

Clarion

THE CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

V 66 N 1 JANUARY 13 2017

A close-up photograph of two hands clasped together. The hand on the left is wearing a rainbow-colored wristband. The background is blurred, showing a red garment and a blue sky.

**How can it
be wrong?**

GOD'S CONDITIONAL LOVE

CLARION KIDS

YOU ASKED

Sexual Confusion

Peter H. Holtvluwer
Minister of the Spring Creek
Canadian Reformed Church
at Tintern, Ontario
holtvluwer@bell.net



There is much questioning and a lot of uncertainty

As we launch into a new year it may feel like we are launching into a new era. The speed of change over the last year alone has caught many of us off guard – who was counting on a Trump presidency just months ago? Who predicted that a university professor would be sanctioned for simply maintaining the pronouns “he” and “she” when referring to males and females?¹ Gender dysphoria and gender fluidity are terms we hardly knew a year ago and yet now they are everywhere. There’s a strange wind blowing, it seems.

That wind is blowing within the church community as well. Speaking with office bearers across the federation, I have noticed a rise in cases of same-sex attraction and even of trans-gender struggles. Though not exclusively, it is mainly our teenagers and young adults that are being drawn to these life-styles. What is especially noticeable among that peer group is that there is often little conviction that these are wrong, unbiblical. Some ask: *How can it be wrong if you’re born with it? Or if it feels good?* There is much questioning and a lot of uncertainty. This has created a growing sexual confusion that we need to talk about.

Generation gap

Does this surprise you, this confusion among our younger folk? It surprised me. I think there is a generation gap on this issue that directly relates to the change in our western culture. My guess is that if you were born before 1980 you are likely very clear that gay and lesbian feelings and activities are sin. If you were born afterward, you likely have your questions. If you were born after 2000, you may well be leaning toward acceptance. Why? Because somewhere in the 1990s our western North American culture brought homosexuality out of the closet into the main stream and made it seem legitimate.

In 1990, if there were any gay references in the mainstream media then they were virtually all negative. Gay marriage wasn’t even thinkable. But the revolution was moving – seen literally in crowds of people marching in annual Pride Parades in many cities. By 1999, several movies and TV shows for the first time featured leading gay characters cast in a very positive light – and they were immensely popular! Remember *Will and Grace* (1998)? Ground-breaking stuff. Ellen DeGeneres “came out” as a lesbian and began a highly-rated talk show (2003 to present). *Brokeback Mountain* in 2005 was another envelope-pusher, an award-winning film about two same-sex attracted cowboys. 2005 was also the year that Canada’s Parliament voted to change the definition of marriage to include same-sex couples. By 2017 – only twelve short years – anyone daring to publicly criticize homosexuality is denounced as a “homophobe” and slandered in the media. It all happened in a blur.

Questioning

Those born before 1980 – many parents and grandparents today – need to realize that their teens and young adults are maturing as this cultural revolution is unfolding. TV shows and movies now regularly show a happy, content, gay life. Actors, politicians, and even sports figures feel free to come out as gay – to much applause. What we have to understand is that the gay revolution has succeeded in making the homosexual life appear normal to our society, even “cool.” It’s just another choice, not right or wrong, just different. And that has our younger generation confused.

While the over-thirty-five crowd grew up believing that God created sex as a gift to be shared in a marriage between one husband and one wife, those under-thirty-five may not be so sure. It’s the norm in today’s society

to be completely open-minded about sexual "preferences" and even about gender "preferences," and that has our younger adults thinking differently. The morality and ethics of sex are not so clear cut to them. The huge increase in on-line porn use among our younger generation² has further eroded their sense of good and bad, right and wrong in this area. It's becoming trendy to question both your own sexual orientation and your gender. Young people are encouraged to experiment. *Why not try it out? Doing it once won't hurt anyone. It might just be for you – you'll never know till you try!*

INSIDE THIS ISSUE...

A new year, a new volume of *Clarion*. Rev. Peter Holtvliuw-er begins with an editorial on a current issue: that of questions surrounding sexuality and gender identity in the context of the Bible and our faith.

From Rev. Ryan Kampen we have the first of two articles: "God's Conditional Love" is the title of the first. His second article will be in the next issue of our magazine.

This year our editorial team hopes to feature the 500th anniversary of the Great Reformation throughout the year. In our first issue of 2017 readers may find an article from the Celebrate 1517 Committee.

As we search for a new Treasures New and Old coordinator, we will bring be reprinting meditations; this time we have one from Rev. John Ludwig. There is also the Clippings on Politics and Religion column, *Clarion Kids*, and a question for Rev. William den Hollander's "You Asked."

