daily acts of communion with God can hold! It is essential that we engage in it habitually and consistently. We should do so at or near the same time every day. As we saw, Scripture mentions morning and evening. Our times should be manageable. They do not need to be long. They should be sustainable. Obviously, having devotions with a spouse, or children, or the whole family is both necessary and profitable. However, private prayer is a necessity for every disciple of Christ (Matt. 6:6).

Using a daily devotionals that are based on the Word of God may be helpful. Ensure that your devotional is faithful to Scripture and our confessions. Reading a page or a few pages from a solid book may be a great help in your daily walk as well.

Backsliding

For all its beauty, the habit of daily devotion is easily neglected. What begins as a few missed mornings can, sadly, become weeks or months of spiritual famine. This neglect leads to harmful and destructive backsliding.

1. Watch Against Subtle Slipping

Few Christians deliberately choose to forsake daily devotions. Instead, the drift is usually subtle. Pressures of work, parenting, school, or church duties begin to squeeze out private time with God. We think: “Just this once, I’ll skip today.” But today becomes tomorrow, and soon the Word is closed, and the soul is cold. Hosea prophesies concerning Israel, “Ephraim is a cake not turned” (Hos. 7:8). How easy it is to be half-baked, inconsistent, and spiritually insipid! The result is not only forgetfulness of God but spiritual self-confidence. We begin to rely on our routines, our theological knowledge, or our Christian identity, rather than on the Lord, who alone can be our confidence.

2. Beware of Hardness of Heart

Without regular exposure to the Word and prayer, the heart slowly hardens. Sins that once grieved us now don’t feel so bad. Conviction fades. Our thoughts become worldly, our speech careless, and our affections dull. Public worship begins to feel lifeless, for we are not spiritually-minded.

The Lord warns in Hebrews 3:12–13: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God... lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.” Backsliding often begins with private neglect, not public scandal.

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3. Grieve Not the Holy Spirit

Though the Spirit will never utterly leave a true believer, He may withdraw His felt presence. The joy of salvation wanes. Assurance withers. The Bible feels dry. Prayer feels like talking into the wind. These are signs that we are being chastised by the Lord. David experienced this in Psalm 32, after his unconfessed sin: “Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer.” And yet, when he confessed and returned to God, he was again surrounded by songs of deliverance.

Returning to the Lord

Returning to the Lord is the only remedy to backsliding. He is ready to receive the prodigal. He never grows weary of our repentance. He calls us, even in our failure, “Return unto me, and I will return unto you” (Mal. 3:7).

Do not wait for a perfect day or a perfect heart. Begin again today. Open your Bible. Read slowly. Confess every known sin. Consider the forbearance of God. He could have wiped you off the earth. He could have made others to blaspheme God because of your sin. Consider what your sin has cost the Saviour. Ask for

light. Ask the Spirit for help. Let the Word search you, stir you, and soothe you. Confess your sins. Lay your burdens before Him. Ask for renewed delight. Remember God’s Word: “A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise” (Ps. 51:17).

The goal of daily devotions is not to check a box, but to commune with the Lord. “Search the scriptures,” Jesus said, “for... they are they which testify of me” (John 5:39). They are not an end in themselves but a means to fellowship with God. Daily devotions are not a mark of super-spirituality but of basic spiritual health. To neglect them is to bring leanness into your soul.

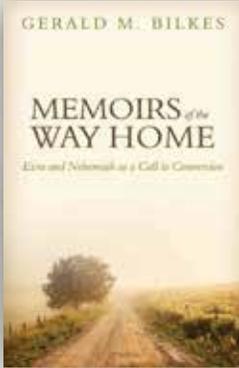
Do you still love the secret place? Has your Bible grown dusty, your prayers brief, your meditations shallow? Then return, not in your strength, but in the strength of the Holy Spirit. May we regularly cry: “Quicken thou me according to thy word” (Ps. 119:25).

Maybe you have never drawn near to God. God sees your heart too – how devoid of life it is. This is what His Word says: “The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God” (Ps. 10:4). To you also God says: “Seek ye me, and ye shall live” (Amos 5:4). Begin today. 

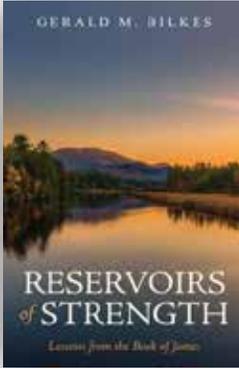
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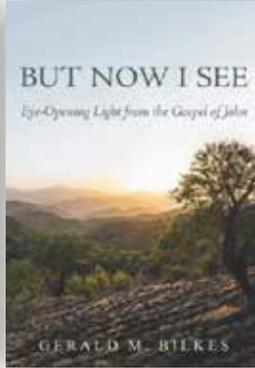




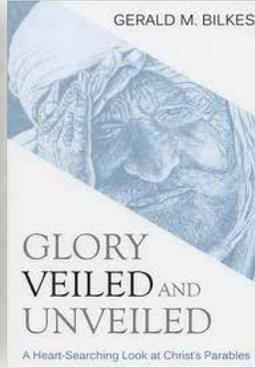
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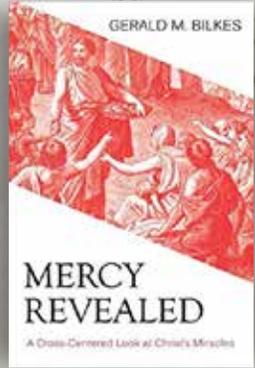
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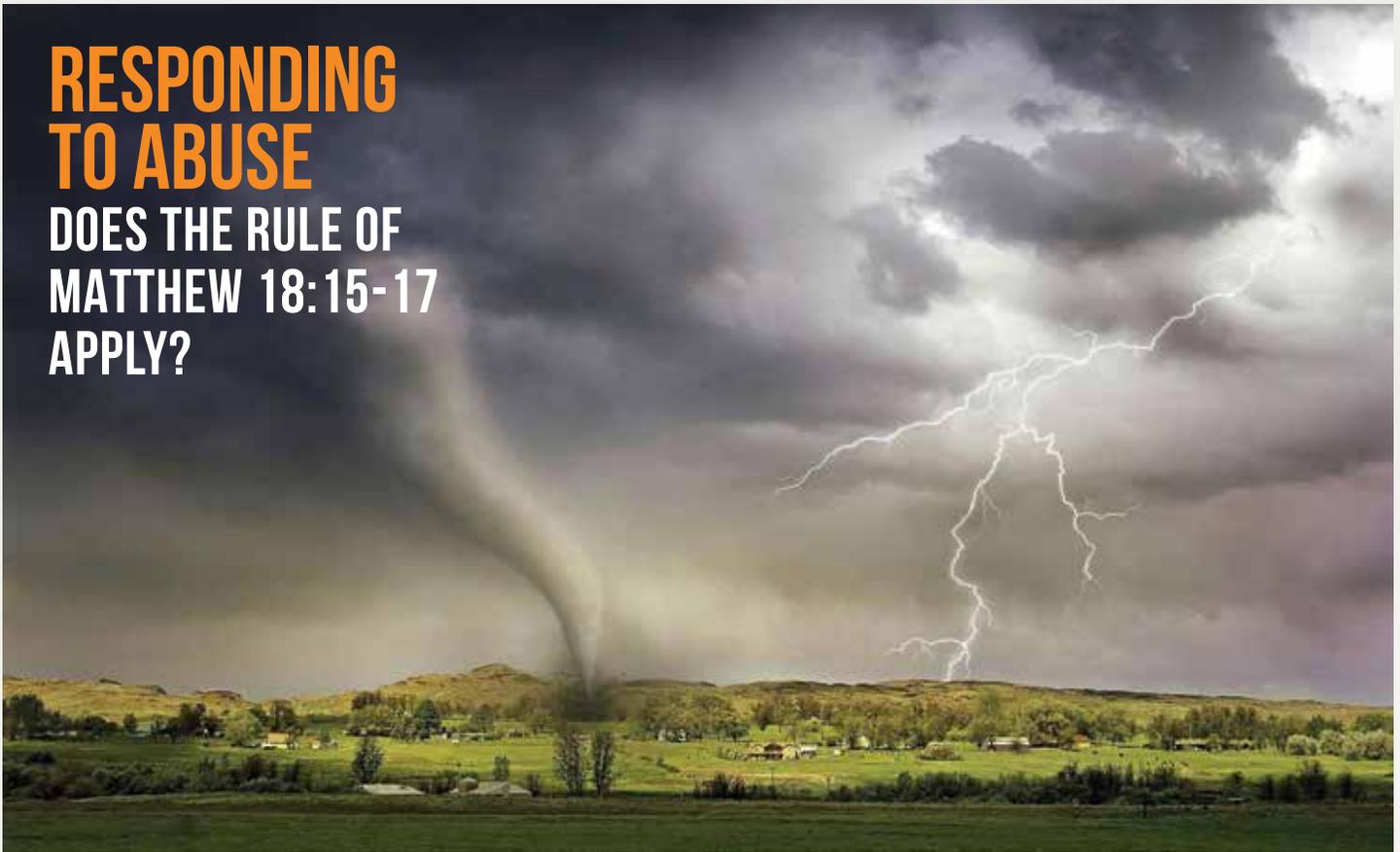


