

# Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

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**Ready to say  
"I do"?**

**#DORTMATTERS  
INCLINED TO FOLLY**

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## INSIDE THIS ISSUE

We begin our issue with an editorial from Rev. Eric Kampen; he writes that "in this editorial, we will briefly review the issues dealt with in the Canons of Dort, consider what was at stake, and conclude with showing why #DortMatters today."

Dr. Andrew Pol has written an article on the decision to get married – published now with spring, and perhaps love, in the air. Look for the second half of "Commitments and Courtship" in our next issue.

Issue 7 brings readers many regular columns: Treasures New and Old, Clippings on Politics and Religion, Education Matters, Clarion Kids, and You Asked. You will also find book notices, and a few press releases.

Laura Veenendaal

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# #DortMatters

## *At stake was the glory of God and the comfort of the believer*

As this year marks the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Synod of Dort, readers will not be surprised to have another Dort related editorial. It is good to seize the moment and bring out how the decisions of that synod, held so many years ago, in a country that resonates less and less with the younger generation, matter for us today. To use a popular way of expressing oneself, we could say #DortMatters. In this editorial, we will briefly review the issues dealt with in the Canons of Dort, consider what was at stake, and conclude with showing why #DortMatters today.

### Brief review of the issue

By the end of the commemoration of the Reformation last year, many were able to sum up the key issues of the Reformation by naming the five sola statements. The key issues that led to the Synod of Dort can also be summed up in five statements, often captured in the acronym TULIP. This stands for *Total Depravity, Unconditional Election, Limited Atonement, Invincible Grace, and Perseverance of the Saints*. This acronym sums up the position explained in the Canons of Dort. While the word “TULIP” is a handy way to remember the issues, the actual order in the Canons is ULTIP. The Synod put forth these teachings in response to those who had spoken of *election on the condition of foreseen faith*. Man was seen as only *partially depraved*, still able to accept or reject the gospel. They spoke of *universal atonement*, that is, of Christ dying for everyone, and it was up to people to accept or reject the offer. They also spoke of *resistible grace*, which meant that if a person decided to reject the gospel, there is nothing God could do about that. Finally, they spoke of the possibility of the *elect falling away from grace*. When you put all the pieces together, the issue came down to whether God is sovereign in salvation or whether man has a free will, able to make a contribution to his sal-

vation, even if that contribution is no more than accepting the offer of salvation by faith.

When you reflect on this, it is evident at issue was the truth that had been summed up especially in Articles 14-16 of the Belgic Confession, which deal with the creation and fall of man and his incapability of doing what is truly good, original sin, and divine election. Articles 14 and 15 explain how we are dead in our sins and trespasses. Salvation, therefore, depends fully upon the gracious act of God for every aspect of our salvation. God does not just send the offer of salvation for man to take it or leave it. God graciously sent his Son as the atoning sacrifice to pay for sins. God sends the Holy Spirit to give new birth to hearts dead in sin. God works faith to believe in the Saviour. While it is true that the gospel message is proclaimed to all men, it is only by the gracious working of the Spirit that people believe. Key passages that bring out God's sovereign, gracious plan of election are Romans 8:29-30, 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, and Ephesians 1:3-2:10.

It may appear that the Synod of Dort dealt with a dispute among Christians in The Netherlands around the turn of the seventeenth century. This was not the case. Christians in England, Scotland, Germany, Switzerland, and France were aware of the dispute. When a synod was called, men from these countries were invited to participate in the discussion.

There is one more remark to put the matter into perspective and show the link to the Reformation. Luther had a discussion with Erasmus on the same root issue, namely, the free will of man. He wrote a book titled *On the Bondage of the Will*. Those gathered at Dort did not deal with just an internal matter for believers in The Netherlands. They dealt with a matter that touched the very core of the Reformation.



## What was at stake

When it comes to doctrinal controversies, it is possible to overstate the case. Before you know it, there is more heat than light. Sometimes it is helpful to take some distance from a discussion and then revisit the matter and ask what really is at stake. Is it possible to agree to disagree? The Canons of Dort indicate that this was not possible. At stake was the glory of God and the comfort of the believer. This is expressed several times in the Canons.

We come across this for the first time in Chapter 1, Article 6, “*God’s Eternal Decree*.” After explaining how God works in those he has elected and leaves others in their own sins, it concludes with the words, “Although perverse, impure, and unstable men twist this decree to their own destruction, it provides unspeakable comfort for holy and God-fearing souls.” Note that “comfort.” Which believer does not long for that unspeakable comfort, that certainty of salvation?

