

Clarion



What's Inside

A current trend in teaching a concept called "mutual submission" brings up the topic of submission and headship. However, Rev. Holtvliwer points out in his lead article, there is more to the topic of submission than a discussion of the marriage relationship.

Another current topic is that of journalism bias, and the question of whether we can really trust journalists to be objective. Rev. Arend Witten has written an article on reforming journalism. Following his article, we have an article by Richard Feenstra entitled, "Calibrating the Conscience" - once again, a relevant topic.

Issue 13 brings readers a Treasures, New & Old meditation by Rev. Ben Schoof, the Ray of Sunshine column, a book review, a letter to the editor, and one short report.

Laura Veenendaal

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Due to human error, an article in the previous issue was printed without the author's name or credentials. We offer our sincere apologies to our contributor for leaving out this information and to our readers for the confusion.

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Clarion

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LEAD ARTICLE



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Submission:

#notjustforwives

The topic of wives submitting to husbands seems once again to be in the air. A number of recent books written by Reformed and/or Evangelical authors have abandoned the long-standing teaching that wives are called to submit to husbands in acknowledgement of their headship. Instead, based on Ephesians 5:21, they insist that wives and husbands are called to “mutual submission.”ⁱ In this concept there is no authority of the husband, no designated role of leadership, but simply a humble submitting to one another’s will within marriage.

Before making comment on this idea, I’d like to pull the camera back and look at what Scripture says about men’s submission. It seems to me that this debate often gets bogged down by looking only at the calling of married women to submit, but what about the calling of married men (single men too!) to submit to others? If women sometimes struggle to submit to their husbands as called to do in Ephesians 5:22-24, do

they realize that their husbands may struggle with the same requirement albeit in a different setting?

What is submission?

Let’s start with the basic meaning of the verb “to submit” in the Bible. The Greek word in question in Ephesians 5:21 and used elsewhere in Scripture is *upotasso* and at its root means “to place under.”ⁱⁱ English synonyms for the translation “submit” are

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God's Word

"subject" or "subordinate." To "submit" implicitly acknowledges the existence of order and authority structures in society like kings/queens and the people they govern, masters and their servants, church elders and those under their charge, parents and their children, as well as husbands and their wives. In the Bible, each of the latter in these pairs is called to "submit" (*upotasso*) to the other, an act which involves both placing oneself under the authority of the other and honouring him/her by following his/her will. It includes respectful obedience and is God's calling not just of wives to husbands but of husbands and men generally to all whom God has placed over them. And since it is God's calling, submission must be a good thing.

Men submitting to men

After all, isn't it a good thing that all men (married or single) are required to submit, for example, to the elders of the church? This is clearly God's will as Peter instructs, "Likewise, you who are younger, be subject [*upotasso*] to the elders" (1 Pet 5:5).

Hebrews fills out this calling in 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submitⁱⁱⁱ to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you." The elders shepherd the flock by guiding members to follow the good Shepherd in love and obedience. Elders teach the Lord's promises and commandments, and all members must submit and obey. Where they do not, elders must admonish, rebuke, and exercise formal discipline if necessary.

Can you imagine if the men of the church went around ignoring the instruction of the elders and just doing their own thing? Instead of answering the call of the elders to faithfully attend every worship service, the men (and for married men, also their families) would just come when they felt like it. Likewise, the men would only help others when it suited them (or simply not bother); they may or may not give of their first fruits; they may or may not attend Bible study or have their kids attend catechism. Without submission there wouldn't be much order left in church and in its place would be a growing pattern of self-willed worship, exactly what God hates. Submission means yielding your will to those in authority and doing what they ask, so long as it doesn't conflict with God's Word. Submission is God's design and it's a blessing for all involved.

The call to submit to the body of elders (the consistory) is true even for deacons, elders, and ministers as individuals. At their ordination, every office bearer pledges to "submit to the discipline of the church in case [they] should become delinquent in doctrine or life."^{iv} Every individual office bearer, just like every church member, falls under the supervision of the elders as far as their personal doctrine and conduct is concerned. More broadly, according to the Lord's fifth commandment, deacons, elders, and ministers must also submit themselves "with due obedience" to the "good instruction and discipline" of those in authority over them (LD 39).

The rub and the blessing

I personally have felt both the rub in this command and the blessing. The rub is that by nature we don't like to obey others, and I have that same tendency, even as a Christian, even as a pastor! My old nature likes to think it knows best while my new nature – as the Holy Spirit is making it come alive in me – knows my calling is to submit to the decision of the elders, even if I have misgivings. And misgivings do occur.

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 and society

As a minister, I attend and even have chaired just about all the consistory meetings in the churches I've served. By far, in most instances, we are able to discuss an issue and come to a decision by consensus. But occasionally opinions differ, and the body is divided. And on those occasions, I have a few times found myself on the side of the minority. Of those times, there have been instances when I felt very passionately that the consistory was making an unwise decision and yet, despite my pleas, it was the will of the body to so decide. Although it wasn't an unbiblical decision, it seemed very foolish to me and I found it hard to go along with it, even frustrating. That's the rub in submission. But in moments like that, I have to trust in God, who set up this and every authority structure and who calls me to submit. To submit, especially in such a moment, is an act of faith.