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RESPONDING TO ABUSE

DOES THE RULE OF MATTHEW 18:15-17 APPLY?



Sometimes our society exposes issues which the church, to our shame, has not addressed properly. One of these issues is that of abuse, which can refer to sexual, physical, or emotional abuse. Thankfully, we are now speaking of this issue more openly, but yet struggling with how we should address abuse as churches. Dr. G.M. Bilkes wrote three very helpful articles on the sin of abuse and how the church should respond to accusations.¹ He has outlined for us several biblical principles. With two further articles, we will consider in more detail how we should respond to abuse. In this first article, we will ask how Matthew 18 applies to accusations of abuse. Dr. Bilkes already stated in his December 2022 article:

“Churches should not put a cloak of secrecy over abuse, pleading Matthew 18 in cases of crimes or heinous sins. Where civil laws have been broken, the magistrate, who bears not the sword in vain, should be alerted and involved.”

Yet, some argue that in cases of abuse, and even in cases of child abuse, rather than contacting the authorities, we should, according to Matthew 18, first contact the abuser and confront him² about his sin. In fact, sometimes the perpetrator becomes offended when confronted by a third party such as an elder or a pastor. He might on that occasion say: *Don't they have to come to me in the way of Matthew 18 first?* However, when that is the posture of one who has been accused, it is a sign of the hardness

of their heart. Years ago, I remember confronting a man about an inappropriate sexual relationship he had with another man's wife. He was so broken over it that he not only confessed what had taken place but said: “I am so glad that my offences have been brought to the light, for my conscience was continually accusing me that I had no peace.” You see, when a perpetrator fights against the process or what is said or not said, his heart is yet hard, isn't it? When he responds with brokenness and humility, the way to true repentance might be very near.

A special issue of the *Standard Bearer* on sexual abuse³ stated that Matthew 18 may not be used to exhort a victim to confront the perpetrator of the abuse. Dr. Bilkes, in the article previously mentioned, showed many other scriptural principles need to be kept in mind in dealing with abuse. We will come back to those principles in the second article on responding to abuse. But for now, what about Matthew 18:15-17? Does it have any application to the situation of abuse?

Well, earlier in Matthew 18:6, Jesus indicates that offending little ones is such an offence that it would be “better if a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea....” Therefore, rather than leaving the “little one” to experience further vulnerability, the intent of Matthew 18 is to protect such “little ones.” Furthermore, when we examine verses 15-17 more carefully, we realize that one of the primary purposes is not the protection of the perpetrator of the sin, but rather his repentance. We read in verse 15: “If he shall hear thee

(implying he repents), thou hast gained thy brother.” Therefore, we might say that the two-fold aim of what Jesus teaches here is the protection of the “little one” and the repentance of the perpetrator. Some have argued that the goal of the process given to us in Matthew 18:15-17 is the protection of the offender, but the ultimate goal must be his repentance. The perpetrator of abuse is to be confronted, but to require the abused to do so betrays both goals of the process of Matthew 18. It leaves the “little one” (victim) vulnerable to further abuse and allows the abuser to further manipulate the situation for their own advantage. Such a process rarely leads to true repentance.

How then should the perpetrator be confronted regarding their sin if not by the victim? The Bible requires another approach because of the nature of the sin of abuse. Matthew 18:15-17 primarily describes the approach we must take if there is personal offence. Jesus said in verse 15: “if thy brother shall trespass against *thee*, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone.” Jesus here is addressing private sins committed between two individual believers, not public sins, nor sins which because of their gross nature are to be addressed publicly. Our church order correctly understands Matthew 18:15-17 when it states in article 72:

In case anyone errs in doctrine or offends in conduct, as long as the sin is of a private character, not giving public offence, the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matthew 18 shall be followed.

Here the church order states that sins of a “private character, not giving public offence” are to be dealt with by the rule of Matthew 18. This article of our Church Order makes a distinction that most of us don’t notice, for it does not simply refer to “*private sins*” but those of a “*private character, not giving public offence*” (CO 72). This implies that certain sins, by their very nature, are not private, but are such that they give public offence. Abuse, particularly sexual and physical abuse, is a sin of such public nature, not because there are witnesses to the offence, which is often done in the darkness of secrecy, but because of the many involved in this sin, and the ones who are abused. An abused person usually belongs to the weak and vulnerable (little ones) of our society and is abused by someone who biblically should have been their protector. Whenever there is abuse, it involves the perpetrator and the abused person, but others are impacted by the sin. If the perpetrator or the abused is married, it involves their spouse. If the perpetrator or the abused has a family, it involves other family members. It also potentially, and quite likely, involves other victims in the church and community. Sexual abuse in particular leaves the entire congregation vulnerable and therefore gives *public offence*.

Our church order, in article 79 also speaks of a *public, gross sin*. While this article primarily concerns office-bearers, the principles have broader application. The relevant part of article 79 states:

When ministers of the divine Word, elders or deacons, have committed any public, gross sin which is a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by civil authorities...

Notice the comma between *public* and *gross sin*. In Reformed ecclesiology, public sin refers to transgressions that are openly known or have become widely visible within the church or broader community. Gross sin, meanwhile, denotes offences of exceptional gravity, whether in their moral character (e.g., adultery, theft, abuse) or doctrinal nature (e.g., heresy, schism).