The next mention is in Chapter 1, Article 14, “*How Election Is to Be Taught*.” It stresses that the doctrine of election should be taught “with a spirit of discretion, in a reverent and holy manner, without inquisitively prying into the ways of the Most High, to the glory of God’s most holy name, and for the living comfort of his people.”

This is reinforced in Article 15 in the chapter dealing with the Perseverance of the Saints. Perseverance is part and parcel of the doctrine of election. It shows how God completes what he has begun. The heading of this article is, “*This Doctrine Is Hated by Satan but Loved by the Church*.” It starts off, “This doctrine of the perseverance of true believers and saints, and of their assurance of it, God has most abundantly revealed in his Word for the glory of his name and for the consolation of the godly. . . .”

There are two references to this dual emphasis of God’s glory and the believer’s comfort in the Conclusion to the Canons of Dort. In the second last paragraph, we read, “In teaching it, both in speaking and writing [ministers] ought to seek the glory of God’s name, the holiness of life, and the consolation of afflicted souls.” For this reason, the doctrine must be taught with restraint, not going beyond the Scriptures. That is always a danger and opens the church to criticism. Saying too much dishonours God and undermines the comfort of believers.

The Conclusion ends with a prayer that the Lord Jesus “lead to the truth those who err, silence the slanderers of the sound doctrine, and equip the faithful ministers of his Word with the Spirit of wisdom and discretion, that everything they say may tend to the glory of God and the building up of those who hear them. Amen.”

## Why #DortMatters

By this point it should be clear that the Canons of Dort dealt with the doctrine of election with the double motivation of God’s glory and the comfort of the believers. We are reminded that correct doctrine is not a matter of trying to outwit someone else, of trying to look more orthodox. As Christians, we should always have the glory of our God as our first and foremost goal. It touches on the third commandment, “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.” It touches also on the first petition, “Hallowed be your name.” The glory of God’s name is something to keep in mind in all discussions about doctrine. So easily such discussions are reduced to, “Is it a salvation issue?” or, “Can’t we agree to disagree?” We are not sticklers for truth just for the sake of being sticklers, but because we want to glorify God’s name. This is also true when it comes to the doctrines summed up in the Canons of Dort. To use a formal term, the Canons are concerned with Doxology, and in the way they explain the doctrine of election, they are doxological.

At the same time, the Canons of Dort are pastoral. They show how there is pastoral motivation for pursuing the truth. The pastoral motivation is the true comfort of believers. If you take away the truth of God’s electing grace in Christ, you in effect bring people back to the uncertainty that plagued Luther. He finally found peace in knowing that he was justified out of grace in Christ, through faith. If you slip in any human contribution as a ground for salvation, even if it be no more than the act of faith, you put every person on the slippery slope of doubt and uncertainty.

The Synod of Dort may appear as something that lies in the mist of ages past. All the details of events leading up to it and the figures involved may not capture our imagination. However, those whose desire is to glorify God’s name and find comfort in the gospel will do well to read the Canons. Perhaps someone will want to start a #DortMatters and rekindle profound doxology for God’s sovereign electing grace in Christ and point the way to unspeakable comfort for believers.

***As Christians,  
we should  
always have the  
glory of our God  
as our first and  
foremost goal***





# Inclined to Folly

*"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God'." (Psalm 14:1)*

When you think of the word "fool," what comes to mind? We would probably not associate foolishness with success. Yet the Bible sometimes does. The classic example of such a successful fool is Nabal, the businessman described in 1 Samuel 25. He was a very rich man and had a beautiful wife. But he did not take God into account in his day-to-day life. He did not submit himself to God's authority.

Fools in the Bible are never morally neutral people. A fool is not someone who is sincere but misguided in his unbelief. Rather, all fools are by nature defiant. Therefore, they are repulsive to God.

Psalm 14 describes what a fool is like. But then it goes on to say, "There is *no one* who does good." In other words, there is a bit of the fool in all of us. The Canons of Dort describes the same thing when it discusses man's total depravity. Total depravity does not mean that every person is as wicked as they possibly could be. But it does mean that every part of human life has been corrupted by the fall into sin.

Practically speaking, what does this mean? It means that information

alone cannot save you. Sometimes we believe that as long as you give people the right information, they will make the right choices. But often they don't. And the reason is because the human heart is inclined to folly. You can't change that just by offering the right information. If you believe that, you are a closet Arminian. The sixteenth century Arminians believed that man is basically good, and just needs the right information or the right example to become better. Psalm 14 cures us of that illusion. People need more than information. People need transformation.

From a New Testament perspective, our text becomes a confession of sin. There is no one who does good. Without God we are all fools. And fools deserve judgment. The psalm hints at that when it refers to God observing the children of man. This act of observation is ominous. Yet in verse 7, the psalmist prays that salvation for Israel would come out of Zion. Zion, of course, is where the temple was. Zion is the means that God established for forgiveness. So, the psalmist here is acknowledging that salvation ulti-

mately has to come from God. No one else can divert God's judgment except for God himself.