And the Lord in his grace often rewards that faith. That's the blessing I've experienced in submitting, and I'm sure I'm not alone. Of those few occasions above where I was so convinced

that my viewpoint was the better one and the consistory was making a mistake, in a number of cases some months later I had my eyes opened to see it was the other way around. The Lord knew best all along (of course!) and the body of elders had it right. If my opinion had carried the day, I could now see that it would have made matters worse, and so I have come to thank God both for the wisdom he imparts to the body of elders and for the beauty in submitting. I'm not saying consistories (or other authority figures) never make mistakes, but simply that humbly submitting to their decisions regularly results in blessing. That's the biblical norm.

Submission ≠ inferiority

It's important to clarify that the person submitting to the authority figure is not less than or inferior to the authority figure. This is not about identifying one person as of lesser value than the other. All humans are made in God's image and of equal in worth before him. And yet this same God assigns different offices to various people, as he sees fit, for the good ordering of the family, the church, and society. As a teaching elder (minister) seated at a consistory meeting, I am neither inferior nor superior to any brother there. I have a particular office and role, that's all. And yet I am called to submit to the decisions of the body and recognize that as the Lord's good order.

This is the pattern all throughout Scripture. When Solomon was crowned king we read, "All the officers and mighty men, as well as all of King David's sons, pledged their submission [*upotasso*, LXX] to King Solomon" (1 Chron 29:24 NIV). Even Solomon's own siblings, clearly his equals in every way, nevertheless willingly subjected themselves to the authority of their new king and promised loyal obedience to him. In Luke 2:51 we read that Jesus - who was and remains the Son of God - submitted (*upotasso*) to his parents, which means, as the NIV translates, that he obeyed them. Though Jesus was actually superior to his parents and truly knew better than they did, yet he yielded his will to theirs in obedience to God. Similarly, in Romans 13, everyone, men included, must "be subject [*upotasso*] to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God." Men, like women, are called to submit to others in a variety of callings and roles. And when it happens that the head of state is a woman, the men of the realm are to obey as the Jews obeyed Queen Esther's command (Esther 9:29-32). Even the late Prince

Philip submitted to his wife as Queen of England on the day of Elizabeth's coronation!^v This is God's good and perfect will for us, and the norm is that good will come when we obey God.


Wives submit to husbands

By now it should be clear that "to submit" (*upotasso*) everywhere in the Bible means yielding your will to someone in authority over you. The very concept of "mutual submission" is an oxymoron, an impossibility. Just think: If I submit to you and you submit to me, whose wish will prevail? If everyone is always deferring to the will of another, then in essence they cancel each other out. At the end of the day, someone's will has to change for things to move forward.

Tellingly, Scripture never uses the expression "mutual submission." People *interpret* Ephesians 5:21 that way, but that's not what it says. "Submitting" (*upotasso*) appears there as the last of four "ing" verbs describing what it means to be "filled with the Spirit" (v. 18). Being filled with the Spirit involves "addressing one another," "singing and making melody," "giving thanks," and finally, "submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ" (see ESV). It's the words "to one another" that some believe mean "every person to every other person" and therefore "mutual submission."

Yet not only does that interpretation go against the meaning of the verb, but the Greek adverb also translated as "to

one another" doesn't always mean "every person to every other person." It depends on the context. One example is Revelation 6:4, "So that people should slay one another" – can all people mutually kill all other people? Or consider James 5:16, "Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed." Are we meant to confess our sins to all other people and pray for each and every other person and vice versa? The idea of doing something "to one another" can be limited to a certain group or groupings of people and that's what Paul does in Ephesians 5:22–6:9. After introducing the idea of "submitting to one another," he goes on to detail the specific submitting he has in mind: wives to husbands, children to parents, servants to masters.^{vi} The submission in each case is in one direction, just like everywhere else in the Bible. There simply is no so-called "mutual submission."

Much more, of course, could be said about the need for authority figures to act in a godly manner toward those under their charge and how husbands need to sacrificially love their wives as Christ loves the church.^{vii} And, certainly, submission has its limits. Yet the point I'm making remains valid: submission as God commanded it is a good thing. A husband will be blessed in submitting to those in authority over him just as a wife will be blessed in submitting to her husband, whom God has made to be her head. 

ⁱ See for example Sheila Wray Gregoire, *The Great Sex Rescue* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2021), p.30-32; Aimee Byrd, *Recovering from Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), p.105. While there is much helpful food for thought in each book, both writers assume the accuracy of the interpretation "mutual submission" but do not explain much less defend how they arrive at that understanding. Yet they use this erroneous concept to develop some of their points which renders those points weak and untenable.

ⁱⁱ For a detailed discussion on the meaning of this term, the debate over it, and how best to understand it in Ephesians 5, see Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* in the Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) p.399-405.

ⁱⁱⁱ This is a different Greek word, *upeiako*, but it means much the same as *upotasso*.

^{iv} "Form for the Ordination of Elders and Deacons," *Book of Praise* (Winnipeg: SCBP, 2014), p.626. Ministers make the same promise (see p.620).

^v *People Magazine*, Commemorative Edition, (New York: Meredith Corporation, 2021), p.64

^{vi} For an easy-to-read summary of this issue, see Kevin DeYoung, *Men and Women in the Church: A Short, Biblical, Practical Introduction* (Crossway: Wheaton, 2021), p.103-105. A good book for church libraries!