Together, these categories encompass acts that scandalize the church, undermine its testimony, or warrant civil prosecution. As Article 79 states, such sins are “a disgrace to the church or worthy of punishment by the authorities.” No one will deny that abuse is a *gross sin* and “a disgrace to the church,” even if it is a hidden sin. When a sin is of a public character, the congregation must be

informed at the appropriate time, and in a wise manner, while protecting the victims of the abuse through this process. Perhaps it would be more edifying for these announcements to take place in a meeting of the consistory with only the confessing members of the congregation. Therefore, we realize that the nature of most abuse is of a public character which means that the rule of Matthew 18 does not apply in the strict sense.

This is also confirmed in the history of the churches. In the early days of the Reformation era, pastors and elders in the Netherlands faced difficult questions regarding Christian discipline, specifically whether all sins that are known only to one or a few must be kept private. Repeatedly, the church has concluded that some private sins were of such a nature that they must be treated publicly.

In 1571, the Synod at Emden concluded, “but hidden sins, those which might bring harm and ruin to the general welfare or to the churches, such as treason or the seducing of souls, shall be reported....” At Dordt, 1578, again: “In answer to the question which sins are public: A public sin is one which...because of its grossness is deemed worthy of public punishment. Thus the sins of David against Uriah, of Ananias and Sapphira against the Holy Spirit were made public and punished as public sins.”⁷⁴

These synod decisions confirm that the church recognizes that sometimes sin is of such a nature that it must not be kept private. Our church order alludes to the phrase from the Synod of Emden (1571) that some hidden sins “bring harm and ruin to the general welfare” of the churches. This refers to gross sins and those worthy of punishment by the civil authorities since they bring the testimony of the church into disrepute. These earlier synod pronouncements form the basis of what is recorded

How then should the perpetrator be confronted regarding their sin if not by the victim?

in our church order in articles 72 and 79. These synods in the Netherlands followed the pattern set by their Swiss neighbors led by John Calvin (Calvin died in 1564, only a few years before these synods met) and the consistory in Geneva, who demanded public treatment of certain gross, private sins.⁵

VanDellen and Monsma take a similar position in their treatment of the Church Order's Article 72 ("as long as the sin is of a private character...the rule clearly prescribed by Christ in Matt. 18 shall be followed"). They qualify the rule in this way: "Sins that are not generally known shall not be revealed unless the nature of the transgression should require such..."⁶ The nature of abuse, particular sexual abuse, requires that it be revealed, not kept private. This is Reformed tradition, and the Reformers were not ignoring Jesus' prescriptions in Matthew 18 but honouring the two-fold goal of protecting the "little one" and leading the perpetrator to repentance.

This approach also is consistent with the requirement to report certain types of abuse to the civil authorities. If you witnessed a murder by a member of your congregation, what would you do? We would call the police. After all, a crime was committed and the civil authorities, according to Romans 13, are responsible to punish evil doers. You wouldn't start an investigation yourself before reporting it, would you? No, you recognize that a serious crime appears to have occurred and that the police are equipped to make an investigation, so you quickly call them. You realize that it is possible that it could have been self-defence, but you leave that to the police to investigate. None of us would criticize you for contacting the police. None of us would ask you: *But what about Matthew 18? Shouldn't you have first contacted the brother who you witnessed murdering someone about what you saw?* Most of us would consider that to be nonsense because we understand that the nature of the offence requires us to inform others. The same is usually true of abuse cases, meaning that the nature of these "hidden sins" are of a public character often worthy of public admonition and punishment.

Therefore, if you know of a crime that has been committed, and most abuse is also a crime in society today, you should report it to the civil authorities. In fact, if the abused victim is a minor, almost all jurisdictions require you to report the crime to the proper authorities. This obligation to report increases if you are in a position of care such as a pastor, teacher, or elder. While reporting these crimes can cause excruciating pain for the victims involved, it is essential. Perpetrators, for their own sakes and the safety of others, must be exposed because the church must be a place of safety and security for those who are weak and vulnerable. Victims must be given these assurances of safety and be allowed to heal. Other victims must also be encouraged to come forward so that sin might be addressed and the works of the evil one destroyed.

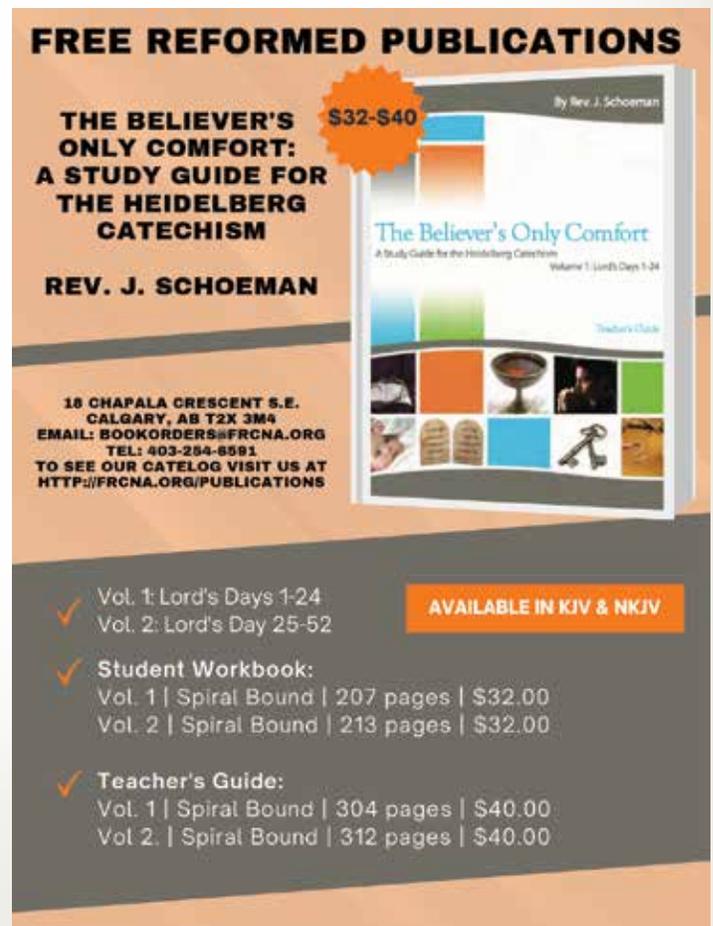
However, we should not think that our work is done once we report it to the civil authorities. In fact, it has only begun, for we must pastorally care for both the victim and the alleged

abuser. How do we care for the victim? How do we care for the perpetrator? We will consider that in more detail in our next article D.V. 

Endnotes

1. These articles are found online in the Messengers of November 2022 – January 2023. They are highly recommended as additional reading.
2. Masculine pronouns are used because statistically the perpetrators are usually male, although the distortion about gender roles in society could alter these statistics.
3. Standard Bearer of the PRC - May 1, 2022 issue found here: <https://cdn.rfpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/21204524/2022-05-01-Special-Issue-Sexual-abuse-Grievous-sin-in-the-church.pdf>
4. "The Standard Bearer" – September 15, 2022 – page 487-488 Link: <https://sb.rfpa.org/reporting-sexual-abuse-the-fatal-misuse-of-matthew-18/>
5. See John Witte, Jr., and Robert M. Kingdon's *Sex, Marriage, and Family in John Calvin's Geneva: Courtship, Engagement, and Marriage*. vol. 1. Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2005.
6. *The Church Order Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1941), 301. Emphasis added. See also their treatment of Article 73 where they also speak of the "common sense" requirement to report "very grievous and dangerous sins" (302, 303).