A fool is ultimately someone who suffers. Fools make choices that can have very painful consequences for themselves. That is why Jesus Christ had to suffer for our foolishness. God's wrath toward fools was diverted to him instead. He was taken out of the city gates and crucified. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins (1 John 4:10).

The message of the cross is still foolishness to fools. But it is the only answer God has given to the fool of verse 1. And that is why it is the only answer that we can give to anyone else. The only proper answer to the fool is to demonstrate the presence of God in our midst. To be transformed by the power of the resurrection, poured out in our lives through the Holy Spirit. To go from total self-willed independence to living in complete submission to God. Then you will find, as verse 5 puts it, that God is with the generation of the righteous. And that is good news for recovering fools!

## For Further Study – Read Psalm 14

1. "Sometimes we believe that as long as you give people the right information, they will make the right choices." Have you ever believed that? How did that affect the way you interacted with your children or others around you?
2. How can we clearly demonstrate the presence of God in our midst? What does that look like?





# Commitments and Courtship (Part 1)

## Many commitments

Spring is in the air. God is giving new life to his creation. It's an annual testimony to his power and faithfulness. With warmer weather and blue skies, people tend to be more upbeat than otherwise. It becomes easier to "connect." People interact with each other. Their interaction can be a reflection of existing commitments or lead to commitments.

In nature and in human relationships the pulse of new life seems to beat faster in spring. It's no surprise, then, that the coming of spring is also associated in Scripture with love (Song of Solomon 2:11-13). When love blossoms, commitments are often made. Couples are formed. This can lead to a further commitment: the decision to get married.

## Happiness: goal or by-product?

What is marriage about? Is it about "happiness" or "joy"? Is that a goal in itself or a by-product of pursuing another goal? What makes for real "happiness" in a marriage relationship? What are the ingredients to make things work out well in the long run?

It takes time and effort to make a marriage function as it should. Couples that are in an early stage of their relationship don't always realize this. Everything is new. Expectations are high. Feelings are intense. Problems that are hard to resolve may seem to be not more than a remote possibility.

## Preparation

Marriage is a covenantal relationship between two people. It's beautiful when it functions as it should. But it can become a disaster area when we don't have the right understanding of how it should function.

Why head for problems if you can prevent them from arising? As in other areas of life, prevention is better than cure. Work on developing and maintaining a strong relationship on the right foundation!

How do you do that? How can you know that your relationship will be strong enough to stand the test of time? You

need to know what the basic ingredients of a solid Christian marriage are. Otherwise getting married becomes a very risky proposition.

Those of you who are married can testify that there is a lot to be learned both prior to marriage and once you are married. If and when problems arise, you need to be able to deal with them. So what are the potential problem areas? How can you prevent problems from arising or else deal with them in a constructive way?

Couples preparing for marriage should be addressing a lot of questions. They are all connected to a basic underlying question: "Are you ready to say, 'I do'?" In this connection, it's good to realize that there are at least five categories of potential problem areas in a marriage: a proper understanding of the institution of marriage as intended by God, communication in marriage, intimacy in marriage, children, and finances. Reflection and thorough discussions in each area will do much to prepare couples who are contemplating marriage. Even couples facing problems would do well to discern where their areas of weakness are so that they can deal with them in a constructive way.

## Basic principles

We live in a covenant with God. Much of what he teaches us about his covenant with us can enrich our understanding of marriage. God even uses marriage as an illustration of his relationship with his people. Marriage is also used to illustrate the relationship between Christ and the church.

Why is this? Because ideally, marriage is a relationship in which there is a commitment to show love. There is giving and receiving. God has given us so much to be thankful for. His love is unfathomably rich. His love is a forgiving, self-denying, giving love.

Do you want the relationship God has established with you to "work"? Then work on loving him in return. Commit yourself to putting him first throughout your life! Remain within the boundaries in which his love may be enjoyed. That is a life of freedom! When we do this, the covenant of

love will blossom. Our lives will have purpose if they are lived within the boundaries of his love. There will be joy and peace.

## A holy relationship

Our relationship with God is an exclusive one, like marriage. Whatever relationships we establish with people, nothing should infringe on our relationship with God. We should let nothing undermine it in any way either. God is holy. He calls us to be holy. This involves separation from the world. With it comes the calling to live for him. This is also why Scripture warns us against close association with people who do not love God (Ps 1). “Bad company ruins good morals” (1 Cor 15:33).

