

Clarion

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE | TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE



The Rich Man & Lazarus

Reuben Bredenhof

Dead to Sin: Part 2

Rob Schouten

Life as a Mountain Journey

Naeem Zafar

What's Inside

In Issue #2 we have gathered four articles that touch on our struggle against our sinful nature and God's command for us to live a life of good works. Rob Schouten gives us the second of his three-part series on sanctification while Ralph Boersema speaks about the necessity of good works. Wes Bredenhof shows us how looking to the cross can help us resist temptation and produce obedience and Naeem Zafar encourages us to look to the light of Jesus Christ as we climb the mountain of life. Stimulating reads!

Are you tired of the latest fad expression "6-7"? You're not alone. Calvin Vanderlinde's editorial offers a more edifying way of thinking about those two numbers. Arjen Vreugdenhil invites us to meditate on the exciting prospect of seeing the invisible God while Reuben Bredenhof helps us meditate on one of our Saviour's most unusual parables, that of the rich man and Lazarus. Matthew VanLuik gingerly walks us through the challenges of reconciling broken relationships, no easy task. Jan DeGelder continues to unpack the Church Order by focusing on marriage and the church's involvement therein (Art 63). Lots to ponder.

Two recent graduates of CRTS are now ministers in our federation and so you'll find accounts of the ordinations of Pastors Reese Gaillard and Fred Struik. Members of our churches are also involved in various organizations that labour somewhere in God's kingdom and this time *Service Snapshots* introduces us to Word and Deed. On top of all this you'll find helpful book reviews, new songs, and a letter to the editor. Thanks to all contributors!

And thank you, dear reader, for your continued interest in *Clarion*. May this issue be a blessing to you.

Peter Holtvliwer

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The 6-7 Segue

If perchance one was unaware, the year 2025 saw the emergence of a popular light-hearted cultural phenomenon, sparked particularly among the younger generation who became enamoured with the numerical combination “six-seven.” What the phrase means, few can, or care to, explain. Even the source of it is foggy. Chalk it up as meaningless. Just a set of two numbers strung together, spoken in a certain cadence and accompanied with hand gestures.

The traction and mileage this craze achieved has been widespread and surprisingly long-lasting. It truly fits the definition of a viral phenomenon. Like a plague, some would say. No doubt, there are many parents, teachers, and older siblings who will groan to hear this phrase mentioned anywhere, let alone in the respected pages of *Clarion* magazine. Will this add fuel to the fire? Or might this extinguish it? Who knows? Certainly, some are suffering from “six-seven fatigue” and want the phrase retired. But nobody knows the shelf-life this craze may have and, based on historical longevity and the sheer frequency at which the numbers appear, this phenomenon may last much longer than a flash in time.

So, rather than retirement, what this phrase needs is redirection.

A MEANINGFUL 6-7

Dare to dream. What if “six-seven” triggered us to think of Deuteronomy 6:7? In this verse, the LORD exhorted his people, “You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” “Them” refers to the commands of the LORD. The older generation—parents, in particular—were charged to teach and instruct the younger generation to observe the law of God and live the life that he summoned them to live before him. Couple this with how, at the end of the same chapter, parents were also told to make known to their children the gospel, the mighty works of God by which he saved his people. In this case God’s mighty work was the exodus, but the exodus serves as a preview of the spiritual and eternal deliverance that Christ would gain for us.

The various everyday occasions listed in Deuteronomy signal an exercise that was to happen regularly, at every available opportunity. Just as attentive young people search out opportunities to use the phrase “six-seven,” so parents are called to be mindful of every moment as a teaching moment, far beyond family devotions

at mealtimes. Instead, they must use all the means at their disposal to train their children in the way of the LORD.

Deuteronomy 6:7 and its surrounding context provide rich food for thought. It is a pastoral favorite to meditate upon with new parents who have received a covenant child from the LORD and are pondering the beauty and purpose of parenting. While the LORD required his laws to be written on the doorposts of the house and on the gates (6:8), more importantly the LORD wanted them to be on the hearts of his people (6:5).

A 6-7 KIND OF TRAINING

How we fulfill this task will, of course, look different depending on the children, their age and differing circumstances. There’s no one-size-fits-all recipe. But the parental obligation certainly extends beyond simply taking children to church and having them memorize the catechism. The Word of God is never to be far from the lips and must arise organically but deliberately in the conversations parents have with their kids.

Parents also have the great opportunity and responsibility to pray with and for their children, to seek God’s strength and Spirit to operate in their hearts. More than merely teaching and imparting truths and continually reinforcing them, parents must also set an example to follow. After all, some things are better caught than taught.

Honouring the call to pray diligently and teach faithfully and patiently, day after day, month after month, and year after year, honours how the God of the covenant sought to have his Word written upon the hearts of his people. There is nothing that can give parents greater joy than to see their children walking in the truth (3 John 4) or the still greater joy of seeing them surpass the previous generation in faith, hope, and love.

May hearing “six-seven” on repeat serve to challenge and motivate us to fulfill our God-given obligation, lest it should happen that one day these numbers cry out in judgment against our failure. 



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Seeing the invisible God

“He is the image of the invisible God” — Colossians 1:15

“I won’t believe it unless I see it with my own eyes!” “A picture, or it didn’t happen!” We rely strongly on our eyesight, as well as our other senses, to tell us about the world. We know the world through observation and experience. But that poses a great challenge when it comes to God. You cannot see him, hear him, smell him, or touch him. He is invisible. That makes it hard for people to believe in him. People would rather make visible and tangible things to worship, to give access to the divine. But God says: That will not work. Don’t try to get at me through images.

God is invisible but he has left traces of himself in the world. His fingerprints are all over creation. You cannot see God’s power, but you can see what it does. Paul says in Romans 1 that some of his invisible attributes can be observed by carefully studying what he has made. People sense that there must be something, and many are, as it were, stumbling and feeling around hoping to arrive at an understanding of the divine.

But our gracious God did not leave it at that. He came within reach of our senses in the person of Jesus Christ. The apostle John celebrates this: “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and have touched with our hands. . . .” (1 John 1:1). John and the other disciples saw and heard and touched and smelled the Lord Jesus, and knew that this was God in their midst. Thomas felt the imprints of the nails in Jesus’ hands and cried out: “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:28).

The invisible God became visible in Jesus Christ. Our Lord is therefore called “the image of the invisible God” (Col 1:15), or “the radiance of the glory of God and exact imprint of his nature” (Heb 1:3). And when this miracle happened, an invitation was extended: Come and see! “If you have seen me,” said Jesus, “you have seen the Father” (see John 14:9). He even invited his three closest disciples to join him on the mountain, where for a brief time they saw his glory shining brightly, the glory of the only-begotten Son of the Father.

In Jesus’ days, the world got to see for a time the invisible God. Yet only some of them believed in him, because the Lord manifested himself not as the glorious Prince of heaven, but as the humble servant of the Lord, who carried the burden of our sin. He was despised and rejected by people, who shook their head in disappointment and turned away from this strange teacher.

Maybe you are jealous of those people long ago who saw the Lord with their own eyes. But there is no need for jealousy. Even though the Lord Jesus is back in heaven, a place beyond our physical observation, he makes himself visible to those who believe. “But we see Jesus,” proclaims Hebrews 2, “crowned with glory and honour.” Not with our physical eyes, not yet, but with eyes of faith. The apostle Paul prayed that God would “enlighten the eyes of the hearts” of believers (Eph 1:18). If you struggle to believe in the invisible Lord, this prayer is for you. Open my eyes Lord, let me see!

God is invisible, but we have much to go on. We encounter the Lord Jesus on the pages of the Bible, in the spiritual gifts he gives us, in the bread and wine of communion, in the loving fellowship of his church. If you learn to look in the right places, you will see enough to be assured that God is in our midst. “Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Pet 1:18). 

FURTHER READING:

John 14:15–24

QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY:

1. If “the heavens declare the glory of God” (Psalm 19:1), and “his invisible attributes . . . have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world” (Romans 1:20), why do so many people find it difficult to believe in God?
2. Can you identify ways in which the Lord “enlightened the eyes of your heart” so that you now see him in a way you did not before?
3. Are there ways in which we can make visible something of who God is, in our individual lives or as the church?
4. 1 John 3:2 promises that when God appears, “we will see him as he is.” How is that possible, if God is in himself invisible?



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The Rich Man & Lazarus

¹⁹ “There was a rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and who feasted sumptuously every day. ²⁰ And at his gate was laid a poor man named Lazarus, covered with sores, ²¹ who desired to be fed with what fell from the rich man's table. Moreover, even the dogs came and licked his sores. ²² The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, ²³ and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. ²⁴ And he called out, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.’ ²⁵ But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ²⁶ And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, in order that those who would pass from here to you may not be able, and none may cross from there to us.’ ²⁷ And he said, ‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— ²⁸ for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ ²⁹ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Luke 16: 19-31

Six Fascinating Features of the Rich Man & Lazarus

DR. REUBEN BREDENHOF

Are we allowed to have a favourite parable? Some people love the Prodigal Son. The Good Samaritan stands out for others. For a long time, my favourite has been the Rich Man and Lazarus. I spent about five years studying this parable for my doctoral degree. I might be biased, but this parable of our Lord is immensely interesting. Let me share six of its fascinating features. First, though, take a couple of minutes to read through the parable, printed to the left—and then come back to this article.