^{vii} See for instance the article of my colleague Rev. Matthew VanLuik, "Headship and Submission: Outdated or Fundamental for Marriage and Family?" in *Clarion*, 69, March 6, 2020.

Jesus Anointed at Bethany

"As he was reclining at table, a woman came with an alabaster flask of ointment of pure nard, very costly, and she broke the flask and poured it over his head." (MARK 14:3-9)

Do you see yourself as a level-headed person? Stewardly? I certainly would not be offended if you described me in this way. But extravagant, impulsive, reckless? Probably not! However, our text challenges our practicality.

Mark stacks words on top of one another to build up the extravagance of what the woman did for Jesus. Alabaster jars are beautiful, fragile, and expensive. Her perfume is made of pure nard – a beautiful scent extracted from a plant growing in the Himalayas. Imagine how costly it would be to import in Roman times!

You're supposed to dilute it before use. A few drops mixed with a bottle of olive oil was equivalent to many months' supply of a beautiful smelling anointment. But she does not dilute it. She does not carefully unstop the jar and drip a tiny bit on Jesus's head. She smashes the jar and empties the entire thing over him! Jesus is literally drenched with perfume. The scent must have been overwhelming. The perfume was worth over a year of work at minimum wage. Maybe \$30,000, gone in a moment.

"Imagine how much good \$30,000 would have done for the poor," the onlookers say. "What extravagance! What a waste!" But Jesus does not consider it a waste. "Leave her alone ... She has done a beautiful thing to me." Her anointing prepares his body for burial. Somehow, unlike all Jesus' other followers, she knows that Jesus is going to die. And she does this to show her extravagant love for him. He is worth this gift and devotion.

Every time I hear this story told in memory of her, it challenges me. I'm still inclined to sympathize with the onlookers! It is a lot of money. What if she poured *half* the perfume on Jesus? It's still an extravagant gift! But then there's \$15,000 left for the poor.

However, Jesus defends her because she was showing her extravagant love in the only way she could. In this way her actions are a picture of the first great commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength" (Mark 12:30).


Taking that command literally seems reckless. Impractical. If I love God with everything I have, then I have nothing left over

for my spouse, parents, children; to say nothing of the poor. And, sin wants to keep a good portion of my love for myself. Not give it all away. But God tells us not to hold back love. Love God with everything you have. Wholehearted. Dive headfirst, eyes shut into devotion to God. And then, like the grain planted in good soil (Mark 8), our love will grow and come back increased for others.

You won't have *less* love for others if you spend all your energy loving God. You will love others exponentially more if you love God first.

Jesus shows us what extravagant love looks like. He set aside his glory and came to serve. He gave everything including his life to ransom many. His shed blood covers all our selfishness, self-love, and sin.

In return, the gifts God has given us we must pour out in God's service, for the good of others (Rom 12:6). Follow Christ, even when it costs your life (Mark 8:34). Do not just hate, but *crucify* your sinful nature with its passions and desires (Gal 5:24). Have *nothing* to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness (Eph 5:11).

Love and service to God is not supposed to be practical. Don't be frugal with your spiritual gifts. Be extravagant. Love, and give everything you can! 

For Further Study

1. **Who do you naturally side with in this story: the extravagant woman, or the frugal onlookers?**
2. **In what ways can you be more extravagant and whole-hearted in your devotion to God?**
3. **What gifts do you have and how can you use them more to love in this world?**



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Can Journalism *be* Reformed?

“I don’t listen to the news anymore. I can’t handle it. They don’t even pretend to be objective!” It’s a sentiment I’ve heard from Christians over the last twelve months. Sensational reporting through the COVID-19 crisis, thinly veiled attack pieces on Christians, organizations and lampooning elected leaders leave a bad taste in a Christian’s mouth.

But we need accurate information. We must understand what is going on in our society to pray for it thoughtfully and interact with it meaningfully. We need to make wise decisions for our families, schools, churches, and businesses. And journalists are those tasked with unearthing such information and serving it up to the public.

On our own we cannot be objective

Reforming journalism

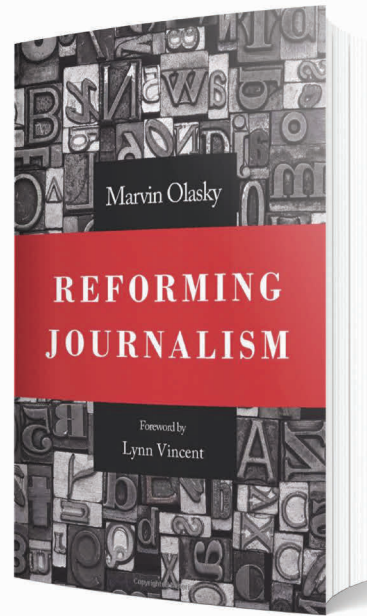
Can journalism be reformed? In a recent book, *Reforming Journalism*, veteran Christian journalist Marvin Olasky charts a path forward. Olasky taught journalism for twenty-five years at the University of Texas and is the editor-in-chief of *WORLD*, a bi-weekly Christian news magazine. His book really is a primer for how a Christian could embark on a career in journalism today. In this article I want to introduce you to Olasky's vision for biblically sound journalism and suggest ways we can contribute to the reformation of journalism from our Canadian Reformed context.