## Wrong relationships

Sometimes people try to justify a “dating” relationship with an unbeliever. After all, is it not possible that the unbeliever will become a Christian? So why not “try it” and see what happens? That approach is not in line with biblical principles; it is born of wishful thinking. Pointing to the fact that sometimes things do work out does not mean that such a relationship was okay to begin with. Just because God can be merciful does not give us an excuse to ignore his will.

It’s not hard to make a mess of our lives. All we have to do is follow our own inclinations without regard to the will of God. Scripture contains many warnings about the ingredients that make for unhappy marriages and families. So, we need to be wise, that is God-fearing, when considering who could become a suitable spouse.

Our heavenly Father does not tell his children exactly whom they should marry, but his Word does instruct us as to what kind of people we should steer away from. For example, in his second letter to the Corinthians the apostle Paul emphasizes: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers” (2 Cor 6:14).

What Paul means can be rendered more fully as: “Stop becoming unequally yoked with unbelievers.” He is referring to a *process*, not merely an accomplished fact. The dismal results were already evident in the church at Corinth.

Paul bases his warning on an Old Testament command not to plow with an ox and a donkey together (Deut 22:10). Those are two different kinds of animals with a different way of walking and pulling. The Lord prohibits putting them to work together under one yoke since this would not be good for them and would not lead to proper plowing. The

conclusion Paul draws from this is general and can be applied in different ways. It most certainly applies to the intimate relationship of marriage.

## An exclusive relationship

Paul then points to Leviticus 26:12, where God promises to be with his people in a relationship of love: “I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (2 Cor 6:16). God does not want anything to interfere with that! Paul therefore refers once again to the Old Testament (Isa 52:11) in driving home the application: “be separate” from unbelievers (2 Cor 6:17)!

Is the call to “be separate” from unbelievers compatible with beginning a “dating” relationship with an unbeliever? No, it is not. If you do this, you are blurring the line that separates you from the world. “Dating” is the beginning of a process of getting “yoked” to someone. It closes the distance between you and the other person and has serious potential for having a negative impact on your spiritual life. You are in the process of giving your heart to someone who does not understand the deepest treasure that is in your heart: God’s love for you and your response to that love.

You are called to love the LORD your God with all your heart. Is it then right to open up your heart to an unbeliever in a relationship of love? How can you do this without sacrificing something that belongs to God?

A fellow believer can strengthen your heart commitment to God. But an unbeliever cannot do this. His or her heart has been given to “other gods:” the idols of this world.

It’s true that in some cases a courtship has led an unbeliever to become a Christian. However, a period of courtship with an unbeliever should never be looked at as similar to going into a “mission field.” It opens the way to a mine-field where many Christians have ended up compromising their faith, crippling their walk with God. Not a few have even left the faith entirely.

**We need  
to be wise,  
that is God-  
fearing, when  
considering who  
could become a  
suitable spouse**

*To be continued. . .* **C**





# Ontario Doctors Must Refer for Abortion and Assisted Suicide

Some time ago, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) set forth two policies which required that doctors who are unable to perform controversial procedures such as assisted suicide or abortion must nevertheless facilitate such procedures by referring the patient in question to a physician who has no conscientious or religious objections. The Christian Medical and Dental Society (CMDS) appealed these policies. On January 31, 2018, the Ontario Divisional Court sided with the CPSO and their new policies.

The Christian Legal Fellowship, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario intervened in support of the CMDS. I will be quoting from their joint statement issued after the Court released their decision.

“The Court acknowledged that the CPSO policy infringes physicians’ freedom of religion by requiring them to take ‘positive action’ to facilitate procedures such as euthanasia contrary to their beliefs. However, the three-judge panel concluded that such an infringement is justifiable to the extent that it advances the CPSO’s goal of ‘ensuring access to health care services in Ontario, and, in particular, to the goal of ensuring equitable access to such medical services.’” (para. 162)

However, as Derek Ross pointed out: “Requiring someone to participate against their will in ending another person’s life is unconscionable in a free and democratic society. Such coercion in any context violates human dignity, an inviolable right which is not extinguished simply because one practices in a regulated profession. It is difficult to comprehend how it could possibly be in the ‘public interest’ to pressure doctors to either compromise their core ethical convictions or abandon their area of medicine. Neither option is a good outcome for Ontario patients, especially in light of the Court’s acceptance that ‘there is no study or direct evidence that demonstrates that access to health care is, or was, a problem that was caused by physicians objecting on

religious or conscientious grounds to the provision of referrals for their patients.’” (para. 147)

The Court did acknowledge that “the CPSO policies infringe physicians’ freedom of religion in a manner that is not ‘trivial or insubstantial.’” (para. 114) Bruce Clemenger, EFC president, commented that since the court acknowledged that the policy being appealed was a serious violation: “We see no reason why the CPSO does not avail itself of alternative approaches used in other jurisdictions that do not violate such an important freedom. In a religiously diverse and secular society, the state has the obligation to welcome and accommodate religious individuals who contribute to the public good. We respectfully disagree with the Court decision that the approach taken by the College was an appropriate balancing of the rights of patients and doctors. All other jurisdictions in Canada and abroad have found ways to respect both.”