So, what's so intriguing about this profound parable?

1. A NAMED BEGGAR

No other parable has a named character. In fact, this one has *two* people with names: Lazarus and Abraham. In every other of the dozens of Jesus's parables, the characters are completely anonymous, introduced as “a certain man” or “a farmer” or “a certain king.” But the beggar at the rich man's gate is called Lazarus. Having the distinction of a name, you might expect him to do something notable but curiously, Lazarus doesn't say or do anything in the parable—except die. He is entirely passive.

This anomaly has led to a lot of speculation about why Jesus tells us the beggar's name. Some say it's because Luke 16:19–31 isn't actually a parable at all, but a true story. Or maybe there's a connection to John 11 and the other Lazarus. Maybe his name is meant to be symbolic, because Lazarus means “God helps.” Or he's called Lazarus simply because this was one of the most common names in first century Judea.



We might never know why he is named, but I suggest it's a way of honouring the beggar. A name gives him status, bestows dignity in his suffering. This is consistent with the rest of Luke's Gospel, where Jesus teaches about God's special care for the poor. For instance, he promises that the lowly will be exalted (1:52–53). While the (anonymous) rich man loses everything, God ensures that the poor man who had nothing is remembered forever. His name speaks to the generosity of God's grace.

2. MISERY VS. LUXURY

With just a few sentences, Jesus paints a highly contrasting portrait of two lives. Verse 20 implies that Lazarus is unable to walk and must depend on others to deposit him at a place where he can beg. His body is afflicted with sores, a skin condition that likely caused physical pain and a nauseating appearance. Sitting outside the rich man's mansion, perhaps Lazarus can hear the revelries within or smell the good food being served. He can certainly picture morsels falling to the ground from the rich man's table (v. 21). Yet Lazarus remains on the outside, hungry and alone. The only relief arrives via the city's dogs who lick his sores.

If Lazarus's poverty is shocking in its bleakness, the rich man's wealth is remarkable for its brilliance. Behind his estate's protective wall, he enjoys all the advantages of his position (v. 19). For instance, he is clothed in garments associated with elite status: purple and fine linen. Besides the opulence of his dress is the manner of his life, for the rich man "feasts sumptuously," not just on special occasions, but "every day." It's a lifestyle of indulgent excess. Next to the abject misery of Lazarus, the contrast could not be more complete—and it cries out for resolution. Something must be done.

3. AN URGENT CALLING

The rich man's post-mortem punishment makes clear that he failed significantly in life. What was his sin? Doing nothing for his neighbour. Though they were separated by physical and social barriers, the rich man and Lazarus were in relationship to one another as fellow members of God's people.

In the law, prophets, and other writings, the Old Testament speaks with one voice about the obligation of God's people to show mercy. With his many material blessings, the rich man should've shown kindness to the beggar at his gate. Think of Deuteronomy 15:7–8, "If . . . one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land . . . you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother, but you shall open your hand to him."

Jesus emphasizes this merciful disposition throughout Luke, in stories like the Good Samaritan, or his words in 6:38, "Give, and it will be given to you." Charity is an urgent calling, but by the time the rich man noticed Lazarus, it was far too late.

The beggar's closeness to someone who had the means to relieve his suffering should make us think of the poor people we encounter today. At busy intersections and on city sidewalks, we come face-to-face with their need. The problems of poverty seem intractable, the solutions elusive. But does that mean we do nothing at all?

4. THE AFTERLIFE SETTING

All of Jesus's parables take place in the first century Mediterranean world: in vineyards, fields, marketplaces, and cities. Dramatically different is Luke 16:19-31. After beginning with a familiar cityscape—a beggar sitting on the sidewalk—the setting transitions to another realm once the two men die. And it's a striking picture.

Verse 22 describes Lazarus being carried by angels to "the bosom of Abraham." Resting with the patriarch suggests protection and peace. As for the rich man, he is "in torment" in the flames of Hades. Between the two afterlife locales is a far distance and a "great chasm," yet a conversation takes place between Abraham and the rich man. Their dialogue, however, lacks a good result for the rich man: he must stay where he is.

For centuries, people have drawn all kinds of implications from this parable's window into the afterlife. Does it mean that we'll know each other in heaven? Will the righteous be able to watch the torments of the wicked? Will *everyone* be able to sit on Abraham's roomy lap? What doctrine can we safely derive from this parable?

Instead of getting carried away with speculations, we should focus on how the afterlife imagery functions in the parable. That is, what difference does it make that the two men's destinies are portrayed in this way?

**Now Lazarus has found peace and company,
while the rich man has become the lonely
beggar, pleading for even a drop of water.**

Crucially, the setting helps us to evaluate the true worth of their respective ways of life. Jesus wants us to notice how the contrast in the parable's first scene is completely upended in the second scene: now Lazarus has found peace and company, while the rich man has become the lonely beggar, pleading for even a drop of water. The afterlife setting shows that it matters what we do with Jesus's message. Our response has consequences that are eternal.

5. THE POWER OF A STORY

Stories are "sticky." This is one of the reasons Jesus told so many parables. They have the power to catch and to hold the hearer's

attention, and to be remembered. The imagery of a parable often suggests that there is more meaning to be discovered here by turning it over in your mind.

That's true for every parable, but this one has a special poignancy with its vibrant descriptions and extraordinary reversals. Luke 16:19-31 quickly engages our emotions with its portrayal of Lazarus's pitiable condition in life and the rich man's anguish in Hades. Jesus is inviting us to give close attention. Now that we've met Lazarus and the rich man and witnessed the outcomes of their lives, we must reflect on what's going to be different for our own lives with respect to possessions, poverty, and the Scriptures.

6. CHRIST BETWEEN THE LINES

Feeling the heat of Hades, the rich man asks Abraham to send Lazarus back to earth so he can warn the rich man's five brothers. Abraham's answer is that Scripture is perfectly clear on the brothers' obligations toward the poor. The rich man presses and says that it'll surely be different if someone returns from the dead with a warning. But Abraham is firm: "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead" (v. 31).

This last word from Abraham almost certainly has a double meaning. The Scriptures are clear about showing mercy, and they're also clear about the one who has risen from the dead. Later in Luke, the resurrected Jesus opens "Moses and the prophets" to show his disciples what should've been plain: Jesus is the promised Christ (24:25-27, 44-47). We see this kind of teaching in Acts, too, when the apostles constantly use the Old Testament to preach about Christ's person and work. Sadly, Acts also shows that those who know Scripture best aren't always willing to believe in the one to whom "Moses and the prophets" point: Jesus Christ.

So, the parable's conclusion is open-ended. Will the five brothers yet listen to Moses and the prophets, and live? It becomes a question for everyone who reads the parable: Will *we* obey what Scripture says about showing mercy? Even more, will *we* believe in the one who rose from the dead, the one of whom Moses and the prophets speak, the one who taught this profound parable? 



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Why Do I Still Struggle with Sin?

This is the second article in a three-part series exploring what it means to be dead to sin and alive in Christ. Part 1 examined the decisive break with sin. Part 2 addresses why Christians still struggle. Part 3 explores how to grow in the new identity.

Sanctification begins with a decisive break: we have died to sin and been made alive to God. But this raises a difficult question: if sin's power is broken, why does it still feel so strong? If Christians are new creatures in Christ—dead to sin and alive to God—why does sin still seem so alive in us? Why do we still stumble? Why do old temptations still feel as powerful as ever?

For many, this ongoing struggle with sin leads to confusion, doubt, and even despair. Some begin to wonder if their Christian faith is

genuine. Others assume they are second-rate Christians, simply incapable of living the victorious life.

The problem, however, is not the struggle itself. The problem is understanding what the struggle is—and what it is not.

A MISGUIDED MODEL

Many Christians have been taught—sometimes explicitly, often implicitly—that believers have two natures inside them. According

to this model, one nature is entirely old and wholly bad, while the other is entirely new and wholly good. These two natures, it is said, continually battle for dominance. On some days the old nature wins. On other days the new nature wins.

The believer, in this view, resembles a kind of spiritual Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.

This is a popular view. It is also wrong. It does not align with what Scripture teaches, and it does not correspond to the actual experiences of faithful Christian living.

THE BIBLICAL VIEW

The Bible does not describe the believer as someone possessing two competing natures. Instead, it teaches that the old self has been crucified. Paul writes: "Our old self was crucified with Christ" (Rom 6:6) and "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Cor 5:17).

The old man—the old self—is no longer alive and active. He has been crucified with Christ, definitively executed at the cross. What remains in the believer is not the old self itself, but the residual influence of sin—the lingering patterns, habits, and reflexes of a life once lived under sin's dominion.

You are not half old and half new. You are fully new. Yet you still live in a fallen body, in a fallen world, and you still carry the deeply embedded mental and physical habits of the person you once were in Adam.