Rev. John Koopman is pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Chilliwack, British Columbia.



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THE REFORMED FORM OF BAPTISM – 5

PRAYING BEFORE BAPTISM

We have come to the prayer before the administration of baptism. That baptism should be preceded by prayer requires no explanation. If we seek the Lord's face before His Word is proclaimed, we should also call upon His Name before the administration of baptism. This sacrament is also a means of grace whereby the Lord is pleased to strengthen our faith. How fitting then for us to beseech the Lord that this holy ordinance may be administered to His glory, our comfort, and the edification of His Church.

The Noahic Flood and Israel Passing Through the Red Sea

Desiring these blessings, the minister prays the words from the Baptism Form: *"Oh Almighty and eternal God, Thou, who hast according to Thy severe judgment punished the unbelieving and unrepentant world with the flood, and hast according to Thy great mercy saved and protected believing Noah and his family."* The prayer continues with a reference to Israel's passing through the Red Sea. The prayer refers to two events that illustrate what baptism signifies, the Noahic Flood and the passing through the Red Sea. At first hearing, these events may seem far removed from baptism. But both demonstrate God's attributes of justice and mercy in a very striking way.

Our form prayer reminds us that God judges the world in righteousness and saves His people by His grace. In these two events, salvation involves passing through divine judgements that destroy enemies. Noah and his family were saved, but how? Not by being taken to a location where the floodwaters could not reach them. The torrents of water came down on them and lifted them above the evil world that perished in these waters. They experienced this great calamity knowing what was happening all around them. They were in a safe place, in the enormous ark whereby God wonderfully saved them.

The same thing is true of Israel's deliverance by safely passing through the Red Sea, which drowned the persecuting Pharaoh and his army. This truth represents the heart of the Gospel. God saves His people, not by overlooking sin, but by judging them most severely. Christ endured the judgment, bearing the wrath of God against sin. The Gospel speaks of being united to Christ to pass through divine judgment into the wonderful life of salvation. Christ died, but did not perish in the judgment;

on the third day He rose from the grave. In this way, Christ became the Ark of salvation for all His people.

Echoing Scripture, our Reformed fathers draw lessons for baptism from the deluge of the Flood and the passing through the Red Sea. Noah in the ark was separated from a world that was destroyed because it lay under the curse of God. Baptism delivers us from this present evil world, impressing us even more when we look at Israel's deliverance from Egypt. So we pray: *"Thou [God] who hast drowned the obstinate Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea and hast led thy people Israel through the midst of the Sea upon dry ground, by which baptism was signified—we beseech Thee, that Thou will be pleased of Thine infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these children."*

Comparison Between Baptism and the Red Sea

Israel stepped into the sea and passed safely through. In this way, they became identified with Moses, their new leader. We also, by trusting in the blood of Jesus, become Christ's people. Our only comfort in life and death is that we no longer belong to ourselves but to our faithful Saviour, who with His precious blood has delivered us from our sins and from the power of Satan. The Israelites and their children were delivered so that they might inherit Canaan, the promised land. That is the glorious prospect for all who believe.

Baptism is intended to strengthen our faith and hope in the Lord's great mercy. Seeing this mercy pictured before our eyes in this sacrament, our hearts should be filled with comfort and praise. Just prior to the administration of baptism, we pray these things so that our hearts may be in the right frame when the holy sign is given to our children. In this sign, God affirms His boundless love and compassion for us.

If we observe this sacrament with indifference, we receive none of these blessings. How easily this happens! For many people, baptism means very little. They fail to see the great mercy of God toward us and our children and do not receive the salvation to which baptism points. One of Noah's sons, Ham, was like that. Although saved from the waters of the flood like the rest of his family, Ham showed no gratitude to God for his deliverance. Our Form for Baptism states that Noah was saved with his family. Salvation here means no more and certainly no less than that God separated them from the rest of the human race that perished in the Flood. Yet only those members of Noah's family who trusted in this God of deliverance and served Him with all their hearts were saved in the spiritual sense of that word.

It is no different today. Through baptism, we and our children are saved in the sense that we are "separated from all other peoples and strange religions that we may wholly belong to Him whose ensign and banner we bear" (Belgic Confession, Article 34). God is very concerned with parents and their children. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," Paul





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OUR FORMS

said to the Philippian jailor, “and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.” Does this mean that all who are baptized will be saved? No, only those who come to understand the message of baptism, seek their covenant God, believe in Christ with all their heart, and acknowledge Him for giving them a place in His Church and covenant.

We see that the same thing happened to Israel. All the Israelites, together with their children, were delivered from Egypt. They all passed through the Red Sea. As Paul says, “[They] were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea.”

A Warning From 1 Corinthians

To the Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes that not all the Israelites who passed through the Red Sea entered the promised land. The apostle said that “with many [most] of them God was not well pleased” (1 Cor. 10:5). Why? Because they rebelled against

God. These people did not appreciate their deliverance and separation from Egypt. They got tired of the manna from heaven and longed for the fleshpots of Egypt. Consequently, they did not receive the inheritance of Canaan. They did not enter the promised land because of their unbelief. Hebrews 3:19 uses this reality as a warning for us.

Our Baptismal Form mentions this frightful possibility for us as well. Therefore, the petition: *“We beseech Thee that Thou wilt be pleased of thine infinite mercy, graciously to look upon these children, and incorporate them by Thy Holy Spirit into Thy Son Jesus Christ, that they may be buried with him into his death and be raised with him in newness of life.”*

Here, we appeal to God’s mercy as a pleading ground for the Lord to work savingly in the hearts of our children. The Church prays that her covenant children may receive what their baptism signifies, namely, the washing away of their sins through the blood of Christ. To receive cleansing, they must be incorporated into Christ by the Holy Spirit. The Church here prays for the grace of regeneration, indicating that our Reformed fathers did not assume that our covenant children are regenerated from birth. Why pray for something they already possess? The Reformers were realistic and took the doctrine of total depravity seriously, teaching that we and our children are conceived and born in sin and must be born again.

The Urgency in the Baptismal Prayer

The Form beseeches God to incorporate our infants into

To the Corinthians, the apostle Paul writes that not all the Israelites who passed through the Red Sea entered the promised land. The apostle said that “with many [most] of them God was not well pleased” (1 Cor. 10:5). Why?

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“Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord.” Ps. 127:3

Christ by the Holy Spirit. We pray for union with Christ so that what He has done for His Church may also benefit our children. Two benefits flow from Christ's death and resurrection: justification and sanctification. The emphasis in our Form is on sanctification, for the Church prays that her children may lead a life of gratitude for the salvation Christ has obtained for them. This is spelled out in the phrase: *"That they may daily follow Him, joyfully bearing their cross and cleaving unto Him in true faith, firm hope and ardent love."*

There is one more request: that *our children may with a comfortable sense of God's favour leave this life, which is nothing but a continual death, and at the last day, may appear without terror before the judgment seat of Christ our Lord who with Thee and the Holy Ghost, one only God lives and reigns forever.* Many object that this last statement sounds so depressing. Is this a fair description of the Christian life? Granted, there are many troubles and griefs in life on earth, but are there not also many good things to be enjoyed for our baptized covenant youth?

