

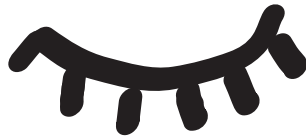
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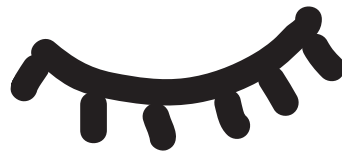
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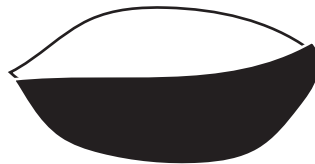
DEC 2022



PRAY FOR THE PEACE



OF JERUSALEM



God's saving will in the
New Testament

Letter to Sardis

Our rejection of
conditions

Race

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Committee's Note

We thank the Lord for yet another issue published!

In this issue, we continue with an editorial on the Songs of Degrees (Psalm 122), as well as our series on the Letters to the Churches in Revelation, God's Saving Will, our survey of Jonah and a reprint from the RFPA blog on the Rejection of Conditions. Included is also a new article dealing with the Christian and Race.

Salt Shakers would also like to update that we have now merged with CERC's Christian Literature Ministry (CLM) to better optimise our resources. We aim, Lord willing, to publish two more issues - in March and June - following which we may develop and publish new material(s).

Don't forget to pass the salt!

In Christ,
Salt Shakers Committee

Salt Shakers is a Reformed magazine published by Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. In each issue, we strive to bring readers quality articles discussing Reformed doctrine as well as practical theology and Reformed viewpoints on recent issues.

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Psalm 122



Lim Yang Zhi
Salt Shakers chief editor

(This is the final editorial of 2022. DV, another issue of Salt Shakers will be published in March 2023; however, the editorial will be replaced with a “current affairs” article, as the current editor has stepped down from his position. May the Word remain among us in pen and paper.)

Pray for peace, the psalmist cries. This is the only command of the psalm. Explicitly, the psalmist commands: *Pray for peace!* Why this command? What makes the act of praying for peace in the church so important?

1. Peace

Look inside your heart. Do you have peace? Do you truly have rest, no fears, a conflict-free life? That question might seem absurd—no one in this life can have unending rest, zero fears, and no battles to fight. Look at the day past; what do you see? Children arguing with you, and parents struggling to discipline their kids. Wives quipping at their husbands for their negligence, and husbands bearing bitterness against wives. One friend, a miserable comforter; another, torn by hurtful words. An employer constantly pressured to make ends meet; an employee bullied into undertaking an insurmountable load of work.

And there are some who live with torments that cannot be removed.

In all these situations, there is sin—sins you commit, sins committed against you, all missing the mark of the just, holy God. Even when you vouch for attempting to meet God’s standard, you immediately see how that standard was never God’s, but yours.

We do not have peace within ourselves; what more, the church? Look at the church; what will you see? Office-bearers struggling to help fellow believers troubled on every side (Num. 11:14); believers,

struggling to be content with the difficult state of the church (Num. 11:1). Singles fearing that they are a dry tree (Isa. 56:3); the married eating the bread of sorrows (Psa. 127:2). Young people struggling to flee youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22); the aged fearing that the LORD has forsaken them (Psa. 71:9).

The church, by herself, has no peace. Oh yes, Jerusalem had *physical* walls for defence and *physical* palaces fit for the king. Yet, these structures, strong and majestic as they may appear, neither give nor guarantee peace. Knowing this, David prays: *Peace* be within thy walls, and *prosperity* [the spiritual treasure that is peace] within thy palaces, Jerusalem!

Therefore, brethren, pray for peace.

2. Pray

Moreover, pray for peace because God is the Giver of peace. Of peace, He is the source (Psa. 29:11). As He has revealed in His Word, He has already given us peace in Christ (Rom. 5:1). Keeping all His promises, He always fills us with peace by faith (Rom. 15:13). If Jesus is called the Prince of Peace, then the triune God may be confessed as the *King* of Peace.

Knowing God is the Giver of peace, we do not first ask Him for peace. We *praise* and magnify the Giver. Prayer without such praise is reduced to the disrespectful demands in Israel’s wilderness wanderings—give me this, give me that. When we pray for peace in the church, we must confess

that true peace comes from God alone.

This confession often stings our hearts. When we receive the exhortation to pray especially in times of trouble, we dismiss the exhortation too easily. “Peace won’t come right away. So why bother praying?” My troubles, and the church’s troubles, don’t go away the moment we pray. The problem with such thoughts is that we think prayer is all about asking from God—but it’s not. Prayer is not, first and foremost, petition. Prayer, and the command to pray, is the confession that *there is no other way to peace but God*. When you lack peace, and you know full well nothing in this life can give you peace, turn to God in the knowledge that He can and will give peace, in His time, in His way.

God is the source of peace. Therefore, pray (to Him) for peace.

3. The way to peace

How, then, does God answer our prayers and give us peace? *Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper (with peace) that love thee*. This is the reality: Those who love God will have peace! God sets this reality: Those who know the love of God are sanctified by that love to love the LORD—to such, peace will be given.

God commands us to love him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Such wholehearted love is shown in our presence in God’s house. The Old Testament saint makes the difficult journey to Jerusalem, because that saint knows the love of God shown first to him. God so loved that saint that He gave his only begotten Son for his salvation, and that saint now renders to God worthy thanks in praise and worship. To have peace in our congregation, we must be in God’s house.

*...true peace comes
from God alone.*

Worship doesn’t take away our troubles right away. Worship reminds us that, in spite of the troubles of our church, we are the beloved bride of Christ. As our faithful husband, Christ sends help—his Spirit—to preserve us in our troubles.

Such a simple act often appears so difficult. It appears that prioritising worship (especially worshipping God twice) is irrelevant to our problems. Some may even say that being in God’s house does not give them peace, especially when their troubles arise from sins within the congregation. Rather than coming to God in worship, we prefer to stay away from God. *Doesn’t God know how difficult my life is, and he still expects me to worship him?* There is much pride in such an attitude; but listen to the distrust, the bitterness, the hurt of those who lack peace.