The Court stated that Christian doctors who are unable in good conscience to give an effective referral for abortion or assisted suicide would have to change “the nature of their practice if they intend to continue practicing medicine in Ontario. In short, they would have to focus their practice in a specialty or subspecialty that would [not result in referral requests for objectionable procedures.]” (para. 207)

There is clearly an ongoing effort to rid the public square of any Christian influence. It follows the pattern of other attempts to do that as seen, for example, in the case of legal challenges to Trinity Western University’s new law school and the federal government’s demand that only those who agree with its position on issues such as abortion need apply for their Summer Jobs Program.

Sources used: “The Joint Statement from Christian Legal Fellowship, the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada, and the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario,” (Jan 31, 2018) available on the respective websites, and Deina Warren, “The Ontario Divisional Court Rules that Doctors Must Refer for Abortion and Assisted Suicide” (Feb 1, 2018) on the Gospel Coalition website.







# Praying for Christian school teachers

Even a casual perusal of the back pages of *Clarion* or *Christian Renewal* reveals the pressing need for Reformed Christian school teachers. Much like the finger of Uncle Sam pointing out at us declaring, “We need you!” so too these ads for Christian school teachers impress upon us a great need. At this time of year, principals and school board directors lift their prayers to God that he would provide Christian men and women who would take up the call to teach covenant children in the fear of the Lord at their local school. Prayer is the chief part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. Our covenant Father wants us to call upon him, to acknowledge that we depend upon him for all that we need in order

to live faithfully before his face. It is fitting, therefore, that we earnestly lay the need for Christian school teachers before our Father in heaven.

## **Do we speak about the importance of Christian school teachers with our youth?**

I would argue that Christian education is another part of the thankfulness which God requires of us. The Psalmist declares, “Behold, children are a her-

itage of the Lord” (Ps 127:3). God entrusts these covenant children to our care that we would raise them in such a way that they would know their sin and misery, that they are set free through the blood of Jesus, and that we are called to live thankfully in all areas of our life. Therefore, we establish and maintain Christian schools so that our children would also learn in school that God has created them, loves them, and wants them to have a meaningful relationship with him; that Jesus died for them and that he is now Lord over all things; and that the Holy Spirit is equipping them for the battle that is raging for their hearts. In short, these fundamental teachings that live in our homes and churches must echo in our classrooms.

## **We need teachers**

To achieve this core goal of Christian education, our schools need special people who are not only equipped to teach the academic content – the knowledge, skills, and attitudes within the curriculum – but who are also committed Christians that can testify of the grace of God in their lives and the need to cling to him in all that we do. We need teachers who can help little ones learn how to read and to write, teachers who can inspire children to be creative in art and languages, and teachers who can challenge young people to critically think as they solve complex math problems or examine various worldviews. But teachers do more – they motivate, they disciple, and they model a love for learning. Christian school teachers help children to live faithfully today while equipping them to live faithfully tomorrow.

Unlike the popular misrepresentation that teaching is for those who can’t do other things, being a Christian school teacher is a high calling. Scripture testifies to this high calling by demonstrating that God gifts some individuals within the church to become teachers who in turn equip others to come to a fuller knowledge of him (Eph 4:11, Rom 12:7, 1 Cor 12:28). Moreover, those who have this calling are held to a higher standard lest what they say cause those whom they instruct to stumble (James 3:1). We are mindful here of our Saviour’s rebuke to not hinder the little ones from coming to him (Matt 19:14). On the contrary, God uses Christian school teachers to remove those ideas and worldviews that would cause covenant children to stumble, replacing them with biblical ideas and a worldview that allows them to see their Saviour.

## **Pray and work**

With such a great need and such an important calling, what can we do individually and as a covenant community? *Ora et labora* – pray and work. We must pray for our Christian school teachers – unceasingly – that they

would faithfully and fervently teach God's children. Our prayers will translate into action through the many different ways we support our teachers and uphold the integrity of the profession. Do we speak about the importance of Christian school teachers with our youth? As our young people wrestle with post-secondary plans in prayer, parents, teachers, and pastors should encourage some individuals to consider whether the Lord is leading them to become a teacher. To confirm this inclination, perhaps these individuals could spend part of a day helping out in a classroom, or, better yet, they could arrange for a co-op placement in a Christian school classroom. Prayer is also needed for those young people who are determined to become a teacher. Preparing to become a teacher may take up to five years, so we can pray with them for patience and perseverance, encouraging them in the knowledge that they are pursuing a worthy calling.