Let us not misunderstand the Form for Baptism here. Our fathers did not mean to say that life on earth is no better than death, but that as long as we are in this life, we must be constantly dying to self and to sin and be made alive to God. "Of how many parts does the true conversion of man consist?" our *Heidelberg Catechism* asks. The answer is: "Of two parts: the mortification of the old and the quickening of the new man" (Q. & A. 88). Scripture and our Confessions clearly teach this. Let us never forget what the Lord said to His covenant people Israel and therefore to us: "Thus saith the Lord, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Jer. 6:16). ①

Dr. C. Pronk is an emeritus pastor belonging to Grace Free Reformed Church of Brantford, Ontario.



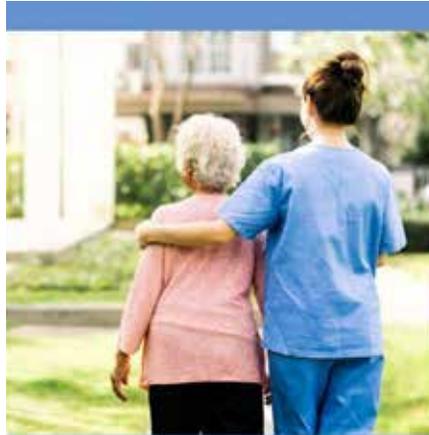
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CHARGE TO 2025 GRADUATES

AT THE PURITAN REFORMED COMMENCEMENT HELD MAY 2, 2025



Dear graduates, standing before you tonight we — as faculty, staff, and entire seminary community — are deeply mindful of the gracious providence of the Lord that has brought you to this significant moment in your life. So with gratitude and joy we send you forth to labour in the fields white unto harvest. As graduates you show that that field and harvest is global and local. You stand as 32 graduates, *representing* 5 different degree programs; *hailing* from 11 countries, including Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Egypt, Honduras, India, Netherlands, South Africa and South Korea; and *representing* 13 denominations. The faculty and staff found it a privilege to serve you, though we acknowledge we did so with many shortcomings.

For a final time, we direct your attention to God's Word so central in your further ministry formation and future. As you go forth into your respective callings — whether it be pastoral and preaching ministry with an MDiv or ThM degree, or biblical counseling with an MABC degree, or teaching and scholarship with a PhD degree — we remind you tonight and charge you with this apostolic exhortation given to Timothy and through him to you, this Word of the Lord, through the Apostle Paul's words in second Timothy four verse one and two:

I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; Preach the word: be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.

This charge is not only a culmination of your studies, but a commissioning: Preach and teach the Word — the *keryxon*

ton logon — the proclamation of the Word. This commissioning contains four indispensable aspects:

First, Preach and teach the Word as those who live and labour before the face of God. You minister not before men alone, but before the all-seeing eye of the triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You labour under the sovereign gaze of the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall soon appear to judge the living and the dead. Never lose sight of this reality. Your ministry is not ultimately a service to men, but a service to God, rendered in the fear of God, for the glory of God, and by the grace of God.

Secondly, Preach and teach the Word faithfully. You are not called to proclaim your own opinions, nor to echo the fleeting sentiments of the age. You are not to cater to the fancies of those with itching ears, nor to dilute the message to suit the tastes of a passing culture. You are charged to declare the whole counsel of God — no more, no less. Rightly divide the Word of truth, labouring diligently in biblical exegesis, theological reflection, and pastoral application, resting upon the solid foundation of Scripture. Guard this sacred deposit entrusted to you with fervent love and faithful stewardship, contending earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints.

Thirdly, Preach and teach the Word experientially. The ministry of the Word must penetrate far deeper than the mind; it must reach the heart and stir the affections. Open up the Scriptures to the hearts of sinners, showing forth Christ crucified, risen, and reigning, as the only hope for lost men and women entrusted to you. Apply the truth searchingly and tenderly, distinguishing the sheep from the goats, the humble from the hypocrites, the convicted from the complacent. Preach and teach to the

conscience. Preach and teach for the heart. Preach and teach that men and women may be convicted of sin, comforted by the Gospel, and built up in the grace and knowledge of Christ Jesus. Minister as one who personally knows the bitter weight of sin, the mercy of deliverance through Christ, and the heartfelt gratitude that overflows from being redeemed by Him. Let your ministry from Canada to Cameroon, from South Africa to South Korea and elsewhere, be filled with a deep sense of your own poverty and Christ's inexhaustible riches. Speak as one who has tasted the bitterness of sin and the sweetness of God's grace. Minister, so that others, through your ministry and by God's grace, may be led from self to Christ, from guilt to pardon, from death to life.

Fourth, Preach and teach the Word practically. Be instant — ready in season and out of season. Reprove where error abounds. Rebuke where sin persists and exhort where the weary need strengthening — all with graced words and patience. Whether in the pulpit or the classroom, whether at the hospital bed, in the counseling room, or over the kitchen table, carry the Word of God in your heart, mind and affections. Let it be your delight and your duty to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable and complacent ones; to build up the saints and to call sinners to repentance and faith. You have been prepared not merely to know the doctrines of grace, but to proclaim them with humble, holy boldness. You have been prepared not merely to understand experiential religion, but to promote it lovingly and wisely among those entrusted to you. You have been prepared not merely to treasure the Scriptures privately, but to wield them publicly for the healing of wounded souls, the feeding of Christ's flock, and the advancement of His kingdom.

Dear graduates, go forth with this His calling and charge engraved upon your hearts and souls: Preach and teach the Word. Do so, because the time is short; eternity is near; and Christ is worthy of all your love, all your labour, and all your life.

Do not lose heart when the path becomes steep or the way grows dark. Remember that the Word is living and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword. The Word of the cross will be the wisdom of God unto salvation for those who believe, even as it remains foolishness to the perishing. Hold fast to the promise that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. Sow the seed of the Word with tears but expect that one day you will reap with joy. Minister not for the applause of men, but for the approval of the Master. May the Lord anoint you with His Spirit clothe you with His power, and preserve you blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. May He grant you faithfulness in life, fruitfulness in ministry, and the everlasting joy of hearing His own voice say, on that last day, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." ①

Dr. Adriaan Neele serves as president of Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary. This article is a slightly condensed version of the charge delivered.

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Psalm 139:13

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PURITAN REFORMED GRADUATION 2025



Friday, May 2, was a very special day for 32 students at Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids. On that day they became graduates of the seminary rather than simply students. These graduates came from eleven countries, including Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Egypt, Honduras, India, the Netherlands, South Africa, and South Korea. They represented thirteen denominations.

None of the graduates were Free Reformed members, but some had close ties with our churches. Furthermore, whatever our denominational connections or lack thereof, we may be gladdened to see men graduate to serve Christ's one church throughout the world.

Students graduated from five different programs. This year witnessed the first graduation of a Masters in Biblical Counselling (MABC) student. This two year program was developed a few years ago to meet the need for training in biblical counselling from a Reformed confessional perspective. Dr. Kelderman leads this program. Several men in the Masters of Divinity (MDiv) program are dual enrolled in the MDiv and MABC programs out of a desire to be further equipped in counselling while pursuing pastoral ministry.

The Master of Arts in Religion (MA) program is a two year program for those wanting to be deepened in their theological understanding in service to various types of ministry. Four graduated from this program including Luther (Asian students often adopt English names of their choice).

The close to four year MDiv program is at the core of the seminary since it is designed to prepare men for pastoral ministry. Only five graduated from this program. Graduates include student Dan Schipper of Providence Reformed Church in Grand Rapids who has led worship services regularly in Free Reformed Churches, but senses a call to serve in South Africa.