THE NEW MAN'S STRUGGLE

Romans 7 is often cited as support for the idea of two natures locked in combat. But a close reading of the text shows something different.

Paul writes: "I delight in the law of God, in my inner being" (Rom 7:22) and also "I see in my members another law waging war against the law of my mind" (Rom 7:23). The inner being—the true, regenerate Paul—loves God's law. Yet sin still dwells in his mortal body.

Paul does not say, "My old self is battling my new self." Rather, he says, "I am fighting the sin that remains within me." Romans 7 is not a portrait of two selves at war. It is the new self, alive in Christ, waging war against the remnants of sin.

WHY DOES SIN STILL FEEL POWERFUL?

Sin continues to feel powerful because it has left a lasting mark. Sin has formed habits. Sin has shaped our patterns of thought. Sin has carved deep grooves into our minds and wills. These effects do not vanish overnight.

This lingering influence of our old life in Adam is a kind of moral muscle memory—ingrained habits that persist even after we've

been made new. Think of someone who learned to type using poor technique—maybe always watching the keyboard and using only a few fingers. Even after learning proper touch typing, they may still revert under stress to their old technique. Their fingers remember the wrong way, even though their mind knows better.

Sanctification works similarly. Our hearts have been renewed, but our instincts and habits still carry the reflexes of the old life. Growth involves retraining.

Imagine a dirt road that has been driven over countless times. Over the years, deep ruts have formed. No matter how carefully you drive, the wheels still tend to slip into those old grooves. It takes deliberate steering and constant vigilance to stay out of them.

In the same way, sin has carved grooves into our hearts, minds, and habits. Even though we are on a new path, our lives still tend to fall into those old patterns—not because we are not new, but because the terrain of our old life left deep marks.

THE SPIRIT'S ROLE

Romans 8 picks up where Romans 7 leaves off. Paul does not say that the struggle vanishes. Instead, he says that the way we fight has changed: "If by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live" (8:13).

The Spirit empowers us in the struggle. He does not fight in our place, and he does not bypass our will. Rather, he strengthens us so that we may actively engage in the battle. We put sin to death not by sheer willpower, but by the power of the Spirit at work in us.

The fact that we struggle is not a sign that we are lost. It is evidence that the Spirit is alive in us. Dead people do not fight. Only the living do.

This is the paradox of the Christian life: we are new, yet we are still unlearning the habits of the old. The fight against sin is not a mark of failure, but the mark of life. In the final article, we'll turn from diagnosis to direction—exploring how believers, already made alive in Christ, can grow into that new life through the Spirit's power and the means God provides. 



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Will You Be Saved?

“What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, ‘Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness’—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone. And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way? For as the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead (James 2:14–26).

Will you be saved? The Holy Spirit asks through James, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” (James 2:14.) If you believe but do not act on your faith, can you be saved? You might have faith but not the kind of faith that saves.

FAITH, BUT NO SALVATION?

Faith, without salvation—is that possible? Yes, it is possible to not have the right kind of faith. James 2:19 says, “You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!” The demons know the real God. They know how majestic and great he is! They are afraid of him and tremble before the Judge of all the earth. However, they do not act on their faith. Their faith does not make them repent and turn away from evil. There are people who do not believe that God exists, but there are also people who

do believe that God is real but live as if this makes no difference. In both cases, their faith is no better than that of demons. It does not give life. Faith without works is dead.

The Spirit makes the point very clearly when he says through James, “You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.” We are not right with God if our faith is alone, that is, if it is not accompanied by works.

Am I getting that right? Doesn’t Paul teach the opposite, that is, that we are saved by faith apart from works of the law (Rom 3:28)? Doesn’t he mean that faith does nothing, that it only receives what God gives? Not really. When Paul contrasts faith and works, he uses shorthand. Each term represents a principle. As an illustration, think of someone trying to fix a machine with much banging. His friend says, “Use your head.” Does he mean, “Bang the machine with your head?” Of course not. The head is shorthand for taking time to think

about what needs doing. Similarly, Paul is not speaking about faith by itself, as opposed to any works at all. In Romans 3:27 he shows that he is talking about two different principles that he calls laws: the law of faith and the law of works.

Guido de Brès explains the faith principle when he says, “. . . strictly speaking, we do not mean that faith as such justifies us, for faith is only the instrument by which we embrace Christ our righteousness; he imputes to us all his merits and as many holy works as he has done for us and in our place. Therefore Jesus Christ is our righteousness, and faith is the instrument that keeps us with him in the communion of all his benefits” (Belgic Confession, Art. 22). The works principle, on the other hand, holds that what we do makes us righteous. Romans 4:4 explains the works principle this way, “Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.”

Paul is not saying, “Don’t do works to be saved.” Rather, he is saying, “Don’t think that your works will make you righteous.” Even perfect obedience does not make someone righteous or contribute to his righteousness. You have to be righteous before you can do any righteous work, not the other way around. God is the only one who can make us righteous, and faith unites us to him.

FAITH ALWAYS PRODUCES WORKS

When James says that we are justified by works and not by faith that is alone, he is not referring to the false principle of works righteousness at all. He is talking about the kind of faith God gives to those whom he justifies. That faith is never alone, because faith that doesn’t do anything is dead. Look at Hebrews 11 and note how many works the believers did by their faith. Living faith expresses itself in works that actively show how believers trust the Lord in what he says.

Faith cannot exist by itself in life. Can you have saving faith without repentance or praying to God, for example? Paul thinks the same way about this. In Galatians 5:6 he plainly says that we are justified by faith *working* through love. He also says that to those who by patience in well-doing seek glory and honour and immortality, God will give eternal life (Rom 2:7). In both cases, he is referring to works done by those who live by faith.

Now you might wonder why James illustrates his point about justification using the example of Abraham offering his son years after his conversion. Wasn’t he justified already when, by faith, he set out for the promised land (Heb 11:8)? Certainly, and after that he continued to be counted as righteous and continued in the same faith—faith that acts on God’s Word.

Our conversion is the beginning of a life of *living* faith worked in us by God’s grace. In that life, we never stop being counted as

righteous. God preserves us and enables us to persevere in God-given faith that works out our salvation with fear and trembling because he is at work in us both to will and to work for his good pleasure (Phil 2:12–13). The only faith that God gives is living faith, and that is not do-nothing faith. As the body apart from the spirit is dead, so also faith apart from works is dead.

The only faith that God gives is living faith, and that is not do-nothing faith.

LIVE OUT THE FAITH

Will you be saved? Do you believe in God, but are you someone who doesn’t really live like a Christian? Can that kind of faith save you? How can you know if you have the right kind of faith? Here’s what Peter tells you to do, not in order to make yourself righteous, but to live out the only faith that God gives as he saves us:

“. . . make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For whoever lacks these qualities is so nearsighted that he is blind, having forgotten that he was cleansed from his former sins. Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall. For in this way there will be richly provided for you an entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Pet 1:5–11).” 



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USING THE CROSS TO HATE SIN



The cross is central to Christianity. It encourages us to know Jesus has paid the price to secure our salvation. All our sins are wiped away with the precious blood shed at Calvary. We should reflect often on the cross simply by virtue of its value in our redemption. However, it is easy to forget that the cross can also have a place in how we respond to our salvation with a godly life. Reflecting on the cross can help us in our sanctification.

At the cross, we see our beloved Saviour suffering horribly. He suffered in his body. Crucifixion was a slow and painful way to die. The Romans designed it as such. Those they crucified would eventually asphyxiate—that is, if they did not perish from blood loss. Our Saviour hung there naked, dressed only with a crown of thorns. The carpenter from Nazareth had rough-hewn nails driven through his body to affix him to the cross.

Then the lights went out. God caused a supernatural darkness to fall on the land. He took the light of life away. In this darkness, Jesus suffered something we cannot comprehend: the infinite wrath of God against sin. There on Golgotha he bore my name on his heart, but then also the curse attached to my name. He took my place and suffered what I deserve. As Paul says, Christ became sin—what God hates—so that in him I might become God’s righteousness—what he loves (2 Cor 5:21).

IT WAS MY SIN . . .

On the cross, Christ suffered in body and soul. Why? Out of love for me and everyone else who trusts in him. He literally loved us to death. It’s awe inspiring, leading you to worship. In his book *Gospel Worship*, Jeremiah Burroughs explains how we should let our reflection on the cross lead us from worship to our walk:

If you saw the knife that cut the throat of your dearest child, would not your heart rise against that knife? Suppose you came to a table and there is a knife that laid at your plate, and it was told you that this is the knife that cut the throat of your child. Fathers, if you could still use that knife like any other

knife, would not someone say, ‘There was but little love to your child?’ So when a temptation comes to commit any sin, this is the knife that cut the throat of Christ, that pierced his sides, that was the cause of all his sufferings, that made Christ to be a curse. Now will you look upon that as a cursed thing that made Christ to be a curse? Oh, with what detestation would a man or woman fling away such a knife! And with like detestation it is required that you renounce sin, for that was the cause of the death of Christ (pp. 242–243).