Each aspect of worship the psalmist sings of addresses this attitude.

Standing before the testimony. Worship is not just giving to God what is due unto him. Worship is our response to what God has first given us. Those who lack peace, in the great burden of their lives, struggle to see God’s gracious, merciful gift of salvation from sin. Rather than seeing that grace and mercy, these afflicted saints see nothing but emptiness. “God does not love me; God does not hear me; God does not see my affliction.” But at the testimony, where God sits on the mercy seat sprinkled by the blood of the slain lamb, God says, “I do love you! I do hear you! I do see your affliction! You may not be able to see my love now, but I’m still here. My Son has died for you and earned peace for you; nothing can change that. I will never leave you; that is not who I am. I AM THAT I AM.” This knowledge

of love strengthens our discouraged hearts!

Give thanks unto the name of the LORD. The afflicted saint, now warmed with the blanket of peace, has the strength to praise God! To be sure, all his troubles remain in him. His circumstances do not change right away—the sin, and its consequences, all there. In singing, however, his faith is strengthened to know all is not lost even when he is filled with troubles. The songs of Zion turn him to the unchanging reality that he has peace that no man can take away from him. The psalms prepare him for dark (and darker) days, in hiding God’s comforting words deeper in his heart.

Thrones of judgment. Before the throne that upholds righteousness, defends the oppressed, and executes judgment, the afflicted saints are exhorted to live in obedience to God. These royal seats—the exhortations, the admonitions, the rebukes—are the single reminder that God who calls us to such a life will bless such a life.

The experience of peace is not confined to worship on Sunday. By the operation of the Holy Spirit, the psalmist takes God’s Word home, into his life for the rest of the week. The way of true worship is the way in which God gives our church peace. In worship, God turns our eyes away from the troubles of our congregation to behold his power, his goodness, and his mercy.

Worship doesn’t take away our troubles right away. Worship reminds us that, in spite of the troubles of our church, we are the beloved bride of Christ. As our faithful husband, Christ sends help—his

The experience of peace is not confined to worship on Sunday.

Spirit—to preserve us in our troubles.

Worship also reminds us that the Spirit’s power to preserve the church is in the Word alone. Each aspect of worship—the testimony, the giving of thanks, and the passing of judgment—is filled with the Word. Do you and your brother have a conflict? The Spirit says: “Examine yourselves according to God’s Word, and be of one mind!” To a sister struggling with the lust of the flesh, the Spirit says, “Turn my eyes from beholding vanity!” To a saint suffering under great affliction, the Spirit says, “When your foot slips, Jehovah’s mercy holds you up. Trust in him!”

CERC, let our worship of God abound and continue, and he will give us peace!

4. The way of love

Just as peace comes in the way of a life of worship arising from our love for God, peace also comes in the way of a life of love for the church. *Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy good, O Jerusalem!* Psalm 122 commands us to love the church: *They shall prosper that love thee!* Love your God, and the church he has given you. How can we say we love God when we hate our brother?

To seek the church’s good is to call each other to come for worship (v. 1). To seek the church’s good is to esteem each other as *brethren*—brothers and sisters whose feet we wash (v. 8). To seek the church’s good is to walk alongside each other, *companions* in a life of obedience before God (v. 8). Love and peace cannot be apart from each other. Paul began his exhortation to the Romans: *Let love be without dissimulation!* And he ended: *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men* (Rom. 12:9, 18).

To love is to seek good. Good is the statutes of the LORD—to learn them, to walk in them, and to abhor all departures from them in word and deed. Love, therefore, is not toleration of sin; love is the patient longsuffering of a brother that repeatedly calls him back to statutes of repentance and faith.

Neither is love a defamation of doctrine, much less a defence of the same coupled with slander and back-biting—love is the meek, uncompromising explanation of God's statutes, humbly set forth in our creeds.

This melodious petition for peace must be accompanied by the way of love.

As you finish reading Psalm 122—I will seek thy good—you can't help but ask: *Is that I?* Am I the brother/sister that seeks the good of God's house? Am I the member of the family of CERC that loves even when I am not loved? Am I the member that gives himself to serve, not expecting any returns

from others, but only more love, sacrifice, and even suffering, on my part? As a new year of labour in the church begins, we do well to ask ourselves these questions.

Let's pray together.

Our father in heaven, although we are poor and needy, look upon us in thy mercy, and give to our church that peace which surpasses all understanding. Fill us with that peace that strengthens our defences against all sin and evil. Fill us with that peace as we seek by thy grace to walk in thy ways. Bless our brothers and sisters with this peace, for they are our brethren, even as thou hast counted us as thine. Hear our prayer, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Lessons from God's Letters to the Churches (6): Letter to Sardis



Prof. Herman Hanko

Emeritus professor of the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, USA and frequent contributor to *Salt Shakers* since its inception.

Sardis, like the other churches to whom our Lord addresses letters in Revelation 2 and 3, was located in western Asia Minor (now Turkey) near Ephesus, a little to the northeast. When the apostle Paul had worked in Ephesus on his third missionary journey, he had sent out evangelists through whose work the 7 churches of Asia Minor were established.

They are written by divine inspiration for the benefit of the churches mentioned, but also they are written to the church of Christ throughout the dispensation between Christ's ascension and his coming at the end of history. The church of our dispensation must read these letters as if they were looking into a mirror, where they will be reflected in at least one of the mirrors. Blessed are they who are reflected in the mirrors of Smyrna and Philadelphia; but woe to them who refuse to heed the warnings of Christ, the king of his church to the other five.

Sardis was a church in the province of Lydia, within the greater province of Asia. (the name "Asia" is used as a province in what is today Western Turkey. Later in its early history, the whole area of Turkey was called Asia Minor instead of Turkey. Sardis was the capital of Asia and was not unexpectedly wealthy; its strategic location near the Aegean Sea made Sardis a busy trading centre.

Sardis had a good reputation. It was known in the city for being a lively church: "thou hast a name that thou livest." Its church doors were not closed and locked during most of the week to be opened only on the Lord's Day. It had staffed offices in which trained men and women were waiting to help depressed people, alcoholics, and people without jobs. They had activities for young boys and girls. They sponsored round table discussions and seminars which discussed the failures in the lives

of the people on the street, and ideas that would improve living.