No objectivity

Olasky asks, "What is objectivity?" Television journalist Linda Ellerbee once said, "There is no such thing as objectivity. Any reporter who tells you he's objective is lying to you" (*Reforming Journalism*, p. 28). In a way she is right. Even when facts of a news article are accurate, they are given a particular perspective which shapes how they are understood. Which stories a newspaper chooses to cover and which to ignore reflects an agenda. In a basic dictionary definition, objectivity means "expressing the nature of reality as it is apart from personal reflections or feelings." But, as human beings, we always perceive reality through our own lens. On our own we cannot be objective.

Biblical objectivity

The only one who understands the true nature of things is God himself. Thankfully, he has revealed to us in the Bible an objective and accurate view of the world. This is Olasky's central concept of Christian journalism: The "only true objectivity is biblical objectivity" (p. 23). A secular critic may complain that it is subjective to report as though God is real. But a secular journalist also must assume without proof that atheism is true. By "biblical objectivity"



Olasky does not mean that a Christian journalist's article would be chock full of Scripture texts. Rather, such an article would report current events in the light of biblical principles such as what is right and wrong, good and beautiful (p. 30).

Implications of biblical objectivity

This all makes sense. But there are implications to accepting Olasky's "biblical objectivity." For one, we ought not to be surprised when we don't get objective reporting from secular news outlets. Rather, we must look for a bias. It must necessarily be there. Two, believing the only objectivity is biblical objectivity means there is great value in Christians working in journalism. And not only in news analysis, but also boots-on-the-ground investigative journalism.

Why be a journalist?

Probably not for the money. Christians want to identify and use their God-given talents for the glory of God and for the good of others. Olasky exudes excitement about equipping Christians to be journalists. Two core reasons stand out. First, a journalist serves as a watchman on the walls. Blowing the trumpet to warn the people (p. 15). Sin likes darkness. But when malfeasance, injustice, or social issues are exposed, we are prodded to do something about it and the wicked are discouraged from their crimes. As Paul writes to the Ephesians, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them" (5:11). Actually, bad news glorifies God by showing the results

Would you encourage a young Christian to consider a career in journalism?

of sin and how desperately mankind needs his grace. Second, reporting good news also glorifies God. Christians believe that this world is God's theatre. The world is full of millions of "nooks and crannies and opportunities for adventure" (p. 20). Describing the world well displays the creative wisdom of our God and leads us to praise him.

Canadian Reformed journalists

We regularly speak of the need for Christian teachers and pastors. But what about journalists? Our Reformed heritage counts prolific journalists. Remember Abraham Kuyper and Klaas Schilder. Our fathers in the faith began *Clarion* and *Reformed Perspective*. How can we build on this heritage? Would you encourage a young Christian to consider a career in journalism?

In the Canadian mainstream media, anyone who does not unequivocally affirm the LGBTQ+ agenda is placed in the same moral category as a member of the KKK. Is it realistic to expect a Christian to be able to serve in a secular news organization? Should we only focus on Christian publications? Olasky points to Daniel living in Babylon as a good role model. He lived and


worked under Babylonian authority and was valued for his integrity and competence. Worldview clashes are inevitable. But who knows what the Lord would do with a Christian who serves as a principled, diligent, capable employee in a secular organization?

Christian journalists must strive for excellence in the same way that a Christian carpenter must learn to build houses expertly. Learning to write English well, to use words accurately, to construct a gripping story, and to conduct an in-depth interview are all advanced skills that need to be honed. Reading Olasky's work will give you a new appreciation for all that goes into a compelling news story, that we media consumers just don't notice. Journalism is a God-glorifying human endeavour that Christians ought not to leave to unbelievers.

Reformed readers

To contribute to reforming journalism, our own choices of media consumption may need to change. I mentioned Reformed periodicals, but there are other Christian news media platforms available to Christians. It is heartening to see websites and podcasts being used to share a Christian perspective on current events. Making use of and supporting these mediums allows them to thrive.

One of the surprising elements of church life in the last twelve months has been how mature, thoughtful, Reformed Christians have arrived at radically opposing positions on the pandemic. As one comedian quipped, "Half my friends wear a mask in the shower to avoid getting COVID from their hamster, the other half act like someone has ordered them to go out and get the virus." How is such divergence possible? Surely part of the answer is the news media we consume. Reading and discussing current events from shared sources allows us to grow together.

Skepticism toward news media has increased through the COVID-19 crisis. But this need not lead to a Christian retreat from journalism. We need objective journalism – biblical journalism. Marvin Olasky has a vision for Christians to be part of the reformation for journalism. Will it work? Can journalism actually be reformed? A better question to ask ourselves: will we work for it? 