We can use reflection on the cross to help us hate and flee from sin

We can use reflection on the cross to help us hate and flee from sin. That’s how the cross can function in our sanctification.

I would suggest that this is also a good reason for a more frequent celebration of the Lord’s supper. Every sermon should take you to Christ, true, but not every sermon necessarily takes you as explicitly and directly to the cross as the Lord’s supper does. As the Lord’s supper does this, as you remember the suffering and death of Christ, you’re more equipped to apply it to your sanctification in the days following.

So if you’re struggling with some sin, take some advice from Jeremiah Burroughs. Reflect on Christ’s cross. See your sin as the reason why your beloved Lord suffered and died. Let that thought make you hate sin and turn from it. 



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Restoring Broken Family Relations

MATTHEW VAN LUIK

I recently received an e-mail request to address the topic of the breakdown of family relations. Scripture teaches that the family is among the most vital institutions God has given to mankind. Whenever the Lord established a covenant, he consistently connected it to the family unit. The covenant with Adam and Eve was tied to the promise of a future offspring who would deliver mankind from the curse of sin. When God made a covenant with Abraham, it extended to Abraham *and his descendants*. Similarly, when God enters a covenant with us, he gives his promises to believing parents and their children.

Paul underscores the essential role of the family in Ephesians 6:1–2, commanding children to obey their parents and to honour their father and mother. He reminds us that this is the first commandment with a promise: that things may go well and they may enjoy long life on earth.

BROKENNESS & ITS SOURCES

Even though God has ordained the family to be the spiritual backbone of the church, the reality is that many families within the church experience brokenness. Few families escape some tension between parents and children, or between siblings. Paul acknowledges this challenge in Ephesians 6:4 when he warns fathers not to provoke their children to anger. A 2022 study published in the *Journal for Marriage and Family* found that, among eight thousand parents

over a forty-year period, one in four adult children in the U.S. have enacted a no-contact rule with at least one of their parents—twice as frequently with fathers than with mothers.

While I approach this subject with caution, knowing it is impossible to address every circumstance that leads to broken family relationships, the frequency of this issue within Christian families makes it necessary to address it. In what follows, we will examine some recurring patterns that often contribute to the breakdown of family relations and then reflect on biblical principles for restoring what has been damaged.

It is important, first, to recognize that not every fractured relationship stems from parental neglect. Sometimes, adult children may choose not to maintain a relationship with their parents, despite the Lord's warning against such estrangement. In these cases, repentance is called for. On the other hand, certain dynamics within the home during childhood may negatively impact the relationship. At times parents may have used certain approaches to parenting that, perhaps unintentionally, have negatively impacted one or more of their children. Great harm is done in situations of serious abuse—such as inappropriate sexual contact, harsh physical discipline, or persistent yelling and emotional manipulation to enforce compliance. These circumstances are intolerable, and require that children be protected, often with the involvement of appropriate authorities if they are minors. I have dealt with this in greater detail in another article.¹

¹ Matthew Van Luik, "Victims and Abusers: Navigating Broken Relationships," *Clarion* 73, Sept 20, 2024.

Honouring parents means seeking honest restoration, not ignoring wrongdoing. True healing comes through dialogue, understanding, and mutual care.

PARENTING PATTERNS

Here, we will consider certain parenting styles that can negatively impact the long-term relationship between parents and their children. Every parent—even those who are believers—may be guilty to some extent of abusing their authority. The most loving parents can, at times, misuse their position to compel their children to act according to their own wishes, perhaps sincerely believing it serves the child's best interests.

Any misuse of parental authority, even in subtle ways, can wound a child's heart and soul.

Parenting is a high calling from the Lord, and most fathers and mothers genuinely seek to do what is right for their children. It requires ongoing self-examination to recognize sinful motivations in our own hearts, so we can distinguish our children's true needs from our personal desires for them.

In a broad sense, abuse is placing our own desires ahead of our children's needs. Any misuse of parental authority, even in subtle ways, can wound a child's heart and soul. Many harmful parenting patterns are inherited from previous generations, making this a generational challenge that must be faced with humility and grace.

Misuse of authority manifests itself in various ways but shares a common denominator: parents attempting to control the actions of their children to satisfy their own needs or desires. It can be as simple as projecting our own ambitions onto our children, pressuring them to pursue paths that reflect well on us or fulfil our own dreams. This undermines our children's autonomy and their ability to learn to make independent choices.

All parents have felt frustration—children can test patience to the limit, sometimes leading parents to yell or utter harsh words. Children learn from this that their parents care more about themselves than about their children's well-being. If this becomes a regular pattern, it can cause lasting harm. On the other hand, such a situation can foster growth if parents humbly acknowledge their own sinful reaction, seek forgiveness, and speak with their children about the Lord's will for their lives.

Another common pattern is the use of guilt—making children feel they have disappointed their parents and causing them to feel guilty for disobeying them. This strategy often continues with adult children, who may feel guilty for not visiting more or helping enough. The underlying message children get is that their parents should be the center of their attention, but true parental care means focusing on the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of one's children.

I have counselled adults who struggle with their view of God because parents impressed upon them that disobedience would result in divine punishment. God is then seen as a looming threat, always watching over them, ready to punish. It causes some to look to their heavenly Father with dread in their hearts. That is not how our heavenly Father reveals himself. Rather, he is a loving Father who holds his little children close in his arms and disciplines them with loving care. Children must learn that even when they err, they can turn to God for forgiveness and love.

IMPERFECTION AND HONESTY

The reality is that every parent fulfils their task with shortcomings. Perfection is unattainable, and each day brings new challenges. Ultimately, what matters is that parents demonstrate love and care to their children—being honest about weaknesses and asking forgiveness when needed.

Loving our children also means that we hold them accountable and teach them about the consequences for their sinful actions—not to serve our own parental needs but to nurture our children into mature adults who delight in serving the Lord. Discipline must always be aimed at the child's spiritual growth, not the parent's gratification.

God's command in the fifth commandment is for children to honour their father and mother. We confess that this means, "That I show all honour, love and faithfulness to my father and mother" (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 39). Children are often told to honour their parents no matter what, but sadly, when children confide in adults about abuse, they may be told to simply honour their parents. God's command is not meant to shield parents from accountability, but to give direction for the healthy growth and development of their children. Children who honour and obey their parents can expect to mature into well-adjusted adults who will enjoy the Lord's blessing.

Children must honour and love their parents not because they are without fault, but because they are God's instruments in nurturing them to fear his name. As adults reflect on their childhood, we pray that, by God's grace, they remember parents who truly loved and cared for them even in their weaknesses. In healthy relationships, children recognize their own role in frustrating their parents but also see parents who always loved them and gave their support. A good relationship allows honest reflection, forgiveness, and enjoyment of one another as the bond matures.

ESTRANGEMENT & SIBLINGS

When relationships between parents and adult children break down, it causes deep grief for parents and bitter resentment for estranged children. Parents may be confused by their children's anger, while children feel misunderstood and hurt. Siblings can also struggle to grasp their brother's or sister's pain, especially if they experienced childhood differently.

Siblings often process childhood experiences differently. Even in cases of serious abuse, one child may be deeply affected while another copes more resiliently. We cannot judge one as better than another—everyone handles pain uniquely. Some remember a happy childhood, others a difficult one. Sometimes this stems from parents treating all children the same way, when each requires unique care—like using the same golf club for every shot, even though every child needs a different approach.

As we gain insight into family dynamics, we see that human relationships are fraught with risk. Relationships require hard work, sacrifice, and wisdom. Poor choices, or neglect of emotional and spiritual needs, can have lasting impact. Unlike airline pilots who must be perfect every time so as not to crash the plane, parents do not need to be flawless; they can use their failures to strengthen the relationship by being honest and allowing children to speak about their struggles.

RESTORING RELATIONSHIPS

Now, once a relationship is broken, can it be restored? This may be difficult and seem unlikely, but we must consider our Christian calling. The Lord calls us to reach out in love. God never abandons his wayward children; he continually reaches out to seek reconciliation with them. For parents and children alike, the principle is to seek reconciliation for Christ's sake—not on our terms, but for the well-being of the other, as Christ sought our good over his own.

To restore a relationship, we must first understand the nature of a relationship. Too often, relationships are seen as transactional—when parents provide for their children, they expect loyalty and obedience in return. But relationships are not a mere exchange of

things we desire from each other; they are relational—that is, built on genuine connection. Restoration cannot be achieved by making demands, but through open dialogue and listening. Building a relationship requires the ability to listen.

Recently, Charlie Kirk encouraged those who disagreed with him to come and engage in open dialogue. He invited them to the microphone, laying down his own microphone and allowing others to speak without interruption. In repairing relationships, we must let the other speak freely and seek to truly understand them before responding.

This openness is daunting, as we cannot control what will be said. Parents seeking restoration must learn to be vulnerable, permitting their children to express their feelings and hurts. The goal in listening is not to refute or defend, but to comprehend the pain behind the words. Restoration seldom comes by sorting out the facts alone. Relationships are messy, involving perceptions and emotions. Hearing a loved one's pain must move the heart; it becomes less important to establish facts than to grieve for the hurt experienced.