As a covenant community we also have a responsibility to pray and work together in order to promote this profession. It's not just high school students who might consider a calling to become a Christian school teacher. For some, the call may come later in life, after having obtained an undergraduate degree in some other area of interest. Do we know someone whom we think may be gifted for teaching? Perhaps they need a word of encouragement to reinforce an inclination

they have to become a teacher. These individuals will need more than just prayer as they take up their studies to become a teacher. Here too, as a covenant community we need to find ways to support these individuals and their families for the duration of the teacher education program. Another opportunity to promote the profession of teaching in Christian schools occurs at annual school membership meetings. We could use these occasions to showcase the profession and pray together as a school community that God would continue to provide teachers for our children. Finally, we would do well, as some church communities have done, to call for a prayer service to thank God for the gift of Christian education and to specifically pray for the pressing need for Christian school teachers. In all of these ways, as we pray and work together for Christian education, we may be assured that through Christ our Lord, God will hear our prayers as he has promised us. The need is great. Let's pray.

*These  
fundamental  
teachings that  
live in our  
homes and  
churches must  
echo in our  
classrooms*

C



# Clarion Kids

## The Lord's Prayer

Matthew 6:5-15, Luke 11:1-13

When Jesus was on earth, he taught the people how he wanted them to pray. This is what he told them to say:

"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

When we pray we should always remember what Jesus taught, and tell God how thankful we are for all the wonderful things he gives to us.

Go to [www.clarionmagazine.ca](http://www.clarionmagazine.ca) to print and colour this picture!



### Word Search

D	I	Y	E	O	P	Z	M	V	D
A	E	N	S	R	R	O	N	L	M
D	V	B	A	U	D	B	O	U	T
X	E	Y	T	G	S	J	K	F	J
U	E	W	N	O	S	E	N	K	F
R	T	I	O	T	R	Q	J	N	A
O	K	T	V	L	L	S	J	A	T
D	A	E	R	B	L	M	H	H	H
K	O	E	Y	P	S	A	O	T	E
F	O	R	G	I	V	E	H	B	R

Bread	Debtors	Father
Forgive	Hallowed	Jesus
Kingdom	Prayer	Thankful

by Emily Nijenhuis

### Double Puzzle

Unscramble the words, then unscramble the circled letters to solve the final word.

LELWAOHD

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

1

LIDY A REDAB

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

8

6

4

FOVREGI

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

2

10

NAEVEH

--	--	--	--	--	--

9

7

REDSOBT

--	--	--	--	--	--	--

3

5

--	--	--	--

1

2

3

4

--	--

5

P							
---	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

6

7

8

9

10



# Q Why is the sacrament of infant baptism such a divisive issue?

*Infant baptism, or as many Reformers call it, “covenantal baptism,” today is still very much a sacrament that divides many of us. Many who are not in agreement have left the Canadian Reformed Churches over it. Although they had their children baptized so as to become covenant children, later on these children never make profession of faith, leave the Reformed faith, or they join another denomination; some of these parents themselves later on recant their profession of faith and leave the Reformed church and Christianity altogether. Among them are those who professed their faith as it was expected of them by their parents. What is right or wrong in this situation?*

**A** In our time, baptism is seen more and more as something for which one should *choose*. Not only in Baptist circles, but even in formerly Reformed denominations in which infant baptism was an accepted practice, children are dedicated to the Lord instead of baptized. The children themselves have to decide whether they want to be baptized or not. The idea that baptism is something that pertains to the baptized person only is gaining prominence in our time. Baptism is seen as a “seal of faith.” The believer shows himself a believer by *choosing* for baptism; it serves as seal on his confession of faith. A superficial look at adult baptism seems to indicate that this indeed is what it does: for the adult believer is baptized after his profession of faith. It’s incorrect though! Baptism is *not* a matter of choice, not even for the parents of infants who are baptized.

“Children *ought* to be baptized,” the Form says, because, as members of Christ’s congregation, our children *are* sanctified in Christ. Christ “loved the church,” Paul writes to the

Ephesians (5:26), “and gave himself up for her, to make her holy, having cleansed her by the washing of water through the Word.” We all, who are baptized, are baptized into Christ, upon *his* word, *his* will, and *his* way with our life. Just as with Abraham in the matter of circumcision, this sacrament is not a seal of faith but a seal of the righteousness which he had *by faith* (Rom 4:11). Before his circumcision, Abraham believed God’s promises, and this faith made him righteous before God (LD 23); by grace God gave him acquittal from all his sins and guilt and made him his own child. Circumcision *confirmed* this status to him, and his offspring *shared* it with him! Likewise, already before our children are baptized they share with their parents in this promise of the forgiveness of sins in the blood of Christ. Then in baptism God guarantees, seals, that they may share in this blessing with Abraham and that he delivers us from all our sins by faith!