Most (17) were graduates of the Masters of Theology (ThM) program. Most of these are pastors or ones who have obtained their MDiv and desire to study further. Many of these were part-time students who periodically came to campus for intensive one-week classes or attend classes in Puritan Reformed learning centers in other countries such as Brazil, Egypt, or Taiwan. One student who came here from India turned out to come from a church in India which had a Free Reformed engineer serving as an elder.

Six obtained their Doctorate through the PhD program. In the days before graduation, each one had a public and formal doctoral defense. Dissertation topics ranged from the use of Jeremiah 31 in Hebrews, to the apocalyptic wisdom theme in Ephesians, to the pastoral theology of John Knox. One dear brother had been an associate member of Grand Rapids Free Reformed church and is set to go back to his home church in Asia to be involved in training men for ministry.

We give thanks to the Lord who brought these students to Puritan Reformed and enabled them to both study and graduate from their programs. We pray God may bless the instruction they have received and fellowship experienced at seminary to further equip them for their ministries and use them to His glory.

At the convocation, Pastor Jeremy Walker of Maidenbower Baptist Church (UK) and author of various books spoke on "God's Students" based on Psalm 111:2: "The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." In light of that theme, the most special thing is not to graduate from seminary but to be enrolled life-long in God's school of grace to take pleasure in learning His wondrous works. Christ receives all types of sinners and does not expel them from His school. 

WHEN YOU ARE ANXIOUS

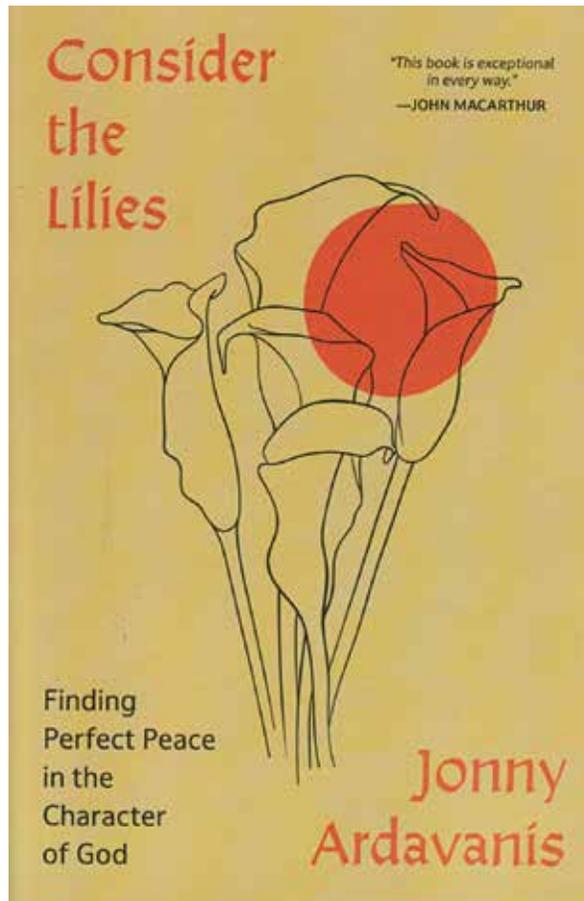
Consider the Lilies: Finding Perfect Peace in the Character of God by Jonny Ardavanis.
Published by Zondervan Books (2024). Softcover, 235 pages.

In the *Foreword*, Sinclair Ferguson writes, “We have become a society riddled with anxieties. The statistical indications are mind-numbing in their indications of the vast numbers of people who take prescription drugs for what is rarely a biologically caused problem. The anxiety levels of young people have reached an all-time high” (p. xiv). The author of this book, pastor and podcaster, worked with youth involved in self-harm, panic attacks, suicidal thoughts, depression, and anxiety. He also had significant medical challenges in his own family.

Put briefly, the answer to these problems may be encapsulated in the phrase: “Do not look inward but look upward.” In other words, look to the Bible and examine what God has to say about Himself, who He is, and what He does. “Gazing at God’s glorious character is the pathway to peace” (p. 2). It is by prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to show us God’s character, His glorious attributes revealed in Scripture, fixing our minds and filling our hearts with God’s matchless and unchanging character that we may find peace and comfort. God is our refuge, especially during the most tumultuous, upsetting changes and times. Throughout the book, the reader is directed to contemplate who God is and our relationship to Him.

In Part 1, entitled “Our Fallen World,” the author connects with the reader, giving examples of the stark realities experienced in a fallen world. Due to the Fall, the world has become full of people experiencing heartache, death, and suffering from natural disasters. He shows how this impacted Bible characters who had similar experiences. It is in the Bible where we can find hope and comfort. Referring to Job, he asks the question: “Have you ever realized that your every worry is an invitation to draw closer to God?” (p. 22). This chapter, as in other chapters, is filled with real-life experiences and Bible references, backed up by quotes of well-known authors such as A. W. Tozer, J. I. Packer, J. C. Ryle, J. R. Beeke, and others.

Before turning to the central substance of the book, the attributes of God, the author wisely deals with possible physical problems which



lead to anxiety. In chapter 3, “Embodied Beings,” it is explained that it is wrong and hurtful to ascribe all anxiety and depression to spiritual weakness. Temperament, physical weakness, exhaustion, loneliness, and grief may be causes. Great leaders, Moses, Elijah, David, and others experienced deep depressions. Abraham, Noah, and Peter fell into great sin and anxiety.

Jesus, the Great Physician, more than anyone knew how we can struggle with anxiety and fear. He addresses these fears by asking questions, as in Matthew 6. What is your treasure? Are you worried about your possessions, missing out on earthly pleasures? Are you harboring bitterness and holding grudges? Is there unconfessed sin? Where is your treasure? Is it in heaven? After addressing these root causes, Jesus reproved them as a loving father to a cherished child. “Consider the lilies of the field...” (Matt. 6:28). After all, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things” (v. 32).

A next chapter addresses the mind in the words of Isaiah 26:3: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength” (Isa. 26:3-4). When our heart has been changed, our mind is renewed and has to be continually and progressively renewed for the rest of our life (cf. Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:1; 1 Pet. 1:13). This involves meditation on God and His Word and studying Scripture.

How we may do this is explained in Part 2, for “in the Bible, there is a paradoxical relationship between despair and joy—the feeling of the former is fundamental to experiencing the latter... You will never know true and lasting joy if you have not first despaired of ever trying to earn your way to God” (p. 79). “God’s grace will never be amazing to those who are not first fully convicted of their sin. *Misery over sin is the prerequisite to joy in Christ*” (p. 80).

Especially by focusing on God’s attributes, our anxieties will be stilled. We can find great comfort in contemplating the names God uses to describe Himself. He is the Great I AM who sees the oppression of His people (Ex.3:7; etc.). God is all-knowing. He knows the beginning from the end of our anxieties and fears. He is the God of space and nature. He

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Colossians 3:17

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BOOK REVIEW Continued

knows all the nations and also knows every hair of our head (Matt. 10:30). He knows every recess within our heart (Jer. 17:10). He formed us before we were born. There is a warning here too. "The only way to be known by the Father is to come in faith to His only beloved Son... The truth of God's infinite knowledge is only comforting to those who are *known by God*. And the only way to be known by the Father is to come in faith to His only beloved Son. If you're a Christian, this is the pillow you can lay your head on at night: 'I am known by God'" (p. 113).