Even the preaching was something resembling a dramatic production: there were trained choirs, beautiful organ renditions, complicated liturgical activities, and an expensively dressed orator for ministers who liked a good joke now and then.

My mind goes to England and its beautiful cathedrals: Westminster Abbey, York, Salisbury, All Souls.... I saw the parade of dignitaries with their robes and scepters and crowns. I heard the organ's beautiful music echo through the building. I sat in wonder as the boy's choir sang. I marvelled at the dulcet voice of the man who read the Scriptures. I heard the female, dressed also in a beautiful robe, but "preaching" on the subject of "Unilateral Disarmament". It was at the height of the cold war. The thought flooded my mind, "I'm in the church in Sardis!!"

What does that awful indictment mean? Because in light of the fact that the Lord also admonishes the church to repent? The Lord simply tells the church in Sardis that, although they have a name, the fact is that they ARE DEAD (verse. 1). But the Lord says in vs. 4 "Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments . . ."

The situation in Sardis may perhaps be compared to Judah before they went into captivity. They showed evidence of still being the people of God. The temple was still standing; the worship of God could be found here and there and there were men like Daniel and his three friends in the nation. God was their true God whom they worshipped and served but the point is that the nation as a whole had by their sins, infuriated God and earned God's destructive power. That is the way God always deals with man. He calls them to repentance, for man always must live in holiness and repent if he should fail in his calling. Reminded of his calling, he will also see that God's judgement is just.

What is the calling of the church? Preach the everlasting gospel, which alone is the power of God

unto salvation (Rom. 1:12; bring the gospel to the sick, afflicted and dying; help the poor, baptise and instruct its covenant children; and expel the wicked and unrepentant).

All that can be done in a barn. I have preached in a YMCA, an abandoned store's basement, a pavilion of a park, a house (in which I served communion to four people), a civic auditorium in which were 200 chairs with Psalters and Bible, but 5 people, a town recreation building with a bowling alley just above us, the library of a school, a basement of a bank, two different schoolhouses (one, a one-roomed school, the other a laboratory of a college and an auditorium of a Christian high school – not our own. Christ was not present in Westminster Abbey. He is present wherever the gospel is preached. Westminster Abbey is Sardis, soon to be dead – if not dead already.

What about your church? It is not a sin to have a beautiful church building. But care for the poor, mission work, and support of Christian schools make church buildings relatively unimportant. The emphasis on earthly buildings to the neglect of preaching the gospel kills a church. The preaching of the gospel is the means God uses to gather his elect people, not the place or building in which people meet.

If they did not repent the Lord will delay for a short time because Sardis still has a few people of God who are faithful. Failure to repent on the part of the church will result in Christ coming secretly to take away the few faithful and leave a dead church behind. They that overcome the struggle (they were struggling with their church leaders for the repentance of these leaders) either by death or by being put out of the church, would be clothed in the white garments of Christ's righteousness and given life eternal. They will eternally possess the glory of seeing God himself in Jesus Christ.

God's Saving Will in the New Testament (2)



Rev. Angus Stewart

Pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church, our sister church in Northern Ireland

God's Will in Romans 9:6-24

Having considered God's will in Ephesians 1:1-14, we now turn to our second major passage on this glorious subject, Romans 9:6-24. Like Ephesians 1, Romans 9 refers frequently to Jehovah's will: *theloo* or *boulomai* or their cognates. It is mentioned four times in the three verses below from this great chapter of Scripture:

Therefore hath he mercy on whom he *will* have mercy, and whom he *will* he hardeneth (18).

Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his *will*? (19).

What if God, *willing* to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ...? (22).

Whereas Ephesians 1 speaks only of God's will in election, Romans 9 deals with His will in both election and reprobation. Election, of course, is God's eternal, sovereign and unconditional choice of certain people in Jesus Christ, both to grace and to glory, to the honour of His name alone. Reprobation, on the other hand, is God's eternal, sovereign and unconditional purpose to pass by and ordain to destruction all others, in the way of their sins, to the praise of His holy justice.

Election and reprobation go hand-in-hand with God's love and God's hatred respectively: "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (13). In the context of Romans 9, the covenant God is saying, in effect, "Elect Jacob have I loved and reprobate Esau have I hated."

Election and reprobation also go hand-in-hand with God's mercy and God's hardening respectively: "Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have

mercy [i.e., the elect], and whom he will he hardeneth [i.e., the reprobate]" (18).

Putting it all together, there is one people embraced in God's election, God's love and God's mercy. There is also God's reprobation, God's hatred and God's hardening of others.

These two realities, hatred and hardening, are crucial aspects of the biblical and Reformed doctrine of reprobation. Divine reprobation entails divine hatred and divine hardening of those whom He passed by in His absolute sovereignty and ordained to destruction for their sins in His unassailable justice.

God's saving will regarding His elect is not only served by His all-encompassing decree of providence (Eph. 1:11) but is also served by His rejecting will. That is, God's election of some in Jesus Christ is served by His reprobation of others: "The elder [i.e., reprobate, hated Esau] shall serve the younger [i.e., elect, beloved Jacob]" (Rom. 9:12).

Both God's will in election and His will in reprobation are irresistible, as the apostle teaches in his rhetorical question of Romans 9:19: "who hath resisted his will?" No one has or will for "none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou" (Dan. 4:35).

Of course, objections to this biblical teaching always arise from unbelieving, proud man. The apostle brings them up and deals with them in Romans 9. Thus he writes, "What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God?" The response? "God forbid," literally, "May it not be!" (14).

Paul anticipates another protest: "Thou wilt say

then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will?" (19). The apostle counters, "Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?" (20-21).

The former Pharisee makes it clear that his inspired teaching in Romans 9 is in full accord with the Old Testament Scriptures on God's will in election and reprobation. In the space of only eleven verses (7-17), Paul quotes the first two books of the Pentateuch as many as five times.