So, baptism is not a matter of choice for us, but in baptism God comes to us in Jesus Christ, either through believing parents or by working faith at a later age, and he gives baptism as an assurance of our deliverance in Jesus Christ.




He guarantees our salvation to us. Baptism is a gift from God, a precious gift, with which I may be very happy, not because I chose for it but because *God chose for me!* He wants to make me rich, rich by faith! In baptism God is coming to me with his promise, Christ is claiming me for the fulfilment of this promise in his blood, personally! It impresses upon my heart and mind the true reality that Christ came to me, claiming me, embracing me, and immersing me in the communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Indeed, this confession of the rich meaning of God's guarantee in baptism has given rise to questions, important questions. These questions often go in two directions. On the one hand there is the allegation that by understanding its meaning in this way we teach a kind of "covenant automatism." If you're baptized, you're alright. God guaranteed his promises in an eternal covenant: so, if it's *eternal* it cannot be broken, it is fulfilled automatically. On the other hand, there is the difficulty we ourselves have with baptism and covenant. There are children who received baptism, who had the promises of God in the covenant guaranteed to them. . . , yet they turn their back on God, they want to have nothing to do with faith. So, what's become of God's promises? If a baptized member can be lost for ever, what good does baptism do to us?

Although these questions sound quite different, and originate from different backgrounds, they have a common notion: how exactly do we have to see the covenant which the LORD made with Abraham *and his seed*, namely the seed that's united with Abraham *by faith*. Abraham is the father of *all* believers. Indeed, God made his covenant with us, believers, *and* with our children. God, however, makes us an *active* partner in the covenant. He takes us seriously, and he

wants us to take him seriously in the promises he gives in this covenant. He wants us to *respond* to these promises by faith in order to obtain what is promised! There is nothing automatic; the water of baptism does not have any magic power. *Promising* the washing away of our sins is not the same as *predicting* that you will be saved! God's salvation comes to us in "bonds" that need to be cashed, as I often explained it in catechism class; it comes to us by way of a cheque, which we need to accept as true, so that we take it to the "bank" in faith in order to obtain the amount of salvation it guarantees. By believing the promises, the promised matter becomes reality!

Already in the OT the LORD worked with this call for *responsibility*, i.e. the call to *respond* to his promises in faith. God said to his people Israel: *I have given* you the land of Canaan, even though they hadn't put a foot in it. That's how strongly God puts his promises: *I have given* you the land! However, when most of the ones to whom God gave this promise did not enter the land, this was not due to God's unfaithfulness to his promise, reneging on his Word; it was due to the people's *unbelief* that they did not enter (Hebr 4)! That's the same today: God promises seriously the washing away of our sins to each one of us *personally*: so, if I don't reach the Promised Land, the new Canaan, the new earth, then that's not his fault but mine, because I did not accept his promises. Hence, making profession of this faith is not done because our parents force us, or due to peer pressure, or as a kind of graduation to complete my catechism classes, but it is full out *my responsibility* to respond to God's promises with a true faith, and a sincere repentance from sin, living in true love to him, our covenant God! 



**Is there something you've been  
wanting to know?**

**An answer you've been looking for?**

**Ask us a question!**

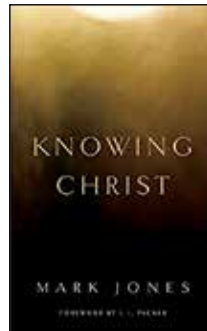
**Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander**

**[denhollanderw@gmail.com](mailto:denhollanderw@gmail.com)**

**23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0**



## Mark Jones, *Knowing Christ* Banner of Truth Trust, 2015, 250 pages



Back in 1973, J.I. Packer wrote *Knowing God*, a book which was very helpful for many Christians to get to know God in a more personal way. It focussed on the core of the Christian faith, that of knowing and worshipping God, and did so in an accessible and stimulating way.

A few years ago, Mark Jones, a PCA minister in Vancouver and noted Puritan scholar, wrote *Knowing Christ*, a title clearly meant to recall Packer's book. While Packer could be said to have focussed primarily on God the Father, Jones focusses on God the Son, the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ. Jones states in his introduction, "I write that people may know Christ better than they already do, and so love him more."