Laura Veenendaal

- 2 EDITORIAL**
Sexual Confusion
- 6 TREASURES, NEW & OLD**
Christian Hope in the New Year
- 7 God's Conditional Love**
- 11 Celebrate 1517 in 2017**
- 13 CLIPPINGS ON POLITICS AND RELIGION**
- 14 CLARION KIDS**
- 15 YOU ASKED**

EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

Editor: J. Visscher; Copy Manager: Laura Veenendaal
Coeditors: P.H. Holtvliuw-er, E. Kampen, C. Van Dam, M. VanLuik

ADDRESS FOR MAGAZINE CONTENT

Clarion
8 Inverness Crescent, St. Albert, AB T8N 5J5
Email: editor@clarionmagazine.ca

ADDRESS FOR ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS

CLARION
Premier Printing Ltd.
One Beghin Avenue
Winnipeg, MB Canada R2J 3X5
Phone: 204-663-9000, Fax: 204-663-9202

Subscriptions subscriptions@clarionmagazine.ca
Advertisements ads@clarionmagazine.ca
Website www.clarionmagazine.ca

2017 SUBSCRIPTION RATES

			Regular Mail	Air Mail
Canada			\$49.00*	\$ 82.00*
U.S.A. U.S. Funds			\$69.00	\$102.00
International			\$98.00	\$171.00

*Applicable GST, HST, PRT taxes are extra.
GST/HST no. 890967359RT

Cancellation Agreement

Unless a written subscription cancellation is received we assume you wish to continue to subscribe. You will be invoiced prior to the subscription renewal date.

2017 ADVERTISING RATES

Advertisements: \$20.00 per column inch
Full Colour Display Advertisements: \$21.00 per column inch.
We reserve the right to refuse ads.

PUBLISHER

Published biweekly by Premier Printing Ltd.
Winnipeg, Manitoba

Copyright © Premier Printing Ltd.

All rights reserved. No part may be reproduced in any manner without permission in writing from the publisher, except brief quotations used in connection with a review in a magazine or newspaper.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

Agreement No. 40063293; ISSN 0383-0438

RETURN UNDELIVERABLE CANADIAN ADDRESSES TO:
One Beghin Avenue, Winnipeg, MB, Canada R2J 3X5

Acknowledge the feelings

I think it's important that we recognize the honest confusion among the up-and-coming generation and be prepared to guide them through a tumultuous time. As parents (and grand-parents), our natural reaction might be one of frustration and disbelief: *of course it's wrong – how can you even think anything about homosexuality is okay? We shouldn't even be having this discussion!!* If we let ourselves respond this way, will that help the confused teenager or questioning young adult in our families? It will only shut down the discussion, provide no meaningful answers for them, and drive them to seek answers from other sources – not necessarily Christian ones.

A better way to go is to acknowledge their feelings, doubts, and questions and engage them in discussion. Those thoughts, feelings, and struggles are very real for them and we need to give them an outlet to work them through. Hear them. Understand them. Love them. Let's realize the huge impact of our surrounding culture and let's help guide the struggling through the haze of uncertainty. The Bible's teaching itself is quite clear but let's understand it may not be clear to them.

Learn to deal with feelings

The gay revolution has capitalized on using “feelings” as a guide-post, a thought that is everywhere in our western world. If it *feels* right, it must *be* right. Truth is whatever feels good to you. Growing up with this message ringing in their ears, it can be very hard for our young people to get past their feelings and submit themselves to God's will as expressed in Scripture.

We need to redirect their thinking to God's Word and show them that feelings cannot be our guiding light. Why not? Because our feelings are corrupted by sin and because we were not created to serve our feelings but to serve our God. Show them how Satan has been using this trick since the Garden of Eden – distracting us from what the LORD really says and urging us to chase after our feelings and desires.

With gentleness and care but with clarity and firmness, walk them through Scripture to show them God's creation of male and female (only two sexes) and his design for sex within marriage. Point out how the union of one male and one female in holy marriage is meant to portray the marriage of Christ and his bride, the church. Expect a series of conversations, over time, with back and forth discussion – go the distance with them, taking their questions seriously and lovingly coaching them in the truth.

Let them come to see the particular commands against homosexuality in the context of the whole flow of Scripture, from the creation set-up of male/female marriage to the future marriage-feast of the Lamb. Hopefully they will learn that same-sex attraction/relations go directly against God's will and work against God's rescue mission in Christ, who came to save us also from these sins. As Christians, part of taking up our cross and following Christ is to deny whatever feelings or desires which are sinful, which work in the service of the kingdom of darkness.