First, he provides three citations from Genesis, with the last two prefaced by introductory remarks: "In Isaac shall thy seed be called" (Rom. 9:7; Gen. 21:12); "For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sara shall have a son" (Rom. 9:9; Gen. 18:10, 14); "it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger" (Rom. 9:12; Gen. 25:23).

Second, Paul uses quotation formulas before citing two verses from Exodus: "For he [i.e., God] saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (Rom. 9:15; Ex. 33:19); "For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth" (Rom. 9:17; Ex. 9:16).

Romans 9:6-24 quotes not only the first two scriptural books, Genesis and Exodus, but also the last book of the Old Testament, as is arranged in our Bibles, Malachi: "As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated" (Rom. 9:13; Mal. 1:2-3).

Clearly, the doctrine of the apostle to the Gentiles in Romans 9:6-24 regarding God's will in sovereign election and reprobation is divinely authoritative. It fits with, and unpacks, six Old Testament texts: five from Moses, in Genesis and Exodus, and one from Malachi. Moreover, Romans 9, like all of Scripture, consists of words breathed forth by the Holy Spirit

(II Tim. 3:16), who was sent by the ascended Lord Jesus Christ, the revelation of the Triune God.

This authoritative teaching in Romans 9:6-24 refutes two common errors. First, it condemns man's free will, the Arminian heresy that man is able to choose God and His salvation with the help of an alleged resistible divine grace. The biblical and Reformed faith boldly proclaims *God's* free will in both election and reprobation, not *man's* free will! Paul explicitly draws this conclusion: "So then it [i.e., salvation] is not of him that *willeth* [i.e., man and his supposed free will], nor of him that runneth [i.e., man and his works, even his

Both God's will in election and His will in reprobation are irresistible...

most strenuous religious exertions], but of God that sheweth mercy" (16).

Second, Romans 9 also exposes the well-meant offer of the gospel, that is, the idea that God earnestly desires to save absolutely all men head-for-head or everyone who hears the gospel (including the reprobate). This is a position that is intrinsic to Roman Catholic and Arminian soteriology, but it is now promoted by many in Reformed and Presbyterian circles as if it were the biblical and Reformed gospel.

However, Romans 9 actually states the exact opposite. It is not merely that God does *not* earnestly want to save the reprobate but, instead, He earnestly wills and desires—and this has to be said reverently because it is a fearful thing—to punish the wicked for their sins.

It is not that God delights in hurting people (Eze. 33:11), but because He wills to reveal His infinite holiness and omnipotence in punishing the impenitent as they justly deserve. This is what

the chapter clearly says, “What if God, *willing* [i.e., wishing, desiring, wanting] to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction ...?” (22).

This is the true and sincere desire of God—a desire which He always fulfils!—in accordance with His unchangeable will of decree in reprobation. It is the exact opposite of what is claimed to be scriptural and Reformed teaching and preaching by many in our day.

Finally, it is striking that Romans 9’s theodicy or justification of God in election and reprobation is stated in terms of God’s *will* concerning salvation, both with regards to whom He wills or wishes or wants or desires to save in Jesus Christ and whom He wills or wishes or wants or desires not to save in Jesus Christ.

What if God, *willing* to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles? (22-24).

Clearly, the Bible’s own inspired theodicy or justification of God’s decree of election and reprobation in Romans 9 includes the truth that He wills or desires to glorify Himself by the manifestation of His justice and omnipotence in punishing those whom He has eternally ordained to destruction. So how can advocates of the well-meant offer, who claim that He desires to save the reprobate, properly defend the absolute sovereignty of God, truly explain the coherence of biblical theology and faithfully exegete this great chapter?

Salvation is of the LORD (4): The Mariners - Saved? (Jon. 1:13-16)



Marcus Wee

Marcus Wee is a pastor of CERC.

God was chastising his rebellious prophet Jonah. He sent a supernatural storm to stop him in his sinful tracks. By the drawing of lots, He exposed Jonah to be the reason for the storm. Jonah’s response to God’s chastening was repentance. God would later bring Jonah to a deeper repentance in the belly of the fish (Chapter 2), but already in Chapter 1 we see Jonah’s repentance as he readily submitted to God’s chastening, even unto death: “Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm unto you: for I know that for my sake this great tempest is upon you” (v. 12).

Their Refusal to Obey God

The mariners did not heed Jonah’s advice, not immediately. Perhaps they felt too much compassion for this hapless man, that it would be inhumane to toss him into the jaws of certain death. Perhaps they prided themselves on their ability to outrow and outlast even the worst of storms. Whatever was the case, they rowed on: “Nevertheless the men rowed hard to bring it to the land; but they could not” (v. 13).

But they had failed to reckon with God. With God’s sovereignty, that He was “the God of heaven, which

hath made the sea and the dry land” (v. 9), that there was no escaping His sovereign will.

They had also failed to reckon with God’s justice, that “the soul that sinneth, it shall die” (Eze. 18:20).

And so the mariners had to be taught, by God Himself. All their effort at outriving the storm was futile. Whereas previously, “the sea wrought, and was tempestuous” (v. 11), now it wrought and was tempestuous “against them” (v. 13). God’s wrath was now directed at the mariners for their presumptuousness in attempting to defy the sovereign God of heaven and earth.

Their Recognition of God’s Sovereignty

The mariners were forced to recognise God’s sovereignty: “Wherefore they cried unto the LORD, and said, We beseech thee, O LORD, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man’s life, and lay not upon us innocent blood: for thou, O LORD, hast done as it pleased thee” (v. 14).

They had been unmistakably confronted by God’s sovereignty, all along: the supernatural storm, the lot that fell on Jonah, and Jonah’s own confession (v. 9).

Now, as their final attempts to oppose God were thwarted, the mariners recognised explicitly God’s sovereignty by their confession.

The question arises, did the mariners’ confession come out of a believing heart? Was theirs a confession of faith, like that of Job? “I know that Thou canst do every thing, and that no thought can be withholden from Thee” (Job 42:2). Or was theirs a confession that, though accurate in content, proceeded from an unbelieving heart, as the devils who confessed, “Thou art Christ the Son of God” (Luke 4:41)? To broaden out the issue: were the pagan, unbelieving sailors converted by this incident?