For my part, he has certainly succeeded in his objective. It is, of course, a tall order to write such a book. For Christians, Jesus Christ can seem overly familiar to us. After hearing years and decades of Reformed preaching and regular instruction in the Heidelberg Catechism, there can be the danger that we think we know all there is to know about Christ. For those of us who may feel somewhat jaded in our life of faith with the Lord, this book about knowing Christ is highly recommended.

How does Jones succeed in his objective? He does so by taking Christ's divine nature and human nature utterly seriously. He shows aspects of these two natures in Christ in fresh and interesting ways. The mystery of Christ's incarnation is explored and shown by illuminating Scripture passages which we may have overlooked or read over. He also does this by making good use of the Puritans, such as John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and Samuel Rutherford. These brothers of seventeenth century were exceptionally gifted at drawing out precious pearls from the depths of God's Word.

The book consists of twenty-seven short chapters, each about six or seven pages, making it easy to read in short sittings. At the back of the book, there is a study guide with several questions on each chapter, making it suitable for family worship and study societies. It is certainly also highly recommended as a personal devotional book.

## Mark Jones, *God Is:* *A Devotional Guide to the Attributes of God* Crossway, 2017, 240 pages



Mark Jones begins this book about God's attributes with these words, "The true and living God is too much for us to bear, to handle, to conceive, to adore, to know, to trust, to understand, and to worship. The Incomprehensible One is simply too much for us in every conceivable way." This tone of awe, reverence, and worship sets the tone of the book well. He goes on to say that it is in Christ, God made flesh, that we may begin to truly get to know God better and better. As we read in John 1:18, "No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known."

As might be gleaned from the title, *God Is* is an explanation of the many attributes of God, which he possesses to the fullest and most perfect degree. It deals with each of the attributes of God mentioned in the Belgic Confession, Article 1 and many others besides. There are twenty-six chapters, each focussing on one attribute of God. These chapters are even shorter than the ones in *Knowing Christ*, about five pages each. Each chapter is structured in the same way: a section explaining the attribute, how this attribute is revealed in Christ and how this attribute applies to us in the Christian life.

Jones has a gift for explaining difficult concepts clearly and precisely. Ironically one of the most difficult attributes of God for us to understand is that God is "simple." He does an excellent job with this, explaining how all God's attributes harmonize and work together flawlessly in perfect consistency. God is not composed of separate parts, but he is "simple undivided essence." The life of the Spirit-filled Christian is to show an analogous simplicity in showing the fruit of the Spirit in harmonious unity.

*God Is* is a very edifying read, suited to personal devotional reading, as well as group study. Although this book doesn't have discussion questions, the application part in each chapter gives much to consider for further reflection and discussion. Highly recommended!



## PRESS RELEASES

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### Press Release of Classis Niagara, February 14, 2018

Br. Warren Hoeksema opened the meeting on behalf of Attercliffe Canadian Reformed Church in a Christian manner.

The church of Smithville, the convening church for the next regional synod, asked for advice regarding a request

to have an early regional synod (Church Order, Art. 47). Classis gave concurring advice to convene an early regional synod (May 16, 2018) due to a pastoral situation.

John VanWoudenberg  
(vice-chairman for Classis Niagara Feb 14, 2018)

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### Short Report of Classis Niagara March 8, 2018

Elder Ken Jager, one of the delegates from the convening church of Attercliffe, opened the meeting of the delegates in a Christian manner. He noted that Classis Ontario East of the United Reformed Churches had just closed, and that those delegated to Classis Niagara were able to witness the proceedings. He expressed gratitude that the delegates of the URCNA would now be witnessing the proceedings of Classis Niagara March 8, 2018.

The meeting of the delegates chose Elder Ken Jager as chairman, Elder Carl Oosterhoff as clerk, and Rev. John VanWoudenberg as vice chairman.

After the agenda was adopted, the chairman asked each of the churches if the ministry of the office-bearers is being continued, and if the decisions of the major assemblies are being honoured. Each church answered in the affirmative. In closed session advice was asked for and received in a matter of discipline.

Church visitation reports were received regarding the churches of Attercliffe, Grassie, Lincoln, Smithville, and Tintern.

Classis appointed the church of Dunnville as the convening church for the next classis, to be held on June 13, 2018.

Classis delegated to Regional Synod May 16, 2018 the following ministers and elders:

As Ministers: Rev. Peter Holtvlüwer, Rev. John VanWoudenberg; alts (in this order): Rev. Clarence Bouwman; Rev. Rolf den Hollander.

As Elders: Elder Rick Nordeman; Elder Mark Vanderelde; alts (in this order): Elder John Witten, Elder Nick Vandenoever.

Classis dealt with two appeals in closed session.

After personal question period classis was closed.

John VanWoudenberg, clerk e.t. 