The chapter, "Above All," answers the question we often ask regarding suffering, "Where is God in all this?" (p. 117). It is the sovereignty of God, which "is indeed a hard doctrine to grapple with, but it provides the safest comfort and surest hope to the anxious and despairing" (p. 118). "In examining God's sovereignty, we cannot divorce this attribute of God from His wisdom—or His goodness" (p. 136). God does not afflict willingly or grieve the sons of man (Lam. 3:33). He finds no joy in bringing pain and grief into the lives of those He loves—as a Father, He grieves to see us grieve as He did at the grave of Lazarus (p. 136). God's plan is for our good and His glory and is "our conformation into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ" (p. 137).

Other chapters on God's attributes, His *Lavish Love*, *Our Present Refuge* and *The One Who Hears*, are filled with biblical examples to expand our understanding of God's greatness. But right thinking and meditating on who God is ought to lead to action. In fact, as we engage in God's service, we will be lifted up above our feelings and worries. "The most joyful people on earth are those who do not live for themselves... Are you anxious and waiting for someone to serve you and meet your needs? Instead, consider how you can meet the needs of others" (p. 199). We also need God's church family to grow and hone our faith.

Looking to eternity, the author quotes J. C. Ryle: "I am a dying man to a dying world; all before me is unseen: the world to come is a harbor unknown! But Christ is there, and that is enough" (p. 207).

The author is relatively unknown (still?), but John MacArthur said: "This book is exceptional in every way." Among others, R. Albert Mohler, Chris Larson, and Joel R. Beeke endorse it. It is a book you will turn to for stilling your fears and anxiety during the turbulent times in our culture, churches, and family life, but also for help to lead us to God in Christ. Highly recommended. ¹¹

This book may be purchased in Canada at Reformed Book Services in Brantford, Ontario, and at Reformation Heritage Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, U.S.A.

Mrs. Ricky (Frederika) Pronk is a member of Grace Free Reformed Church in Brantford, Ontario.

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MEMORIES OF PASTOR VAN ESSEN



Being twenty five years as an emeritus pastor in the Mitchell congregation has been a real blessing from the Lord. In the year 2000 Pastor and Mrs VanEssen moved to Mitchell with their son Walter and his family. Pastor VanEssen filled the pulpit many times for us during our vacancy. He visited with many in the congregation on his own, with his wife, and with the elders as well. He taught confession of faith classes many times. He would attend consistory meetings when we needed advice on certain issues. He was a great asset to the congregation.

Examples in his preaching were very down to earth. The love for farming he had as a teenager never left him. His prayer often included the need for the Lord's blessings of rain and sunshine for the crops to grow and for a good and safe harvest. His following of current events was also very evident in his preaching. Not everyone shared in his enthusiasm of things garnered from Maclean's magazine and the 6:00 news, but he had a gift for making sense of the news and how it affected our daily lives.

His preaching had an original freshness and showed he read widely. He had a large library of English and Dutch books that was carefully catalogued. Even when his eyes grew weaker, he still wanted to read with a magnifying glass or on his iPad.

When Pastor Overduin became our pastor, Pastor VanEssen stepped aside and made it clear that he was not our pastor. When Pastor Overduin left us, Pastor VanEssen once again became a great help to us in our vacancy. By the time Pastor Hutton came, Pastor VanEssen was slowing down but continued to be a blessing.

While visiting him one time, it was difficult to hear him say he didn't think he would be able to preach any longer due to his failing health and his need to take care of his wife. How difficult it was for him and Mrs. VanEssen, when he was told he couldn't preach any more. His desire was that he would be able to preach for sixty years but was disappointed that he was only able to make 58 years.

Pastor VanEssen was very happy to share with me that he was able to have preached in all of the FRC congregations. He also felt very privileged to have had had opportunity to address the denomination on seminary day, Dutch day, and to have preached a sermon for the opening of Synod. He was often plagued by the accuser with questions. Did I warn the people enough? Did I do enough in warning my children,

grandchildren? Was I honest with them? He was also humble about himself.

It was a difficult time for Pastor VanEssen after his dear wife passed away. He often wondered what else the Lord had for him to do. At times he found it difficult to sit in the pew and drink in the Word rather than be a sermon critic. His desire was still to preach the word.

Visiting with him one time he told me the tables are turned. He was the one lying in bed and I was asking him what I could read with him. His Bible was open to Job 19 23-27: "Oh, that my words were written! Oh, that they were inscribed in a book! That they were engraved on a rock With an iron pen and lead, forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!"

Pastor VanEssen was a servant of the Lord. His love for the Lord, his family, the church, and for those in the community was evident in all he tried to do. Even in the nursing home, I found him with two Bibles on his walker, so that he could possibly share God's Word with others.

He will be missed for sure but we trust he is in the presence of his Lord and Saviour. In our mind's eye, we can hear the Lord say to him "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter thou into the joy of thy Lord." Can we also not also hear him joining with what we read in Revelation 5: "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing. And every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, heard I saying, Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever. And the four beasts said, Amen. And the four and twenty elders fell down and worshipped him that liveth for ever and ever." ①

Mr. Gerald Pol serves as an elder in the Free Reformed Church of Mitchell, Ontario.

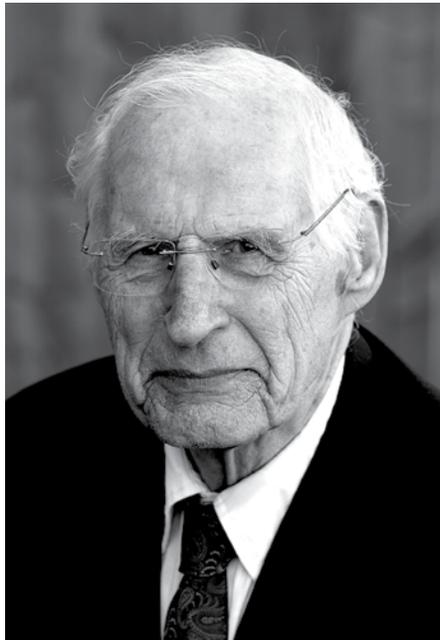
THE FUNERAL OF REV. HENDRIK (HENRY) VAN ESSEN

Friday, April 25, at 1:00 pm in the Bethel FRC of Mitchell was the funeral of Rev. Henry Van Essen. He had died the previous Saturday, April 19, about mid-afternoon, at the age of 94. Members of the Van Essen family, the Mitchell congregation, and pastors and members from other FRCs, as well as others, came together to remember and give thanks for the life of a beloved father, grandfather, great-grandfather, pastor, colleague, friend, and brother in the Lord.

Just over two years ago was the funeral of Mrs. Engelina Van Essen. Now it was the funeral of Rev. Van Essen. How sobering to see beforehand the open casket along the wall in the sanctuary, just a few feet from the pew, and the very spot even, where Rev. Van Essen and his wife would regularly sit when they worshiped with the congregation. There he would sit when he lived; now he lay there dead, about to be buried. So it will go for all of us.

Before the funeral service began, two of Rev. Van Essen's children, Miriam, and Walter, as well as an elder of Mitchell FRC, Gerald Pol, took some time to highlight personal reflections. Altogether they expressed their appreciation for a loving, faithful man of God, father and pastor. In his life, Rev. Van Essen cared for his family, cared for the church, cared for the Lord. He also cared for the land. Before he was a preacher, he was a farmer, and while he fully embraced the Lord's call to preach, his love for the farm and the fields never left him, as reflected in his gardens over the years, his often mention of the fields and farmers in his prayers, and his memorable farming sermon illustrations.