It is indeed a question that cannot be answered with absolute, dogmatic certainty. And hence the title of the article: “The Mariners—Saved?”

At the same time, though we cannot be absolutely

certain of the mariners’ salvation, there is strong evidence to believe that they were indeed converted and saved. For the text gives us more than a bare confession of God’s sovereignty.

Notice that the mariners in v. 14 are crying out to God Himself. They were not saying, impersonally, “God is sovereign;” they were pleading with God: “We beseech Thee, O LORD, we beseech Thee.” Their cry unto God in v. 14 was different from their superstitious crying unto every and any god in v. 5 (different Hebrew word used). They addressed God by His covenant name: “O LORD.” They called upon Jehovah God Himself. They prayed unto Him.

And there is yet more evidence, even apart from their believing confession.

Their Response of Fear and Worship

The text describes their actions. V. 15: “So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging.” Having exhausted all attempts to save Jonah, and clearly faced with God’s sovereign demand, they cast Jonah overboard.

The result was immediate. The sea became calm. Jonah was indeed the reason for the raging tempest sent upon the ship. God was indeed the sovereign God of heaven and earth who must have His justice satisfied, and did.

Then came the mariners’ response. V. 16: “Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice unto the LORD, and made vows.” Literally, they “feared with a great fear.” Notice *whom* they feared: the LORD. Theirs was not a blind terror of an unknown deity, but a reverence towards Jehovah God.

They also offered a sacrifice; again, not in a superstitious fashion according to their pagan customs, but a sacrifice “unto the LORD.”

And they also made vows, literally, “vowed vows.” Vows to serve and worship the same Jehovah God

whom they feared and had offered a sacrifice to. The verb and the noun are used exclusively in the OT to vows paid to Jehovah God, and not to idol gods.

All these activities of fearing, sacrificing, and vowing are in a tense which indicates ongoing action. These activities were the beginning of a continued, lifelong process of worshipping God.

One potential objection to the mariners' conversion and salvation is, how would they know to worship Jehovah God, being pagans? The following ought to be considered, in response. These sailors came from Joppa (1:3), a port in Philistia that was close by to other Israelite cities. These Philistines would have been familiar with the customs and traditions of the Jews. The term "Hebrew" held significance for them (1:9). Jonah himself could have described his own religion to the mariners. Finally, the vows that they vowed could very well have included vows to become proselyte Jews, to return back to land and live in the church in Israel, to be circumcised and keep God's laws.

Therefore, this objection, though valid, is not insurmountable.

Instead, what is more likely is that these pagan mariners were converted. They recognised that they needed to be saved, not merely from a temporal storm that would destroy them physically; they needed salvation from the eternal storm of God's wrath, to which they were exposed in their unbelief. They knew that they were helpless to save themselves in the face of that storm. They needed another to die on their behalf, to cast Himself willingly into the raging sea of God's wrath, that they might be saved.

And so the mariners turned from their unbelief, only because God had first turned them, giving them the gift of faith. And they manifested their faith in worship of Jehovah God, fearing, sacrificing, and vowing vows.

In their conversion and salvation, the mariners manifested the principle that "salvation is of the LORD." God saves whom He wills. God alone saves! How much more clearly that would shine in the salvation of the pagan mariners, just as it did in the repentance of the rebellious Jonah, and just as it does in our own salvation.

Our Rejection of Conditions (2): A Survey of Creeds and Literature



Rev. Martyn McGeown

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Instinctively, we all think that we know what a condition is, but a precise definition is elusive. The word "condition" is from the Latin *condicere* which means to "say with" or "to agree upon." At its most basic a condition reflects a relationship of necessity between two or more things. In English, we often express such a relationship of necessity with words such as "only if," "provided that," "except that," "without," "only after," "always before," and the like. We might call such expressions "conditional" as far as the grammar is concerned (or "conditions in the formal sense"), even if the word "condition"

is not used. As we shall see in a later blog post, God willing, such language is frequently used in Holy Scripture, so we cannot simply ignore it or try to explain it away.

A search of the Three Forms of Unity for the word "condition" yields the following results: the *Heidelberg Catechism* does not contain the word "condition;" the *Belgic Confession* uses the word twice, but only with the meaning of a circumstance or a state of being (see Articles 28 and 36; someone might be in a good or bad condition); and the *Canons*

use the word “condition” only to reject the ideas behind it, ideas proposed by the Arminians. Let us, then, briefly survey the Canons.

Canons 1:9 rejects “[any] good quality or disposition in man, as the prerequisite, cause, or condition on which [eternal election] depended.” Canons I:10 rejects the idea that God has chosen anything in man “as a condition of salvation.” Canons I:R2, 3, 4, 5, and 7 reject “conditional election” (I:R:2); they reject “faith...as well as its incomplete obedience, as a condition of salvation” (I:R:3); they reject the teaching that “in the election unto faith this condition is beforehand demanded, namely, that man should [...]” (I:R:4); they reject the teaching that “faith, the obedience of faith, holiness, godliness, and perseverance are not fruits of the unchangeable election unto glory, but are conditions required beforehand” (I:R:5); and they reject the teaching that the certainty of election “depends upon a changeable and uncertain condition” (I:R:7).

Furthermore, Canons II:R:3 rejects the teaching that “[God prescribes] new conditions as he might desire, obedience to which, however, depended on the free will of man, so that it might have come to pass that either none or all should fulfill these conditions.” Finally, Canons V:R:1 rejects the teaching that “perseverance is... a condition of the new covenant, which ... man before his decisive election and justification must fulfill through his freewill;” instead, the same article teaches that perseverance is “a fruit of election” and “a gift of God gained by the death of Christ.”

From the *Canons*, we learn a few things about the kind of conditions that Reformed theologians reject. First, the Reformed reject that in salvation anything could be a prerequisite, that is, something in man, something that man has, or something that man is, or something that man does—not something that God *gives*—that is required beforehand. Second, the *Canons* contrast conditions with “fountain” (see Canons I:9), “fruit” (Canons I:R:5 and Canons V:R:1), and “gift” (Canons V:R:1). So, important aspects of a condition include something that man must produce, in contrast to what God gives, something

which is required before God will give to man the gift of salvation so that it is something of man on which his salvation *depends*.