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Calibrating *the* Conscience

By **Richard Feenstra** *Member of the Canadian Reformed Church of Grassie*

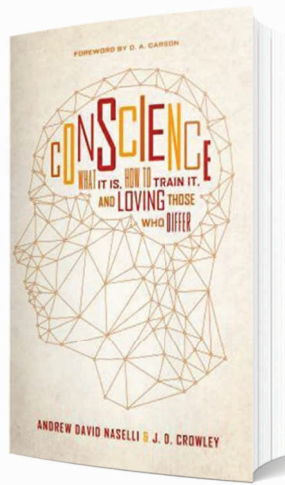
Why is the church at first blush so divided these days? Issues have risen fast in less than a year and it seems like congregations are becoming polarized. But are we really disjointed? Is that really true, or does it just feel like it? We read in Ephesians 4, “There is one body and one Spirit – just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call – one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” One body? Why do we not gather together then? One Spirit? Why are we driven by so many different opinions these days? To mask or not mask, to assemble as one body or livestream worship? Despite our questions there is but one Lord and we are united by one faith and by one covenant symbolised in one baptism. We are ruled by the one and only God, who is our Father. Yes, our Father. We are truly children sometimes. We get mad at fellow siblings and frustrated at each other without really understanding what the other is doing or what they are thinking or why.

On top of and added to the difficulties we have between each other, we live in a world where the devil is clearly pressing

hard against the church. A great spiritual battle is raging around us. It is not just our own flesh attacking us but all three sworn enemies. The devil is using all tactics to pull the church apart, and once isolated we become much easier individual targets for him. Can we fight and, if so, how? Where do we turn, and which battle must we face first? Perhaps another can write on that first question, but I hope to look at the second.

Which battle first?

Scripture is clear in that it begins with our own confession before God. Once our hearts are made pure, we can then look to the body of Christ, that it might be kept as one. “But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another” (1 Cor 12:24b-25). If we have any hope against the devil and the world, we must become one body under the Lordship of Christ. How, then, ought we to seek to understand one another?



A helpful book

I would like to walk readers, in my own words, through a few of the concepts of a book I recently read, *Conscience*. It was written by two men, Andrew Naselli and J. D. Crowley, one a Baptist theological professor and the other an evangelist in Asia. It is a beautifully written book that describes from Scripture what conscience is, how to train it, and how to love those who differ.

For a relatively small book, it packs a lot of content, but I believe there are a few key themes that we can pick out that may prove helpful. The first thing I would like to point out is that, as a rule, each of us is seeking to serve and obey God in a way that we are convicted God teaches us to do so. We have all been taught what a true and false church is, we know doctrine fairly well, and can understand when teachings or ideas go against Scripture. The many doctrines we confess and adhere to give us general concepts of what we believe, but they still leave a lot of room for disagreement on the finer details. We confess the same things and therefore understand how we are one in Christ. Yet, we find ourselves at odds with each other and do not really understand why. Is there something in doctrine or commandments that one side or the other in a dispute is somehow breaking? The answer is: not likely. How we exercise a position might be, but the stance taken on the issue itself is not necessarily against God's Word.

Into the equation comes the conscience. The book's authors provide various descriptions and definitions of conscience. It comes down, in general terms, to be one's moral compass by which one executes and lives out their worldview. As I said, that is a generalization and there are better definitions in the book. We acknowledge the role of our conscience in various parts of our confessions. For example, in Belgic Confession, Article 23, it speaks of Christ's obedience giving us the confidence in drawing near to God, freeing our conscience. Canons of Dort Chapters 3 & 4, Article 5 confesses that one fallen in gross sin can wound their conscience to the point of losing sense of God's

favour. As you can see, the conscience is like a warning light. All is well when we are drawn in faith through the blood of Christ; but, when we fall into sin, we are capable of becoming immune or can even choose to ignore the alarms to the point that God might even allow us to lose sense of his favour.

The other aspect to understand is that conscience does not equal faith. While the two are certainly strongly linked, faith is a firm conviction, whereas the conscience can change, grow weak or strong, can be ignored or nurtured, and covers a multitude of issues daily. Disagreeing with someone does not mean they have weak faith. We have to understand that both sides are struggling to understand and live out God's will. You still share the same faith; you simply do not agree on a particular issue.

Most issues of disagreement within the church are likely based on some level of conscience. We all come to various conclusions on a plethora of life and church issues, but rarely in the same way as the next person. Articulating the reasons for our thoughts is not always easy, and so we stumble over one another, not really knowing why the other has taken such an opposing position. It is important to remember that God gives us much freedom to disagree with one another. We hold fast to one faith, but God unites his church with many different parts.

Stronger and weaker conscience

In each debate there is usually one with a stronger conscience and one weaker. Individually we are of stronger conscience on many issues and weaker on many others. That does not mean we are weak or strong in faith, but simply that we hold opinions on many things in which we are either weak or strong in conscience.

In the book, the authors break down what is happening in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 8, some feel free to eat meat of any sort and others are convicted by conscience that they cannot eat meat sacrificed to idols. In this case the stronger in conscience feels free in Christ to eat anything and the weaker condemn themselves for any such action. The following is a chart, copied directly from the book, explaining the differences in conscience: the extremes judge one another or even fall into heresy, while the middle ground is Paul's solution of love, where they are free to disagree and yet still accept one another.