Sorting out your confusion

If you belong to the younger set and have been struggling with your own questions and confusion, this is quite understandable. It means you're *normal*! You've probably run into “Christian” online articles which try to explain that the Bible actually allows homosexuality, that it's a good thing – more confusion! As a Christian growing up in the midst of the gay revolution, it would be a surprise if you had no uncertainty and weren't tempted to think sexuality is all a matter of whatever your feelings prefer. The thing is: do not let your feelings define you!

Maybe you have an attraction to the same sex, or think you do. Perhaps you are unsure and searching

and it makes you wonder: maybe I am gay? Maybe I was made this way and I should just give in to it? Perhaps you've secretly questioned whether you really are a male or a female. Our society will tell you: *if you feel that way, go for it! It must be right!* But that, my friends, is the devil's big lie. The truth is that just because you question or feel that you might be something, that feeling does not make you that thing!

You are what God has created you to be (male or female) and what the Lord Jesus is recreating you to be (child of your Father in heaven). Your identity and mine does not rest on our sexual orientation or on anything we do or feel but on what God in his Word tells us we are. God claims us for his children in Christ and so by faith we belong to him body and soul, in life and in death. There is a reality beyond our feelings and we have to cling to it, trusting God's Word over our feelings.

**God claims us
for his children in
Christ and so by
faith we belong to
him body and soul,
in life and in death**

Every Christian's sinful feelings

Many Christians – also many from the older generation – have had to face faulty feelings and attractions. It may not be related to homosexuality or gender but the feelings are just as powerful – the desire for sex outside of marriage, the relentless draw to drinking and drugs, the greedy pull to get rich, the driving feeling to have others think well of you and even look up to you. There's also the feeling of jealousy and anger when something doesn't go your way while your neighbour succeeds. Each one is a feeling, each one can become an addiction, but each one is sin.

It doesn't matter if we are born with these feelings or develop these desires as we grow up. Our sinful nature is with us since conception and every part of us is corrupted with sin, so it should not surprise us that all manner of ungodly desires arise in our hearts. Same-sex attraction, gender confusion is at bottom no different than attraction or feeling toward anything else against God's commands. Our job is to analyze every feeling and submit it to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Giving in to these feelings is making an idol out of that activity. It is saying to Christ: you are not Lord of my life and I will not serve you but me. Instead, Christians come to grips with and confess their sins, seek forgiveness, and press on in the strength of the Holy Spirit to not give in to sinful feelings. This is a painful, even life-long process. Resisting sin takes hard work each day and we need each other's help in encouragement, guidance, and accountability.

Back to the Bible

So, please, if you wrestle with same-sex feelings or gender questions, go back to the Bible and open up a discussion with your parents, elders, or someone you respect and trust to give you true, biblical guidance. As they recall their own sinful nature and sinful desires, they will understand and be compassionate and helpful. We need each other across the generations. Don't stay conflicted and don't let your feelings rule you but let the LORD rule you. Let us help one another see the truth clearly and walk in it uprightly.

¹ Professor Jordan B. Peterson of the University of Toronto. See his website for more: <http://jordanbpeterson.com/>

² Though, to be sure, many older members are accessing on-line porn as well. The main difference though is that the older ones generally know right and wrong in sexual matters, more so than the up-and-coming generation.



Helpful Resources

What Does the Bible Really Teach about Homosexuality?

by Kevin DeYoung (Crossway, 2015)

With his usual clarity, PCA minister Kevin DeYoung walks the reader through an explanation of most Bible texts relevant to homosexuality and gives a sound explanation while being charitable to opponents. He also shows how this understanding has been the historic view of the church. If you are looking for biblical clarity on homosexuality, this book is a good place to start.

Same-Sex attraction and the Church: The Surprising Plausibility of the Celibate Life

by Ed Shaw (Intervarsity Press, 2015)

Ed Shaw writes as a self-professed same-sex attracted minister (in a conservative evangelical church) so he is deeply sympathetic to others in the same position. He recognizes his feelings go against God's Word and so he daily has to contend with this temptation. His main goal is to show the church how it can do much better at helping strugglers like him work through their issues and still be vibrant, living members of the church. Councils would do well to discuss this book together.

Outlasting the Gay Revolution: Where Homosexual Activism is Really Going and how to Turn the Tide

by Michael L. Brown (WND Books, 2015)

Brown is an outspoken American Christian minister who dares to publicly challenge the homosexual lobby in the United States - and has experienced much back-lash. He shows how the gay revolution has been carefully planned and executed over the last 50 years in the US and Canada and what Christians can do to get beyond it.

Christian Hope in the New Year

John Ludwig
Minister of the Canadian Reformed
Church at Ancaster, Ontario
jeludwig64@gmail.com



“Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.” 1 Peter 1:13

This meditation was originally published in this magazine in 2004.