So far our review of the *Three Forms of Unity*.

It is striking that, although the Protestant Reformed Churches in their history have always rejected the theology of conditions, a precise definition of “condition” in Protestant Reformed literature is difficult to find. One could search through the many volumes of the *Standard Bearer*, but that would be very time-consuming. Later, I will quote from some *SB* articles from the 1950s when the debate about conditions raged in the Protestant Reformed Churches. One could also look in some of the books published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFPA) where conditional theology is discussed and refuted.

One such place is *Voice of Our Fathers* by Homer C. Hoeksema, where in his comments on Canons I:9 he writes, “A condition is a prerequisite (something required beforehand) which one must fulfill or comply with in order to receive something or to have something done unto him” (*Voice of Our Fathers* [Grand Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1980], 179).

David. J. Engelsma, one of the most prolific authors of the RFPA, has written often about the theology of the conditional covenant. In one work he writes about Herman Bavinck: “Bavinck denies, absolutely, that the covenant is conditional in the proper sense of the term ‘condition.’” Engelsma then identifies the meaning of the term which he rejects, namely, “a decision or work of a member of the covenant upon which the covenant and its salvation *depend*” or the idea that “the member of the covenant must make a decision or perform a work that is *decisive* for the maintenance of the covenant” so that “by performing a demand a member of the covenant *makes himself to differ* from others who, like himself, are objects of the covenant grace of God” (***Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition*** [Jenison, MI: RFPA, 2011], 170, my italics).

Here, too, the important aspects of a condition are, first, it is something that has its source in man, although sometimes it is performed with the help of God's grace; second, that it is something on which the reception of salvation depends; and, third, it makes man's activity decisive because God's grace is supposedly wider than election, so that one person can make himself differ from another. Implied in such conditional theology is resistible grace.

Elsewhere Engelsma writes that a condition is "a deed of the child [i.e., a child born in the church] upon which the covenant *depends*" and contrasts this with the Reformed teaching about the role of faith in justification: "Faith is the means, or instrument, by which God gives and the elect believer receives righteousness and all salvation. Faith is not a human work that makes one worthy of salvation, or upon which one's righteousness and salvation *depend*" (**Federal Vision: Heresy at the Root** [Jenision, MI: RFP, 2012], 101, my italics).

Later he writes, "To teach that faith is the condition of a gracious covenant established with many more than the elect is to teach that faith is *a work of the children upon which the covenant depends and by which some distinguish themselves from others*" (ibid, 112, Engelsma's italics) and "Faith is a demand upon the child, and upon the child's compliance with this demand everything depends. Faith is a condition *in this sense*" (ibid, 113, Engelsma's italics).

Writing about Norman Shepherd, one of the fathers of the heresy of the federal vision, Engelsma adds, "For Shepherd, faith is not part of grace, as it is in Romans 4:16, Ephesians 2:8, and the third and fourth heads of the Canons. Nor is it part of the promise, as is the teaching of Westminster Larger Catechism, question and answer 32. But it is an entirely separate element of the covenant. Faith is not God's grace, neither is it included in God's gracious promise. Rather, it is man's obligation, man's work, man's effort, man's willing and running. And upon this second element, which is not part of grace, does the grace of God *depend* from beginning to end" (ibid, 113, my italics).

Faith is the means, or instrument, by which God gives and the elect believer receives righteousness and all salvation.

Contrasting the use of the word "condition" by orthodox theologians of the past with that of modern federal vision proponents, Engelsma writes, "The federal vision does not mean by condition the necessary means by which God certainly realizes his covenant with the elect. The federal vision does not refer to faith as the necessary means of covenant salvation that God promises to the elect in Christ, and to them alone, and that he works in them by his sovereign Holy Spirit. Not at all! The federal vision and the conditional covenant doctrine that the federal vision is developing mean by condition a work of the child upon which the covenant and its salvation *depend* and a work of some children by which *they distinguish themselves from others*, who are as much the objects of the gracious promise and as much the recipients of covenant grace as themselves (ibid, 113-114, my italics).

In fact, orthodox theologians have used the word "condition" to denote a necessary means. The Presbyterian *Westminster Larger Catechism* is a case in point: "How is the grace of God manifested in the second covenant? A. The grace of God is manifested in the second covenant, in that he freely provideth and offereth to sinners a mediator, and life and salvation by him; and, *requiring faith as the condition to interest them in him*, promiseth and giveth his Holy Spirit to all his elect, to work in them that faith, with all other saving graces; and to enable them unto all holy obedience, as the evidence of the truth of their faith, and thankfulness to God, and as the way

which he hath appointed them to salvation” (Q&A 32). When the Westminster Larger Catechism calls faith a “condition,” it simply refers to the necessary means of salvation; and, in fact, the same answer reminds us that God promises to his elect the Holy Spirit who works that faith in their hearts so that they believe.

Herman C. Hanko, another prolific author, explains the development of the word “condition” in Reformed writings: “If one studies the history of the covenant both in English and in continental thought, one will discover that the idea of a conditional covenant was often, though not always, maintained. However, those who were Reformed in their approach to this doctrine, i.e., those who proceeded from the truths of the five points of Calvinism, especially the truth of sovereign and double predestination, when speaking of a conditional covenant, used the word ‘condition’ in an altogether different sense from which it is commonly used in our day. They meant by ‘condition’ ‘way’ or ‘means’ by which God realizes His covenant sovereignly. They wished to emphasize by the use of this term the fact that *faith is the God-given and God-ordained way or means by which the covenant is realized and maintained*. God establishes and maintains His own covenant and does so by imparting faith to His people according to the decree of predestination so that faith becomes the means of the realization of that covenant. *Used in this way, we can hardly have any objection to the term*” (*God’s Everlasting Covenant of Grace* [Grand

Faith is not a human work that makes one worthy of salvation, or upon which one’s righteousness and salvation depend.