PROCESSING PAIN, FINDING REST

Adults also need to accept that they can no longer deal with their pain as they did when they were children. While the pain and hurt are real and should not be ignored, the Lord now equips us to process the pain and heal as we mature. God does not teach us to ignore or suppress the pain, but we must learn in faith to cast our pain upon the Lord who heals broken hearts and restores wounded souls. We must not nurse grievances endlessly but find rest in Christ. As the LORD says, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10).

Finding rest in God also means seeking peace with our parents. Honouring our parents does not mean overlooking sin, but loving them enough to seek restoration. When we find rest in Christ, we gain strength to face the pain and begin honest dialogue. Relationships require us to confront pain, and through that process we gain a deeper understanding and care for one another. Parents want to better understand the pain they may have caused, wittingly or unwittingly, and children also need to hear the struggle in the heart of their parents.

The key to rebuilding relationships is to understand each other at a heart-level, not to determine who is right but to truly love each other as Christ intended. In restoring what is broken, we glorify our Lord Jesus Christ. 



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Life as a Mountain Journey

Whatever the season, many people enjoy hiking in the mountains. It is truly a privilege to live in a beautiful place like British Columbia where we can go on these trails with groups, family, friends, or even school trips.

One thing we all know about hiking is that it comes with challenges. Along the way there are difficult points, tiring stretches where we slow down, or even stop for a moment. On the trail, we face roots, mud, rocks, and uneven ground. We must carefully place each step, so we don't stumble. As we continue, we also notice how shadows cover much of the path, but through the trees, little rays of sunlight break through. Somehow, we keep pushing forward, step by step.

The whole journey is a process. And when we finally reach the top of the mountain, after staying on the trail and persevering through the obstacles, we feel a deep sense of achievement. We see the full light and the breathtaking landscape before us.

In that moment of reflection, I realized something: hiking a mountain is much like the journey of life itself. Every obstacle we

face—roots, mud, rocks, shadows—represents the trials, struggles, and temptations of life. And just as we need sunlight to guide us through the shadows, so in life we need the light of God's Word.

This is what the psalmist meant when he said: "Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path" (Psalm 119:105). God doesn't always show us the entire way at once. Instead, he gives us just enough light for the next step, so that we may trust him, walk carefully, and reach the place he has prepared for us.

TRUSTING THE LAMP

Think about this: when we keep walking uphill and it begins to get dark, we depend on the lamp strapped to our head. That lamp does not reveal the whole path—it only shows one or two steps ahead. But if we want to reach the top of the mountain, we must trust the lamp to guide us step by step.

The Christian life is much like climbing a mountain. It requires perseverance, faith, and trust. Just as we rely on a lamp on a dark

trail, we must rely on God's Word and Spirit as we walk in Christ through all the shadows, difficulties, and obstacles of life. The mud, roots, and rocks along the way represent the trials thrown at us by the enemy, by the invisible forces of darkness working through people and circumstances (Eph 6:12).

Yet God calls us to keep moving forward, step by step, until we reach the top. Jesus promised us his help: "I will give you the Helper" (Jn 14:16) and "I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you" (Luke 10:19).

From the beginning, God gave mankind dominion over all creation (Gen 1:26), but through Satan's rebellion the angels who followed him became demons (Jude 1:6), and mankind fell under their attacks. But when Christ was born, as God had promised, he restored our authority. Christ gave us power to overcome the snakes and scorpions—that is, the forces of evil, so that we might glorify God through every obstacle we face (see Eph 6:10–20). Walking obediently in Christ, we can continue this journey of life one step at a time, confident that his light will carry us through until we reach the summit.

REACHING THE TOP

As we continue walking, trusting in the lamp to guide us, we draw closer to the mountain's peak. When we finally reach the top, the light opens before us. A beautiful landscape spreads out in every direction, and everything becomes clear—things we could not see while we were at ground level. From the top, the whole view is revealed, and we realize the reward of the long, difficult hike.

In the same way, when we trust in the Word of God, it lights our path. Though at times we may only see one step at a time, in the end his Word reveals the fullness of the journey. Trusting the Word of God means trusting in Christ himself, because he is the Light—the final path of life. As John wrote: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . In Him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it" (John 1:1, 4–5).

WALKING IN OBEDIENCE

If we desire to see that full light at the end of our life's journey, we must also walk in obedience. Just as when we remain steadfast and committed to the path despite the challenges of the mountain we will eventually reach the summit, in the same way, when by God's grace and mercy we obey the commands of Jesus to love one another, not following the desires of the flesh, then we will surely reach the final light of Christ.

We cannot continue in sin and still expect to reach the summit of God's light. Jesus clearly said, "If you love me, keep my commandments" (Jn 14:15). Obedience is the evidence of our love for Jesus, and through this we walk faithfully toward the everlasting light of Christ.

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave us deep commands that go beyond outward religion and reach deep into the heart:

- Not only "do not murder," but *do not even be angry with your brother* (Matt 5:21–22).
- Not only "do not commit adultery," but *do not look with lust* (Matt 5:27–28).
- Be faithful in marriage (Matt 5:31–32).
- Speak truthfully; let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No" (Matt 5:33–37).
- Do not repay evil for evil but *turn the other cheek* (Matt 5:38–42).
- Love not only your neighbor but even *your enemies* and pray for those who persecute you (Matt 5:43–44).

Through these commands, Jesus shows that righteousness is not merely external—it is a matter of the heart. He said, "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them" (Matt 5:17).

But remember this: our forefather Adam and mother Eve sinned against God by disobedience. Because of that, every one of us is born with a root of disobedience in our nature (Rom 5:12). By ourselves, we cannot obey God fully. We were weak, trapped under sin's power. Yet in Christ, we are weak no more. We cannot justify sinful habits by saying, "I am weak." For Christ has given us power to obey, to resist sin, and to reach the summit of his light.

The gospel is this: Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly, died for our sins, and rose again to give us new life. By his Spirit, we can now walk in obedience—not to earn salvation, but because salvation has already been given by grace (Eph 2:8–10). Therefore, let us love one another, "for love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:10). This kind of love cannot happen until we fully surrender to the Lord's commands and walk in the grace already prepared for us in Christ Jesus.

May the Lord bless you, keep you safe, and guide your steps by his Word until you reach the summit of his everlasting light. 🕯️

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Receive him with all joy: Living Hope welcomes the Struik family



Instituted on April 28, 2024, Caledonia Canadian Reformed Church became known as “Living Hope” in the year that followed, with humble beginnings that continue in the Bellstone Christian School gym.

That first summer of our existence we were grateful to get regular preaching from a student who had just completed his third year of seminary, and so we welcomed the Struik family for the season. The early enthusiasm of a new congregation, the endearing Struik family who made themselves at home among us, and the faithful gospel-centred preaching each week made it feel that by the end of the summer, the departure of Fred Struik and his family was only a brief pause in a new beginning.

The rest, as they say is history and Living Hope welcomed the Struiks permanently on November 16, 2025. The Scripture, songs, ceremony, and preaching of the day tell the story of our joy and excitement in this memorable chapter in the unfolding story of Living Hope.

ORDINATION SERVICE

Fellow member and seminary professor Dr. William den Hollander led the ordination service and called us to worship from Psalm 92: “It is good to give thanks to the LORD . . . to declare your

steadfast love in the morning and your faithfulness by night.” His message began with a personal note, explaining that Fred was his student for four years, his mentee, his sometimes doppelganger, and was now to be his pastor.

The theme from Mark 4:26–29, the parable of the growing seed, was that *Christ* grows his kingdom. After the farmer scatters the seed, Jesus tells us that the farmer sleeps before any growth happens. Because Christ is responsible for the growth, the charge to Fred was to sleep in peace, sow in faith, and reap with joy.

The congregation responded in song, ending in this chorus:

To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus

All the glory evermore to Him

When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat

Yet not I, but through Christ in me.

The ordination ceremony followed, where the form from the *Book of Praise* states “from all this we see what glorious work the ministers of the Word may perform.” After Fred responded to the questions for his office, the minister and elders present came to the front to lay their hands on him, commissioning him in prayer for his task.

Fred was charged to “Love Christ, feed his lambs and tend his sheep,” and in turn a charge was given to the congregation: “Beloved brothers and sisters, the Lord has granted you this servant. Receive



him with all joy. How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news (Is 52:7).”

During the offering, the musicians played the song “Living Hope” by Phil Wickham with the beautiful chorus:

*Hallelujah, praise the One who set me free
Hallelujah, death has lost its grip on me
You have broken every chain
There's salvation in Your name
Jesus Christ, my living hope*

After the service, letters of congratulations and encouragement from area churches and other churches in the federation were read. Cake and coffee followed to celebrate and mark the special occasion.

INAUGURAL SERVICE

The afternoon service was led by the newly ordained Rev. Fred Struik. His inaugural sermon marked the occasion with significance. Preaching on Luke 10:17–20, he began with this question: “Brothers and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ, what brings you joy?” The fleeting nature of the many good things that give us joy call us to consider the source of true and lasting joy: the kingdom work of God through us and for us.