The three columns in the centre are deemed part of the solution and the goal of the believer from both sides of a dispute. Looking at the issues of others when it is laid out well and explained well can seem easy to understand, even obvious. But when you are the one in agreement with some

Strong Conscience	Strong Conscience	Strong Conscience	Strong Conscience	Weak Conscience	Weak Conscience	Weak Conscience
But carelessly crossing the line into lawlessness and immorality	But looking down on (despising) those with a weak conscience	<i>Fully persuaded yet welcoming rather than looking down on those with a weak conscience</i>	<i>But free to be flexible in disputable matters in order to (1) edify fellow believers and (2) advance the gospel</i>	<i>Fully persuaded yet welcoming rather than judging those with a strong conscience</i>	But judging those with a strong conscience	But crossing the line into legalism
Eats Meat	Eats Meat	Eats Meat	Flexible	Does Not Eat Meat	Does Not Eat Meat	Does Not Eat Meat
"I have freedom not only to eat meat but to go to parties at the temples of idols." (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-22)	"I have freedom to eat meat, and those who don't are being unreasonable and theologically in error."	<i>"I have freedom to eat meat for the glory of God, but I still welcome Christians who disagree."</i>	<i>"I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some." (1 Cor 9:22b)</i>	<i>"I abstain from eating meat for the glory of God, but I still welcome Christians who disagree."</i>	"It's sinful to eat meat, and Christians who do so are being unfaithful to God."	"You must follow the Old Testament dietary restrictions if you want to be a Christian."
Heresy	Arrogance	Love	Love	Love	Judgementalism	Heresy
Distorts the gospel by lawless subtraction	Diminishes the gospel	<i>Reveals the gospel</i>	<i>Magnifies the gospel (goal of every mature believer)</i>	<i>Reveals the gospel</i>	Diminishes the gospel	Distorts the gospel by legalistic addition

and disagreement or conflict with others on an issue, the solution to moving forward together in harmony is not always so easy to see.

Another application

Perhaps we can dare explore the issue of wearing a mask. Governments say this is what we must do. God has placed them in authority over us and so to honour God we must respect and obey them. Why is there even an issue? Seems pretty straight forward some would think. Yet there seem to be a good number of members in any congregation who do not wear one either once seated or even into church at all. Do they not want to obey God and the fifth commandment? Perhaps you wear one more so because they protect you and/or others from the virus. In that case, are those not wearing the mask perhaps breaking the sixth commandment by not showing any love or care for others? Scripture seems so clear; how can anyone be a true Christian if they do not wear a mask? The conscience is convicted before God that a mask must be worn.

On the other side, we can start first with those who are truly exempt. Life for these people has been difficult as it seems very few accept them, even in the church. Beyond this category there are many more choosing not to wear a mask. If there is ever a place one should feel free to exercise their conscience, one would expect it to be in the church, amongst the very people in society who should understand conscience the most. Most make an effort to hold this position going into town for groceries and so on, but here the world has taken the mask mandates to new levels and, in the end, one is forced to make some concessions in order to fulfill their vows before God to adequately care for family. As talk began of mask mandates mid 2020, many began to look at all the scientific studies on masks and very quickly concluded that they were clearly ineffective for preventing contraction of any virus or spreading it to others. N95 was the only one that might protect you, but it definitely did not prevent spread. Even then the professionals that fit masks for a living said that even these were not being used properly by many in the medical world and it would be impossible to fit an entire population. So why was government mandating everyone to wear

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But carelessly crossing the line into lawlessness and immorality	But looking down on (despising) those with a weak conscience	<i>Fully persuaded yet welcoming rather than looking down on those with a weak conscience</i>	<i>But free to be flexible in disputable matters in order to (1) edify fellow believers and (2) advance the gospel</i>	<i>Fully persuaded yet welcoming rather than judging those with a strong conscience</i>	But judging those with a strong conscience	But crossing the line into legalism
No Mask	No Mask	No Mask	Flexible	Wears Mask	Wears Mask	Wears Mask
"I have freedom to defy government in any way I feel is right	"I have freedom to wear no mask, and those who do are being unreasonable and theologically in error."	<i>"I have freedom in Christ to wear no mask for the glory of God, but I still welcome Christians who disagree."</i>	<i>"I have become all things to all people that by all means I might save some." (1 Cor 9:22b)</i>	<i>"I wear a mask for the glory of God, but I still welcome Christians who disagree."</i>	"It's sinful to not wear a mask, and Christians who do not are being unfaithful to God."	"You must follow all government laws if you want to be a Christian."
Heresy	Arrogance	Love	Love	Love	Judgementalism	Heresy
Distorts the gospel by lawless subtraction	Diminishes the gospel	<i>Reveals the gospel</i>	<i>Magnifies the gospel (goal of every mature believer)</i>	<i>Reveals the gospel</i>	Diminishes the gospel	Distorts the gospel by legalistic addition

one? Many concluded that they could not in good conscience comply with a lie, particularly when coming into the presence of the God of all truth. It sat against their conscience to wear a mask and, to show love to God and their neighbour, they felt compelled to go without. Some felt the mask was being made into an idol, as if it were the tool to save themselves and others, and to comply would be sin against the second commandment.


There are many more biblical reasons for either side, but you can see how after wrestling with the issues against Scripture, one's conscience before God becomes convicted to make decisions.

It is neither my point nor desire to get into a debate on whether wearing or not wearing a mask is right or wrong. The message we must recognize is how, even when we differ, each of us is weighing our decisions according to our conscience and God's Word. The above is the chart used from the book adapted to the division over masks.