Rapids, MI: RFPA, 1988], 192, my italics). Hanko then warns the reader against using the term today: “The problem is, however, that this term has taken on quite a different meaning in today’s discussion of the covenant” (ibid, 192).

Elsewhere, Hanko writes, “The PRC are aware of the fact that the use of the word ‘condition’ has not always been Arminian. As was shown at the time of the controversy in the early 1950s, many ministers, including the leaders of the denomination, had used the word repeatedly. The word was often used in the past as a way of making God’s work of salvation a particular and not a general work. The condition defined the objects of salvation. ‘If one believes, he will be saved.’ That is, only believers will be saved. No one else can or ever will inherit salvation. And, in connection with the use of the term as a limiting clause, a condition also expressed the way in which God saved. When God says in His Word, if you believe, you will be saved, God not only limits salvation to believers, but He also defines faith as the way in which salvation is given. For salvation is by grace, and through faith. That use of the term was frequent and legitimate. But gradually the word itself was abandoned. This was done for two reasons. One reason was that the term ‘condition’ is not once found in all the Reformed confessions—except as a term used by the Arminians. The other reason was that the term had taken on so many Arminian connotations that its very use conjured up in the mind of the listener Arminian thoughts” (***For Thy Truth’s Sake: A Doctrinal History of the Protestant Reformed Churches*** [Grandville, MI: RFPA, 2000], 358).

Another important book in this connection is *Ready to Give An Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* by Herman Hoeksema and Herman Hanko of which Section III, 4, is titled “The Question of Conditions.” This book was written to explain both the controversy in 1924 over common grace and the controversy in 1953 over the conditional covenant. A dictionary definition is cited: “1. [A condition is] something established or agreed upon as a requisite to the doing or

taking effect of something else; a stipulation or provision; hence, an agreement determining one or more such prerequisite. 2. That which exists as an occasion of something else; a prerequisite” (*Ready to Give An Answer: A Catechism of Reformed Distinctives* [Grandville, MI: RFPA, 1997], 189).

The book then explains conditions when applied to salvation, “When faith is made a condition, the meaning is that salvation will not be granted to anyone unless he fulfills the condition of faith. Man must first believe for salvation to be given to him” (ibid, 189). But, asks this Catechism, can condition not simply refer to “necessary means”? The answer is astute: “Yes, but when the term ‘condition’ is applied to the work of salvation *in connection with a general promise*, it can no longer refer to ‘means’” (ibid, 190, my italics). The issue is, as always, the general promise: we reject a general promise, but we do not reject the necessary means of faith or the necessity of the sinner’s believing!

Later, the role of faith is clearly defined: “Faith is *the means which God uses* to save his people” (ibid, 192). “Faith is the *God-given gift* which unites us to Christ and by which the life of Christ comes to us, so that all the blessings of salvation are given us by Christ” (ibid, 193). In answer to the question, “Why then cannot faith be a condition to salvation?” we read, “Faith is *one of the blessings of salvation*, included in salvation, and part of salvation” (ibid, 193).

In another question, “Why then does Scripture speak of faith as the way to salvation?” we receive this insightful answer: “Scripture does this because it is God’s purpose to give us the blessings of salvation in such a way that we consciously experience them. God works faith in our hearts by which we come to Christ, embrace him as our only Savior, and find in him all our salvation. *In this way we are given the conscious experience of salvation*” (ibid, 193).

In reference to the Philippian jailor of Acts 16:30-31 we read, “When that command of the gospel comes

through the preaching, God so works by his Spirit in the hearts of his people *that they believe* in Christ, receive him as their Savior, and receive, by faith, the blessings of salvation” (ibid, 193, my italics). As to responsibility, this Catechism affirms, “Elect believers are responsible before God for believing and walking in love and obedience. But they are enabled to do this by God’s grace” (ibid, 194).

We notice again the elements of conditional theology that the Protestant Reformed Churches and her sisters reject. First, grace is wider than election or the promise is general and for more than the elect; second, man is able to—and, therefore, must—do something (believe, obey, persevere, etc.) on which the covenant *depends*; and, third, the “something” (believing, repenting, obeying, persevering, etc.) that a man does is not given to him by grace or included in God’s promise, but is his contribution to salvation. Faith is not—and cannot be—a condition because it is the God-given and God-worked means by which God makes us partakers of salvation, and it is part of salvation itself. And in that sense—necessary means—the older Reformed writers used the term “condition.” Because of its ambiguity, many modern Reformed writers avoid the term, and because of its erroneous nature, we reject both the term and the theology behind it.

The *Heidelberg Catechism* teaches, not that God promises to save any and all of the children of believers *if they believe* (which is the teaching of conditional theology), but “redemption from sin by the blood of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the author of faith, *is promised to them*” (A74, my italics), so that they believe, and through faith, they are saved. If God promises to give the Holy Spirit to work faith in his people, their believing (which is the fruit of God’s promise and the work of the Holy Spirit in them) is not a condition. Instead, faith is God’s gift to his elect people, and the necessary means or instrument by which they appropriate to themselves, and thus enjoy, the salvation purchased for them by Christ and decreed for them in election.

Race and the Christian



Julia Koh

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Racial issues have been present in society for centuries. The racist notions of black slavery and Nazi fanaticism in World War II still haunt us with varying manifestations – anti-Chinese sentiment after COVID-19 first broke out in Wuhan, China and less than equal treatment of black persons like George Floyd by white policemen in the USA. Recently, the term ‘BIPOC’ was coined (stands for Black, Indigenous, People of Colour) with the goal to increase awareness of violence and discrimination experienced by this minority group of people. Interestingly, we South Asians are part of this group too.

Locally, we are familiar with a certain Chinese privilege, documented in a 2021 survey where 53.9% of >2000 respondents felt that being of the majority race is an advantage. Also in 2021, an unpleasant remark made the news where an Indian-Filipino man was chided to “date people of (his) own race” when he was seen with his Chinese girlfriend. How should Christians deal with these issues? Do we have a notion of race privilege in our own hearts? Are we less accepting of Christians of other races?