Looking at the story of the seventy-two unnamed disciples whom Jesus sent out to preach and to heal with nothing but the clothes on their back, we get a picture of self-denying, Christ-reliant discipleship. In v. 17 we read, “The seventy-two returned with joy.”

“Why are they so full of joy?” asked Pastor Fred. “Because of the power of Jesus in their mission! They come back rejoicing that ‘even the demons are subject to us in your name!’ And Jesus replies, ‘I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven.’”

“When the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed, it goes out with power! God works through ‘ordinary’ disciples, building his kingdom through each one of us!”

“Brothers and sisters, when you participate in kingdom work, it is no small thing,” emphasized Pastor Fred. “When you bring the gospel to the unsaved. . . . When the healing balm of the gospel is applied to anxious and frightened souls. . . . When you do the ordinary, hard work of raising up children in the fear of the Lord, when you lend your voice to the praises of God’s people, when you stand up for what is right and good, then you advance the kingdom of God! . . . As a church, we have been given the glorious privilege of pushing back the darkness of Satan’s kingdom and advancing Christ’s kingdom! . . . So as we move forward together into this new chapter, let’s root our joy in the unchanging grace of God.”

Once again, the congregation responded in song:

*Before the throne of God above
I have a strong and perfect plea
A great High Priest whose name is love
Who ever lives and pleads for me
My name is graven on His hands
My name is written on His heart
I know that while in heav’n He stands
No tongue can bid me thence depart
No tongue can bid me thence depart.*

What more needs to be said? With hearts full of the gospel and hope for what lies ahead, Living Hope received our new pastor and his family with joy. 🇨🇩

Josh Sieders

Caledonia



Cloverdale welcomes REESE GAILLARD

Sunday, November 2nd dawned bright and clear in Cloverdale, BC, contrary to the wind and rain that had been forecast a few days earlier. To paraphrase our former pastor: “The sun was shining, the Son was reigning!” The day had a very busy schedule: ordination service, coffee social, afternoon inaugural service of Rev. Reese Gaillard, potluck dinner, and welcome evening for the Gaillard family; the extra hour of sleep the night before would come in handy!

PASTORAL CHARGE

For the morning service, our usual congregation size of about 100 people was augmented by visitors from neighbouring congregations. The service was led by Dr. W. den Hollander from the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS). During Reese Gaillard’s time at CRTS, Dr. den Hollander served as his mentor, and relationships were a key focus of the morning sermon. The sermon text was Acts 20:28–31, with the theme: Shepherd the Flock of Christ. As Jesus said to Peter in that last walk along the beach: “tend my sheep, feed my lambs,” so now Dr. den Hollander said to Pastor Reese at the end of his mentorship: “care, feed, and look after the well-being of this flock in Cloverdale.”

Dr. den Hollander pointed out that in verse 28, the order of caring is to “pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” The reminder to Pastor Reese not to neglect his own spiritual health, to ensure that his relationship with God stays strong, was also a reminder to the congregation that we too should care for him as he cares for and feeds us.

During the ordination, we were privileged to see and experience the laying on of hands, as local elders and visiting ministers participated in this blessing. As Dr. den Hollander had reminded us in the sermon, this practice is not just a nice photo op for the *Clarion* article (although it is also that!), but rather a visual reminder that it is the Holy Spirit who has made Pastor Reese an overseer of God’s people, and of this particular congregation.

PASTOR REESE BEGINS

In the afternoon, Rev. Gaillard began his first worship service as an ordained minister of God’s Word with a call to worship from Psalm 18:1–3: “I love you, O LORD, my strength . . . I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.” The last part of these verses fit well with the text from 1 Peter 5:10, with the theme “The LORD teaches those who remain in Christ to overcome the world.” Yes, there is an enemy, but we have the promise, the sure hope that “the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.” These brief paragraphs do not do justice to either of the day’s sermons; they are available online.

As is the Cloverdale custom when celebrating an event, the congregation came together for a potluck meal—well organized, good food, and good fellowship.

Directly following the dinner, the congregation and interested visitors came together for a brief welcome evening for the Gaillards. Br Siebe deJong, as MC, thanked all the visiting ministers we’ve enjoyed listening to during the past two and a half years of vacancy. And I would like, here, to thank Br DeJong for so diligently arranging all the pulpit supply; these efforts were greatly appreciated by the congregation.

Contributions to the evening included a song and trivia contest by the Young People’s group and a contribution on behalf of the seniors, who make up about 25% of our congregation. Pastor Reese was given guidelines on visiting schedules, and recommendations on reading materials to prepare him for dealing with this age group.

Near the end of his morning sermon, Dr. den Hollander quoted Count Nikolaus of Zinzendorf, who sent out missionaries in the 18th century with the instructions: *Preach the gospel. Die. Be forgotten.* We here in Cloverdale sincerely pray that Pastor Reese Gaillard fulfills only the first part of that mandate during his time with us! May his work here be done with sincerity and humility and may all the glory go to Christ. 

Lyn Metzlar Leyenhorst

Cloverdale



Unity in Diversity

KASPAR VAN VEEN

I can vividly recall my younger days, in the basement of Chatham church receiving catechism instruction on the historical life and doctrines of the church. I needed to work through terms like doleantie, secession, union, and liberation. We were taught about controversies, heresies, and the continuously reforming character of God's people. Our pastors strived to shape us into Berean Christians, encouraging us to immerse ourselves in God's Word and be ready to defend the truth. These lessons were reinforced in the home, and I am thankful for the humble men and women who provided (and continue to provide) bold instruction in the uncompromising truth of the gospel.

One phrase that continues to resonate in my mind is the warning against "unity in disunity." On the surface, that term does not make a lot of sense, but that is exactly the point; you cannot have true unity with disunity. But it poses a different question—can there be unity in diversity? If you look at any one congregation, we are blessed with unity in the communion of saints and yet the great diversity of individuals is striking. If you take that one step further, we can



see an amazing global diversity in God's children and yet we see a beautiful unity in who we are in Christ.

DIVERSE TEAM

This "unity in diversity" is beautifully evident within the organization of Word & Deed Ministries and, more importantly, in our partners. While considering the diverse cultures that our partners work in, we at Word & Deed hold fast to our unifying mission "to meet the spiritual and physical needs of people in the developing world in accordance with biblical principles for the glory of God." As team members, we look beyond the historical context of the countries our partners work in and ensure we cooperate to maintain a gospel focus, foster the determination toward reaching local sustainability under Christ, and establish indigenous leadership with each of our partners. All of this needs to be done with an underlying foundation of trust and integrity.

But do we do this in the exact same manner, with the same motivation, or with an identical historical background each time? Thankfully, no. The beauty of the organization is that there is a healthy diversity in our approach. Our diversity, especially the diversity found across our partners, provides an excellent basis for

healthy discussions and challenges us to set aside our own cultural biases while seeking a positive solution for any issue at hand.

It might seem easy to talk about unity, and perhaps it all seems a bit idyllic, but how does it express itself in reality? We are blessed with a very diverse support base and experience committed prayerful and financial support from individuals, businesses, schools, and churches across the North American Reformed spectrum. From a Canadian Reformed viewpoint alone, over 85% of our churches actively support Word & Deed with varying levels of financial contributions. It has been a wonderful blessing to witness firsthand the grassroots support of families, schools, individuals, and businesses across this country.

Word & Deed as an organization also maintains unity in our governance while representing the diversity of the alphabet-soup of Reformed churches (CanRC, FRC, HRC, OPC, URCNA, etc.). The makeup of the board and staff provide balance across the Reformed churches, thereby protecting the organization from being driven by one specific cultural perspective while at the same time maintaining an identity in each federation.

DIVERSE PARTNERS

Our partners represent the greatest level of diversity we are faced with. Cultural challenges, educational proficiencies, and religious backgrounds can make for challenging situations. We strive to understand the cultures we are working in and are sensitive to their societal nuances. With our European heritage, a straight-forward and blunt approach is very comfortable for us, but that may also be a significant stumbling block for a social structure based on standards of politeness, honour, and shame.¹ We put great effort into nurturing an atmosphere where we can cooperatively guide each other, teaching and being taught by each other, to reach an approach that is honouring to the Lord.

The question remains—is it possible to have real unity in diversity? When we train our focus on the Lord and his work, we can confidently expect him to provide unity. However, if I can paraphrase the words of the Apostle Paul, as soon as we start to boast in what we have received, we diminish the unifying spirit of our work and pull the focus away from what the Lord is doing across his created world. May we, in all callings where the Lord has placed us, see our need for him and seek *his* glory. 🙏

For Word & Deed,
Kaspar Van Veen
Guelph

¹ For an interesting comparison of "hot and cold climate cultures," the book *Foreign to Familiar* by Sarah A. Latimer is highly recommended.