Conclusion

I am sure that the position of weaker or stronger conscience for this issue could easily be flipped around, but I have placed those

who do not wear a mask in the category of stronger conscience, as it seems to more accurately parallel the example of the previous chart on eating meat. It does not make those stronger in conscience better than those weaker. Rather, each of us must continue to examine our own position to ensure our conscience is right before God. And if we disagree with others, we ought not to be quick to judge. We can challenge, certainly, but in love; and when we realize that the other is also convicted before God, we can accept the difference, building one another up in love. So, as you insert yourself into the chart and discover the category you are currently in, perhaps the challenge for all of us outside of the three in the middle, is to dig deep in our hearts, to seek to recalibrate our conscience, and strive to move our position to one that rightly loves our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

We may be at a time and place in history where God is repeating the abandonment of a nation as in Romans 1 or Isaiah 5, only this time it is our nation. God will not abandon his elect. We must become one people, complete congregations faithful in serving God, loving one another, as love covers a multitude of sins. May this book be a blessing to the churches. 

James Buikema



Hi Everyone,

I'd like to introduce myself. My name is James Buikema and I live with my sister and brother-in-law, Ron and Anne; I have been living there for three years. My birthday is July 4, and I will be turning the big 6-0 this year. I'm hoping to have sixty guests over and want to rent a big party tent. With COVID, that is probably not happening, but maybe I will get over sixty cards.

I love to socialize and my favorite thing to do is talk. Sometimes I read or do word searches or watch movies. Right now, I am really enjoying dog movies. I play a lot of Yahtzee, Qwirkle, and enjoy Chess. I have support workers that I spend time with each day. Sometimes I help them run errands or do chores. I used to visit Hiro (Head Injury Rehabilitation Organization) every week, but they are closed due to COVID. We would paint, do other crafts, and visit the police station or fire hall. These visits were the best and I'm hoping I can do them again soon. I sometimes work for Plantinga Floral and label ribbon packages with stickers. I'm really good at this and my boss is the best!

I really miss going to church and can't wait to worship together with lots of people again.

Happy birthday to all of you celebrating a birthday in July! We wish you all the Lord's blessings in the year ahead, and a wonderful day with family and friends.

July Birthdays

4 James Buikema will be **60**

c/o R. Jager
627 Maple Ave
Burlington, ON L7R 1M7

11 Jeffrey Jansema will be **24**

158 Lane Road
Dunnville, ON N1A 2W1

14 Sarah Vandergugten will be **26**

23 Jane Street
Smithville, ON L0R 2A0

20 Charlie Beintema will be **46**

29 Wilson Ave
Chatham, ON N7L 1K8

20 Derrick VanderHorst will be **34**

c/o Twin Oaks
3217 Twin Oaks Cres
Burlington, ON L7M 3A8
derrickvanderhorst@gmail.com

25 Joel Slomp will be **36**

316 Church Rd
Apartment 102
Spruce Grove, AB T7X 0G2
joelrslomp@gmail.com

25 Julie Ostermeier will be **33**

c/o Harbour Home
42 Spadara Drive
Hamilton, ON L9B 2K3

BOOK REVIEW

The Maker versus the Takers:

What Jesus really said about Social Justice and Economics

The Maker vs. the Takers really stands out among the books I read this year as one of the most interesting with a profoundly compelling thesis. The book is short and written in a simple style, but it contains much to ponder on in the face of the various ideologies that compete for space in our public square.

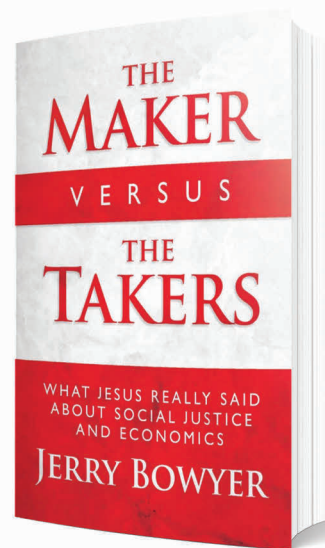
Theologians tend to ignore economic commentary on the gospel. Unfortunately, that leaves that field wide open. It ends up dominated by the socialist version of Jesus. And Jesus's words often seem to support the socialist agenda. What we too often ignore is the context of the gospels. Jerry Bowyer seeks to fill that hole by writing an economic history of Jesus.

Jerry Bowyer seeks to prove that Jesus's primary critique of wealth is in the context of those who take wealth. While in Galilee, Jesus tends not to focus on the problem of wealth in the same way. However, as he comes closer to Jerusalem, Jesus emphasizes the abuses of the wealthy.

Bowyer argues that this is because of the way the different areas are organized politically. The centralized, highly-taxed Judea is a place where the poor are ground into the dust. The wealthy are wealthy through taking from others. The decentralized, entrepreneurial Galilee is where there is a burgeoning middle class. The wealthy are wealthy through producing goods for the market. Galileans have their own sins, but they are not accused of robbing widow's houses as the Judeans are.

Bowyer seeks to prove this through a careful reading of the gospels themselves. He constantly notes where Jesus is speaking when he condemns wealth. One of his primary examples is Jesus's Sermon on the Mount in Matthew vs. the Sermon on the Plain in Luke. These sermons, he argues, are probably two different versions of the stock material that Jesus used to teach people during his life. Jesus gives the Sermon on the Mount in Galilee. Here he has much less to say about wealth than the Sermon on the Plain, which he gives in Judea.