Do we have a perception that certain races are superior? This may take various forms – some races are perceived to be more hardworking, more intelligent, have more beautiful skin or other outward appearances. The pursuit among women to achieve fair and flawless skin is obvious, from the various aesthetics treatments available nowadays. Would you consider having a best friend, or a lifelong partner, of another race? These questions may unearth some buried racist notions within us.

The origins of race

Any discussion about race should be prefaced with Genesis 1. Genesis 1:26-27 reads “Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our

likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

Adam was made in the image of God and in true knowledge, true righteousness, and true holiness. He and Eve were not of a specific race, and contained the genetic material that Noah, and subsequently all humankind after the flood, would possess. After the fall, the image of God was marred but it remains that humans were first created in God’s image. To assert that one’s race is superior is to reject the truth that we all share the same creation heritage and forefathers as documented in the bible.

While Babel created division in terms of language and culture, it is remarkable that there is no mention of race (except for the running sort of race) in the bible. Some¹ believe that race is an evolutionary concept developed by Darwin and other evolutionists to rationalise white racism. Secular organisations² define race as “a human-invented, shorthand term used to describe and categorize people into various social groups based on characteristics like skin colour, physical features, and genetic heredity.” Notably, they profess it to be human-invented, and a concept that was born in the 16th century.

Biblical Rejections of Racism

In the Old Testament we have an account of inter-racial (or more appropriately inter-national

1 Origin of the Races | The Institute for Creation Research (icr.org)

2 Talking About Race | National Museum of African American History and Culture (si.edu)

in view of the lack of the specific word race used) marriages. Moses marries Zipporah, a Midianite woman. Later in his life, while faithfully leading Israel and serving God, he marries an Ethiopian woman (Numbers 12:1). Consistent with New Testament teaching not to be unequally yoked, Deuteronomy 7:1-4 expounds that forbidden intermarrying with other social groups specifically refers to getting involved with pagan inhabitants of other lands.

Proverbs 14:31 and 17:5 speak against those who oppress and mock the poor because that implies reproaching his Maker! That is a serious charge against those that oppress and mock others who differ in social circumstances. Making racist jokes or belittling someone on the grounds of a different skin colour or language are sinful acts and should be soberly dealt with and repented of.

The familiar parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) also reminds us of the importance of loving our neighbour as ourselves. The Lord uses the most explosively disharmonious races of Jews and Samaritans in this parable to illustrate that it is possible, and required of us, to treat someone with such love and care even though they are furthest away from us socially.

Racism in the church

Ultimately our religious identity supersedes our racial identity, and within the church we are “one in Christ Jesus” according to Galatians 3:28. Our faith brings us closer to each other than the colour of our skin and Jesus Christ who draws us to Him reminds us again in Colossians 3:11 that “there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all.” Reflecting about our friendships, we probably experience more common ground among those in the church compared to those who disregard all Christian doctrine and theology.

Bringing it back to home, Singapore is a country

with fantastic opportunity for inter-racial interaction and HDB void decks can be likened to melting pots of various cultures (think incense burning alongside Malay weddings, racial quotas within each block to ensure mixing of races). As a young mother, introducing my kids to members of other races has been eye-opening in terms of what I catch myself saying. How I explain a difference in skin colour should always have an overarching idea that we should love our neighbour.

Other ways of being aware and showing love cross-culturally includes being aware of mission work in India and others in the region. Geographically, we have many racially different neighbours and should take an interest in the various cultures that affect practical religion. When I was in India in 2012 visiting a church, I was struck by how much variation there was in music during the worship service. I was also aware that for women there, dressing appropriately in public was crucial and inappropriate dress would draw stares and comments. Such small sensitivities made me realise that it was important to adapt and “do as the Indians do”. With many similarities in beliefs that we share with the fellowships in India and Philippines, inviting them for our online bible studies and writing to them are also expressions of love.

On the flip side of the coin, if we were to be targets of racist jokes or remarks, we can be thankful for our identity in Christ. Romans 8:1 also promises that there is “no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit”. The culmination of all the world’s history will be in the final judgment, and Christ declares that on that day there will be no discrimination, prejudice or privilege based on race. Revelation 5:9 reminds us that Christ was slain, and “hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation”. We will not be judged according to our language, culture or nationality; how can we then pass judgement on others by these standards?

NEWS FROM THE CHURCHES

Singapore

We praise and thank God for the ordination of our second minister, Pastor Marcus Wee. God is indeed gracious in providing us with a second minister to share the workload and to minister to the church. May God give our two young pastors the wisdom, strength and grace required to take on the huge task of shepherding the church, especially in troubling and upheaving times.

With the end of year comes an abundance of church activities like the Reformation Day Conference, camps for children and teens as well as Christmas carolling. We are thankful that these events can resume in larger capacities and in-person (rather than online) with the COVID situation continuing to improve. May God continue to use these activities to draw us closer as a church and to reach out to those around us.

Philippines

Rev Daniel Kleyn and his wife are now back in the Philippines after recuperating from surgeries in West Michigan. May the Lord grant healing and strength to them as well as the other missionaries who continue their work in the Philippines.

Classes in the PRCP Seminary continue for 2022-2023. We continue to keep the instructors (Rev Smit and Rev Kleyn) as well as Seminarian Ace Flores in prayer that God will bless their faithful labours.

America

The Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary has published its latest Fall 2022 issue of the Protestant Reformed Theological Journal. This issue features articles by the Professors and includes one which looks at an old article by Herman Hoeksema on mental illness; as well as numerous book reviews. It is available for free on the seminary's website. Be sure to sign up to be on the mailing list to be alerted whenever a new issue is published!

For the month of December, Rev Bruinsma will be delivering messages on various Bible passages related to the first coming of Christ in the flesh on the Reformed Witness which you can find on Sermonaudio. The Reformed Witness Hour also publishes each month's messages in an attractive booklet which serve as a blessing to many. Contact them if you or your Evangelism Committee would like to receive them.

COVENANT LIFE IN PICTURES



CKCKS camp activity: pottery!



Baby
Jude's
baptism



Ordination of Pastor Marcus Wee



Vacation Bible School: Re-created scenes
from Pilgrim's Progress using recycled materials



Christmas
carolling at
various
homes