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

JAN DEGELDER

The fact that marriage is one of the oldest traditions in human culture has resulted in a large variety of wedding ceremonies. Given the character of this column, we will just focus on some of the history and practices of Christian marriages, and then on what we have agreed upon in Article 63 of the Church Order. It is good to reflect on this. Despite the changes in our modern culture, young folks in the church are still committing themselves to married life “for better for worse, for richer for poorer,” to use a phrase from the traditional marriage vows in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer. Knowing a bit of the history of Christian marriage can help us understand why we solemnize marriages as we do today and can perhaps also show us aspects we tend to overlook.

AMBIGUITY FOR CENTURIES

In the Roman Catholic church of the Middle Ages, marriage had become a sacrament. That means that everything related to marriage was the sole responsibility of the church. Civil authorities were not involved. After the Reformation, however, things became a bit more complicated. The first Reformed Synod (Emden 1571) stated that marriage was partly ecclesiastical and partly political or civil. But it was not quite clear who was responsible for what, and how this connection should function.

This ambiguity continued throughout the next centuries, with the churches solemnizing most marriages while urging civil authorities to take responsibility for regulating uniformity of practice



and stipulations. This is reflected in the article on marriage in the Church Order of Dort 1618/19 (Art 70). In 1795–1796, in The Netherlands, civil marriage became mandatory.

It is good that the government, as responsible for proper order in public society, sets standards for a legitimate marriage, and for mutual obligations and rights in marriage. But that does not mean that, for God's people, the church does not have a role to play. In the 19th century, "ecclesiastical confirmation" of marriages in the church became the standard practice. This could (and can) only take place after the couple can show proof that they were legally married in a civil ceremony. There was, however, still uncertainty about the significance of the church "confirming" or "blessing" a marriage when a couple is married already. This can be seen in how this matter shows up in the church order. General Synod (GS) 1893 removed Article 70 from the Church Order without changing the numbers. Between 1893 and 1905 there was nothing in the Church Order about marriage. Article 70 was simply vacant. When GS 1905 revised the Church Order it added a new Article 70: *Since it is proper that the matrimonial state be confirmed before Christ's Church, according to the Form in use for that purpose, the consistories shall attend to it.*

NEW IMMIGRANTS – NEW RULES

This became the original article on marriage in the Canadian Reformed Church Order. The problem was, however, that this stipulation did not fit with the practice of solemnizing marriages in Canada. The brothers at the first CanRC Synod realized this. They did not remove Article 70, but added a note that "the observance of this article is left in the freedom of the churches."¹ In hindsight, one wonders how helpful this was. It is understandable that for early immigrants from The Netherlands it would take time to get used to the different role of the church in solemnizing marriages. But the decision of GS 1954 did nothing to clarify that role. And the ground for this decision did not help either. It says "that it

¹ National Synod Homewood/Carman 1954, Acts art.74. See also GS Orangeville 1968, supplement 12, p.125

cannot be proven from the Word of God that blessing or confirming the matrimonial state in the presence of the church is proper.” Even if this is true, it does not remove the old ambiguity about the ecclesiastical aspect of marriage. Today, we go by what we have agreed upon about solemnizing marriages in Article 63 of the Church Order. Because of the drastic developments in our modern culture the first paragraph was added in 2007,² but the rest was formulated in 1983.

JUST A PRIVATE AFFAIR?

A Christian marriage involves the family, the civil government, and the church. Indeed, the church has a vested interest in Christian marriage.

In Canada the provincial government takes responsibility for the legal and social consequences of marriage in public society. To control this, it requires that marriages are only solemnized by those who have been registered as authorized for this task. Those who have solemnized a marriage must inform the relevant government officials. The church order is silent about this role of the government. That makes sense, given the character of this ecclesiastical document. And yet, when it comes to marriages, the government executes its authority through the church, by registering only ministers ordained by the church as officiants for marriage.

The church respects this arrangement, while at the same time keeping its own standards and responsibilities. In other words, the church will only abide by the civil regulations as long as these are not in conflict with God’s Word.³ This is also explicitly stated in the second paragraph of Article 63 CO. Here the churches agree on the task of the consistories to set the parameters for allowing the ministers to solemnize marriages: members of the congregations must marry only in the Lord and ministers are only authorized to solemnize marriages that are in accordance with God’s Word. This gives the church a vital interest in the marriages of its members.

For a long time, the dominant view has been that a marriage is not an ecclesiastical or congregational matter, but a family affair. And thus, a wedding is a private ceremony that does not belong in a public worship service. The provision in the last paragraph of Article 63, that it may take place in a worship service, is then seen as an unfortunate leftover from the old Dutch tradition. But perhaps there is more to it.

WHAT ABOUT THE CHURCH?

The parameters in the second paragraph of Article 63 reflect that the consistory must actively exercise supervision over the marriages

of the members of the church. One of the tools for this is that the church provides marriage classes for those preparing for married life. I hope we all agree that it is a pastoral responsibility to instruct those who are engaged to be married as to what a marriage in the Lord looks like, and how marriage as an institution of God should reflect the unity of Christ and his church (Eph 5:22–33). When the consistory announces an upcoming marriage, it also includes the congregation in this, by asking whether there are any lawful objections. And the one who solemnizes the marriage does so as minister of the Word, under the supervision of the consistory and with the use of an official, ecclesiastically adopted Form.

When the role of the church is so significant for a Christian marriage, I wonder: how can such a marriage not be considered an ecclesiastical or congregational matter, but just a private affair? Some may think: what would actually be the practical difference for how we solemnize the marriages of our church members? Does marriage as an ecclesiastical matter imply, for instance, that the marriage must be officiated in a public worship service? To make that a requirement would probably be a step too far, for a number of reasons. That said, it is a valid alternative, and there are good reasons to keep both possibilities in Article 63, that “a marriage may take place either in a private ceremony or in a public worship service.” The second option should not be dismissed as an unfortunate leftover from the past.

The strong emphasis on marriage as just a private affair has led to a practice where more and more marriages are solemnized at a private venue, rather than in the church. That can be the family backyard, a golf course, a winery, a resort on a remote island, you name it. This makes the occasion only accessible for invited family and friends. Apart from a minister for the legal paperwork, the congregation is excluded. That is unfortunate. Moving your wedding away from the church geographically weakens the awareness that the church has anything to do with it.

Even if we don’t make it a public worship service, should it not be a delight to solemnize a Christian marriage in the midst of a joyful gathering of God’s people? It would require a different mindset when planning your wedding: make your local church the venue and invite the whole congregation. It would also require a different mindset in the congregation: a brother and sister in Christ are united in marriage. Let’s praise the Lord with them. I believe this will show more respect for the ecclesiastical aspect of a Christian marriage. 



Jan DeGelder

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² GS Smithers, 2007, Acts art.156

³ See the grounds for the decision referred to in note 2.

Grace to the Humble

Based on 1 Peter 5:5b–10

1. God scorn-ful - ly op - pos - es all those puffed up with pride,
but nev - er is his fa - vour to hum - ble folk de - nied.
Sub - mit to one an - oth - er in love and har - mo - ny,
and clothe your - selves with gar - ments of true hu - mil - i - ty.

The musical score is written on four staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and folk-like, with a mix of quarter, eighth, and half notes. The lyrics are written below the notes, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across notes.

2. Be humble in submitting to God's almighty hand;
then yours will be the honour that he for you has planned.
Whatever cares distress you or anguish you go through,
take all this weight and cast it on him who cares for you.
3. Your enemy the devil will with a lion's roar
prowl all around while looking for someone to devour.
Be watchful and resist him! Stand firm in faith, aware
that you share in the suffering of Christians everywhere.
4. Though briefly you will suffer, God will himself be near
to strengthen and uphold you and help you persevere.
Our God, all-good, all-gracious, has chosen you to share
in the eternal glory for you in Christ prepared.

Text: William Helder, 2025

Tune: Nyland (Finnish folk melody)

Alternative tune: Genevan 128

William Helder

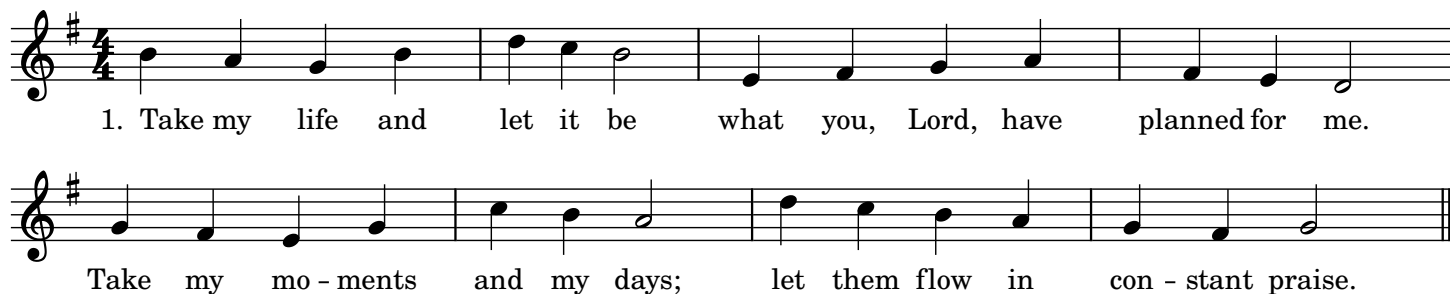
*Former member of the Committee for the Church Book
(later: SCBP)*

Hamilton

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Take My Life and Let It Be

Revised Version in Today's English

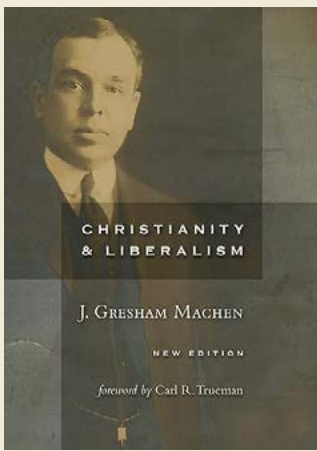


2. Take my hands and let them do
works that show my love for you.
Take my feet and lead their way;
never let them go astray.
3. Take my voice and let me sing
thankful praise to you, my King.
Take my lips and let them be
from deceit and folly free.
4. Take my wealth, all I possess;
make me rich in faithfulness.
Take my mind and let me use
all its powers as you shall choose.
5. Take my will and shape it so
that I in your paths may go.
Take my heart and by your grace
let it be your dwelling place.
6. Take my love and let me, Lord,
of your favour be assured.
Take my self! Then I will be
yours for all eternity.