He backs this up with research in archeology and history. Archeology presents a compelling case that Galilee was surprisingly well off in the first century A.D. It was home to a great deal of entrepreneurship and industry that made it what we would call middle class. Jesus himself probably grew up in that context. The carpentry of his father Joseph was likely in great demand because of a building boom in a town close to Nazareth. The entrepreneurial and productive Galilee is



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Hardcover: \$29.24, Kindle: \$9.99 141 pages

find on [**Amazon.ca**](https://www.amazon.ca)

in contrast to Jerusalem, which, though much wealthier than Galilee, also exhibited far more significant disparity between wealth and poverty.

Bowyer also pays attention to the history books, pointing out how the Judean elite used certain systemic practices in temple worship to plunder a population in Judea that was already highly taxed. Perhaps most interesting is how he demonstrates the economic aspect of the crucifixion of Christ. He points out that there was a financial crash that probably happened shortly before Christ's crucifixion. A friend of Pontius Pilate's was held responsible for that economic crash. Therefore, the Jews are able to convince the usually anti-Semitic Pilate to do their dirty work of killing Jesus.

The book is well-researched and full of information, although it would be nice to see more footnotes, just for the sake of digging into the various sources that Jerry Bowyer is using. However, Bowyer does aim the book at a popular audience. Some could question a couple of claims, and I've seen certain claims challenged in other sources, but the book's effect is cumulative. Bowyer is able to bring a wide swathe of evidence from the gospels to support the picture he paints of Jesus.

I highly recommend *The Makers vs. the Takers*. It is a book for everybody. As a pastor, I enjoy how it brings a fresh and concrete reality to the gospels. Jesus is not just concerned about the next world, but he is very concerned about the abuse of power and the treatment of his children in this world. 



James Zekveld Minister

Ambassador Canadian Reformed Church
a church plant in Niverville, MB
under the supervision of Redeemer
Canadian Reformed Church, Winnipeg, MB
james.victor.zekveld@gmail.com

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I have been watching different live-streamed worship services and reading various Christian periodicals and have noticed that there is a lot of prayer for the easing of restrictions so that we can worship in person again, and visit our loved ones in long-term care, and a lot of discussion on and even challenges to the validity of the restrictions, but comparatively little prayer that God may remove the COVID-19 plague.

Are we perhaps missing the point? Perhaps God is waiting for more Christians to put as much effort into putting all their trust in him, and praying for relief from the plague, as they are for praying and protesting against the lockdowns.

When God removes the plague, those other issues will be moot. Given the increasingly vicious and personal pushback they have been receiving, I'm sure the authorities will lift the restrictions as soon as they can.

Therefore, let us pray unceasingly with humble, contrite, and repentant hearts that God may have mercy on his people and grant us relief from this pandemic.

*Sincerely,
Julie Lindhout*

Short Report of Classis Niagara May 12, 2021, held via Zoom

Elder Jan VanZanten, a delegate from the convening church of Niagara South, opened the meeting of the delegates in a Christian manner. In prayer he specifically remembered Rev. Rolf den Hollander from Grassie, who had to step back from his ministerial duties for some time; Dr. Ted Van Raalte at the seminary, who is recovering from an accident; as well as Candidate Shin, who was about to be examined by Classis. After the credentials were found to be in good order, Classis was constituted. Rev. Cody Swaving served as chairman, Rev. Ryan Kampen as clerk, and Rev. John VanWoudenberg as vice-chairman.

The Church of Spring Creek requested a peremptory examination for Candidate Daniel Shin, who accepted the call to serve as minister in Spring Creek. Classis deemed his sermon proposal on Romans 12:1-2 sufficient and thus proceeded with the examination of Old Testament exegesis, New Testament exegesis, Doctrine and Creeds, Church history, Scripture Knowledge, Ethics, Diaconiology, and Church Polity. Thankfully Classis, with the concurring advice of the Deputies of Regional Synod, could judge that Candidate Shin sustained the examination, opening the way for him to be ordained as Minister of the Word in Spring Creek Canadian Reformed Church on June 6, 2021. Candidate Shin expressed that he would sign the form of subscription of Classis at the next in-person classis. Classis therefore approbated the call of Candidate Shin to Spring

Creek, and upon request from Spring Creek, made provisions for a representative from Classis to be at the ordination service, conditions permitting.

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 one case of discipline.

The church of Dunnville submitted an overture to Classis to overture Regional Synod East November 2021 to overture General Synod Guelph 2022 to amend Article 55 of the Church Order by having as its first line, "The 150 Psalms shall have the principal place in the singing of the churches." Classis adopted this overture.

Church visitation reports regarding visits to Dunnville and Niagara South were received with thanksgiving.

The next classis was scheduled for September 15, 2021 beginning at 9:00 AM, with the convening church being Smithville Canadian Reformed Church.

Given that Rev. Clarence Bouwman is about to become emeritus this month, words of appreciation for all his service were expressed to him.

After personal question period, Classis was closed.

John VanWoudenberg, vice-chairman e.t.

Clarion

To equip God's people for his glory,
in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized
in the Reformed confessions, Clarion
adheres to the following core values:

Confessionally Reformed

Loving in manner

Attuned to current issues

Readable and Reliable

In Submission to Scripture

Open to constructive criticism

Nurturing Christian living