On God's forgiveness and how amazing it is, for example, Rev. Van Essen told the story once (or more times perhaps) of a farmer who hired a young man to cut his hay, warning him about a set of harrows on the far end of the field and to make sure not to drive over them. But sure enough, the young man went round the field, and before he knew what was happening, he drove over the harrows, puncturing all four tractor tires. The farmer was not happy, of course, but what could he do? He repaired the tires, and he sent out the hired hand to finish cutting the hay. But again, going around the field, the young man rode over the harrows, and again, he punctured the tires. So, what kind of farmer would keep a man like that? Then, think of how many times we sin



against the Lord, so often doing the same evil things over and over! How thankful we may be that the Lord does not fire us, but rather forgives us, every time we ask, all for Jesus' sake. Truly, His forgiveness is amazing!

The formal service then began, being led by Rev. Martyn Van Essen, oldest son of Rev. Henry Van Essen, an ordained minister in the Presbyterian Church of Canada. After opening readings of Scripture, the gathered congregation sang together the first four stanzas of Psalter 421. This was followed by prayer, more singing (*My Hope is Built on Nothing Less than Jesus' Blood and Righteousness*) and then several more Scripture readings, these being read by various grandchildren of Rev. Van Essen.

Then came the sermon from Ezekiel 16:63, this being at the request of Rev. Henry Van Essen: "That thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD." In the sermon, Rev. M. Van Essen highlighted the context, it being about God's people, Jerusalem, being under God's judgement for their terrible sins, so inexcusable in view of all God's goodness and kindness to them, and worse than Samaria and even Sodom. Yet what happens is that the LORD, Jehovah, the God of the covenant, establishes (upholds) His covenant (v. 62) with His people. He leads them to know that He is the LORD and that brings about deep conviction of sin. The people remember and become confounded, ashamed, and silent before the LORD, as they realize their sin and their guilt. At the same time, the Lord Himself provides a way out for His guilty people, for He is pacified through the atonement He accomplishes, ultimately through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Rev. M. Van Essen then applied this to his father: Dad lived with an awareness of his sin, and it grieved him very much. Yet, by the grace of God, Dad was enabled to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and to experience deliverance, atonement through Him and the blood that He shed on the cross. This gospel captured Dad's heart so that he loved to preach it for so many years. It is this same gospel we all need. We too may know its power through faith in Jesus. To this faith we are called still today.

After the sermon, the congregation sang together a Dutch hymn, loved by the Van Essen family: *Vaste Rots Van Mijn Behoud* (Solid Rock of my Salvation), and a closing hymn (My Jesus, I Love Thee). Soon after, everyone exited the sanctuary to follow the casket to the grave, located in the cemetery just outside the church. After some family members, serving as pallbearers, had laid the casket to rest, Rev. K. Hutton, pastor of the Mitchell FRC, led the assembly in committing the earthly remains of Rev. Van Essen to the ground, in sure and certain hope of the resurrection.

This was followed by Rev. C. Pronk speaking a few words on behalf of the FRCNA. Rev. Pronk reflected on how Rev. Van Essen came into the denomination about 30 years ago and how he was enabled to serve among us in preaching for over 20 years. By God’s grace, we found Rev. Van Essen to be of one mind and heart with us, and the Lord blessed the preaching and ministry work of our brother in the churches. Finally, Rev. Hutton closed the committal service with a benediction and we sang the doxology. Before everyone went home, there was an opportunity to enjoy food and fellowship in the church hall.

On a personal note, when I was first ordained to the ministry and began to serve in Mitchell FRC, Rev. Van Essen lived one street over, and Dr. David Kranendonk (then minister of Bornholm), one street over the other way. The three of us met together regularly for study and prayer, the two younger ministers learning from the far older and very experienced minister. Rev. Van Essen had many stories to tell, a lot of wisdom to share, and he turned out to be an excellent mentor and encouragement to us. I still remember and appreciate various sayings and illustrations he passed on to us in his humble way.

One example is when he reminded us of what he himself had learned years before from his teachers: “A minister’s work is to preach, teach, and visit,” and then he stressed, “*and in that order*,” meaning that we were to prioritize preaching and preparing for that, while not forgetting of course to be with our people, so as to preach helpfully to those whom the Lord set before us.

For Rev. Van Essen, his preaching days are over. In one sense his mouth has again been silenced. Yet, we may be sure that where he is now in the presence of the Lord, his mouth is open as it were in hearty praise and worship, together with the spirits



of just men made perfect, forever adoring and exalting the Triune God of grace. ①

Rev. Joel Overduin serves as pastor of the Free Reformed Church of Vineland, Ontario.

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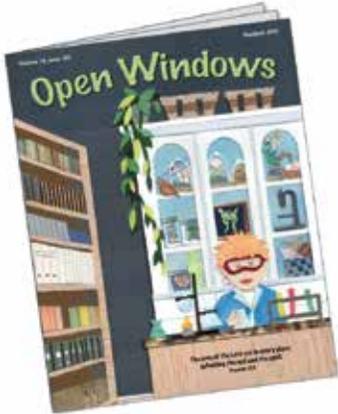
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Ps 78: 4, 7

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

OBITUARY



REV. HENRY VAN ESSEN

The Rev. Henry Van Essen, 94, of Mitchell, was called home to glory at the West Perth Vilage, Mitchel on **Saturday, April 19, 2025.**

*Beloved husband of the late **Engelina Van Essen** (2023).*

Dear father of: **Martyn Van Essen (Mary), Joan teBokkel (Derk), Walter Van Essen (Marsha), and Miriam Van Essen.**

Loving grandfather of **14 grandchildren** and **2 great grandchildren.**

Also surviving are his nieces and nephews in the Netherlands.

*Predeceased by his parents **Hendrik and Dirkje van Essen** and sister **Johanna (Joop) Plokker.***

Rev. Van Essen immigrated to Canada from The Netherlands in 1952, with the plan of becoming a farmer. His plans changed when he answered God's call to become a minister of the gospel. While studying for the ministry, he married Engelina Middelhof on August 30, 1958. Upon graduation from Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan, he was ordained as a minister in the Reformed Church in America in 1960, where he laboured for 38 years. Rev. Van Essen served congregations in Vancouver, Wainfleet, Grootegast/Doezem (The Netherlands), Exeter, and Maitland. He also served as pulpit supply for churches in Scotland while studying in Edinburgh. As a minister emeritus in the Free Reformed Church, he served as pulpit supply for churches across Canada and in the United States. Rev. Van Essen never let go of his love for farming and often had large vegetable gardens. Instead of becoming a farmer of the land, he sowed the seed of the gospel. To his last days, he was concerned for the spiritual well-being of his family and church.

BEHOLD YOUR GOD!

FREE REFORMED SEMINARY DAY

WHEN: Monday, Sept. 1, 2025

WHERE: Dundas FRC

SPEAKER: Rev. Mark Wagenaar

SCHEDULE: 9:30 Opening

THEME: WHAT IS REFORMED PREACHING?

ADDRESS 1: The Foundation

10:30 Coffee

ADDRESS 2: The Focus

Noon: Closing, followed by lunch being served.

ALL AGES ARE WELCOME!

Please mark your calendars and pray for a blessed gathering!