Text: Frances Havergal, 1874; extensively revised, 2025
Tune: Justin Heinrich Knecht, "Ohne Rast und unverweilt," 1799

William Helder

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Christianity & Liberalism

Christianity & Liberalism by J. Gresham Machen

William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1923/2009; foreword by Carl R. Trueman. Paperback, 158 pages, \$21.99 CDN.

The year 2023 marked the 100th anniversary of the publication of *Christianity & Liberalism*, and for many it was an occasion to remember the author, J. Gresham Machen, and to reflect on the book's enduring relevance. *Christianity & Liberalism* encapsulated Machen's argument against liberalism amid the modernist-fundamentalist controversy within the Northern Presbyterian Church of the U.S.

LIBERALISM A FALSE RELIGION

Machen systematically works out his central thesis that liberalism is not a legitimate form of historic Christianity but rather a different religion entirely by exposing the disparate views on doctrine, God and man, the Bible, Christ, salvation, and the church. As Machen states: "In the sphere of religion, as in other spheres, the things about which men are agreed are apt to be the things that are least worth holding; the really important things are the things about which men will fight" (p. 1).

Machen, a professor of New Testament at Princeton Seminary, situates the conflict in a world that had witnessed major advances through science and the industrial revolution. These advances may have improved the material conditions of life but, as Machen laments, it came at a spiritual cost. It was questioned whether Christianity, a first century religion, could stand in the presence of twentieth century science. Machen demonstrates that, in an attempt to reconcile Christianity with the modernist worldview, the liberal movement in religion became rooted in naturalism, denied supernaturalism, and abandoned the convictions of the past.

Throughout the book, Machen contrasts Christianity with liberalism, and in so doing presents a clear exposition of historic Christianity. For example, while some protest that "doctrine divides; practice unites," Machen shows how historic Christianity views doctrine as an account of the gracious acts of God and their meaning for the believer and the church. In this way the church follows the pattern set by Jesus Christ (Mark 10:45) and later the apostle Paul (1 Cor 15:3–7), who taught that the historical reality of Christ's incarnation, death, and resurrection was necessary because of man's sin and God's righteous wrath. This

message of salvation is the plain teaching of God's Word, a Word that, by faith in Christ, the Christian knows is true.

LIBERALISM'S GUISES

Machen also exposes the various forms of liberalism, which ranged from the denial of key doctrines to the promotion of the so-called social gospel. As D.G. Hart explains, obvious forms of liberalism included those who "reduced such doctrines as the virgin birth and the inerrancy of Scripture to old fashioned ideas that were no longer appropriate for educated Christians." Other forms of liberalism manifested "in the various denominational agencies which did not so much deny cardinal doctrines but did pursue a range of activities, from medicine to education, which undermined the church's task of proclaiming the gospel and saving souls from death."¹

Machen shows that liberalism softens the distinction between God and man, views Christ as an example for faith rather than the object of faith, and puts its hope in man's ability to overcome evil in the world.

In the years that followed the publication of *Christianity & Liberalism*, Machen was compelled to leave Princeton Seminary, founding Westminster Theological Seminary and, together with other conservatives, forming the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. This book provides a window into the origins of these institutions.

Most importantly, I recommend this book because the devil continues to attack Christ's church today through the same liberal movement. As Carl R. Trueman warns in the prologue: "... how much more urgent is it for those of us who live over (a hundred) years later in a world more deeply secular and ignorant of the most basic biblical truths?" (p. xv).

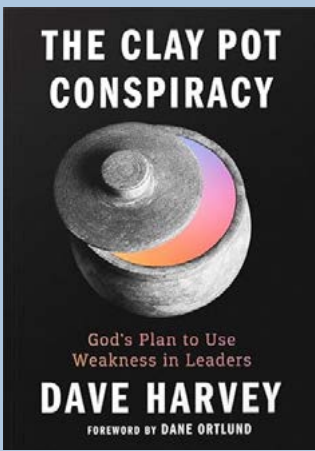
Christ sits at the right hand of God where, by his power, he defends and preserves us against all enemies. As the church engages in the battle, books like *Liberalism and Christianity* remind us to put on the full armour of God and to be strong in his power. 



Jack Huizenga, PhD

Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College

¹ As cited by J. De Jong, *Remembering Gresham Machen*, *Clarion*, Vol. 46, No. 18.



Fragile—Handle with Care

The Clay Pot Conspiracy: God's plan to use weakness in leaders by Dave Harvey
New Growth Press, 2025, Paperback, 176 pages, \$23.65 CDN.

The ability for a leader to rise above the fickleness of his followers, shield himself from the slings and arrows of criticism and disappointment, while carefully guarding his privacy may be championed as the recipe for resilience and endurance in many circles. But Dave Harvey, pastor, church planter, and speaker, makes the claim in his latest book that the scriptural recipe for pastoral leadership is a much stranger brew. Our weakness + God's power = Resilient Ministry!

The apostle Paul explained to the Corinthians that they came with *treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us*. Harvey traces this teaching throughout the Bible to show how God uses human weakness, not strength, to administer the gospel faithfully and fruitfully. This strategy is not the aberration in God's kingdom, but the norm. For the struggling pastor or leader, it may seem that God has conspired to deliver the gospel in this way to his detriment, as it may feel like a stumbling block rather than a pathway to success. Harvey admits that, in his own experience, it is through tripping and falling that he has learned to get out of the way of the gospel and watch its transforming work in both himself and others.

This is a very personal book that challenges the reader to engage with it intimately. Harvey is not taking an arms-length look at how ministry functions. He invites church leaders to join him on an adventure of self-discovery in their ministry, to understand how God is shaping them to be the best vessels to deliver the gospel and to endure while doing it.

The clay pot conspiracy is not aimed at man; it is designed by God to thwart the devil's work and manipulation and make the servant of God dependent on God and not on himself. Harvey lines up the challenges:

death, personal weakness, wounds, enemies, repentance, etc. and he invites his co-workers to experience the diminishment that leads to greater dependence on Christ. He shares some of his own ministry trials in a careful way (9th commandment) to lead the way in being vulnerable. Each chapter concludes with a few self-reflection questions for taking personal inventory of your own ministry work and God's role in it.

This book presents a delicate challenge for pastors and ministry leaders. In picking it up, you are welcoming scrutiny on your own work and how well you are faring. Do you feel resilient in your ministry? What is that resiliency balancing on? How precarious does it feel from day to day?

Perhaps the greater challenge is to work through this book with your ministry partner (wife, co-pastor, elder, best friend) and succumb to mutual discovery of how you are doing, and where and how God can reshape you to be the clay pot he intends for you to be. Harvey testifies that it has been a life transforming exercise for him and that now, in the latter years of his ministry, he is truly beginning to understand how God's "power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9).

Tenderly recommended. 



Rick Ludwig

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Dear Editor,

In the recent October 31 issue of *Clarion*, I was disappointed to see the review of Abounding Grace Radio in which readers were encouraged to access this podcast in order to find clarification on the so-called “controversial issue” of Federal Vision. More than forty years ago, Dr. J. Faber and other professors from our own seminary presented readers of *Clarion* with thoughtful articles on the theological position of Norman Shepherd, one time professor at Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. In the past decades the pages of *Clarion* contained articles by both professors at our seminary and other pastors of the Canadian Reformed Churches acknowledging the theological linkage between Federal Vision, Shepherd’s teaching on the doctrine of justification in Christ, and Schilder’s teaching on justification, covenant and election. While most members of NAPARC have adopted position papers condemning Federal Vision, the Canadian Reformed Churches have not. Of course, not all Canadian Reformed pastors today share this same relatively enthusiastic reception of Federal Vision, and admittedly, *Clarion* is not the official mouthpiece of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Nevertheless, it is concerning to see *Clarion* appear to join this particular bandwagon.

Wayne Chase
Everson, Washington