A new year usually brings with it new expectations in almost every aspect of life: from medicine to farming. Will researchers discover a cure for cancer or other terminal diseases? Will advances in agriculture lead to an increase in crop productivity? New experiments will be conducted, new ideals born, new plateaus reached in space technology, genetic engineering, computer science. All the focus of such frenzied activity will be on the improved quality of life here and now. What sort of new conditions will be created for a longer, healthier, more prosperous life? The hope of our society, of the unbelieving world, does not extend beyond the present life. As church of Jesus Christ in this world we have to be careful that we don't get swept up in that shallow euphoria. We must set our hearts on the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Peter reminded his readers of precisely that in his first letter, “Set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.”

Peter had spoken about Christian hope already in verse 3, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.” Upon what is that hope

fixed? Upon “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade – kept in heaven for you” (verse 4).

Verse thirteen begins with the word “therefore,” which means that what Peter is now going to say is based on, and includes, all that has preceded it. Because you have been born anew to a living hope, because you have an inheritance prepared in heaven, *therefore* set your hope fully upon the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. Peter, then, is urging them to keep their hope focused on the future advent of Christ. They can hope and long for it because, says Peter, at the revelation of Jesus Christ *grace* will be given to you.

In our way of thinking we receive *grace* now, but *glory* later. Peter shows us, however, that grace is not contrasted with glory, but is another name for glory. It is not the means toward attaining the final salvation, but it is that salvation in all its fullness. This unexpected word, describing the great object of our Christian hope, is filled with meaning. It tells us that the ultimate blessedness of being ushered into the city of God is purely and solely the result of the undeserved love of God. Literally it says “The grace that is being brought to you.” In Peter's conception it is already on its way! It is “being brought.” Upon that we fix our hope.

Let this new year bring whatever God has decreed for it. Even if we could

ascertain what that will be, what will it help us? The more we confine ourselves to *the grace that is being brought*, the more certain and powerful our hope. For our hope rests entirely on Christ, who is coming to judge the living and the dead. Whoever hopes in him will not be put to shame.

This hope must also be active and living. It requires strenuous effort on our part. Hope is one of those rich covenantal terms. It is an unshakeable *trusting* that God will bring salvation. It is a patient *waiting* for it, in his time and in his manner. And it is at the same time an eager *longing* for it. Trusting, waiting, longing.

We have to distance ourselves from the common meaning of the verb “hope” today. It's often used to convey doubt. For example, our friends might say, “Are you planning to visit us Friday evening?” And we respond, “I hope so!” We don't know for certain. One of the kids might get sick. The car might not start. We're not one hundred percent sure. And so we use the word “hope” in the context of uncertainty. Nothing of that is in the biblical meaning of hope. It is filled with rock-solid certainty, for the simple reason that the basis of hope is God's abiding. What he promises comes true.

The apostle enjoins us to “hope *fully*.” Perfectly. Unreservedly. This exhortation is so needful because our hoping is so often sporadic and broken.

That Christ is coming back in glory we believe. We know that because God has told us so in his Word. But to *hope* upon that is something else! Hoping is praying and preparing for, counting on and looking forward to, the coming grace, not just now and then but constantly – also in times of prosperity and abundance, as we enjoyed once again this past year. Do we hope like that? Fully? Is our heart, our mind, our strength, our soul always wait-

ing for the Lord? Without that hope, how anxiously and fearfully we would enter the new year. The world has its wishes and dreams, but they will all perish with them.

We are so privileged. Our hope extends beyond the grave, beyond the needs of this present life. It reaches all the way to the day of Christ's revelation. The man who hopes like that will *show* it in all his ways. It will influence his life, his character, his daily work.

The expectation of the coming grace does not weaken us in our tasks here on earth, as others have sneeringly accused us. It's exactly that which gives us the strength and the dedication to work to God's glory. This present life is insignificant unless beyond it, and shaped by it, lies the life hereafter. No one can work as strenuously and rewardingly as the believer who knows that his works follow him into the eternal kingdom of his God and Father. C

God's Conditional Love

Ryan Kampen
rjkampen@gmail.com



If you could describe God's love with one word, what would you choose? Covenantal? Steadfast? Jealous? Fierce? Undeserved? Each certainly works. What word wouldn't? Fickle? Insincere? Selfish? Conditional? All of the above. All except one.

Perhaps you are familiar with some Christian slogans of relatively recent vintage. A couple go as follows. "There's nothing you can do to make God love you more, and there's nothing you can do to make God love you less." "God loves you because of who he is, and not because of anything you do or don't do. His love is unconditional." Sounds about right. After all, do we not confess that "God, without any merit of my own, out of mere grace, imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ" (LD 23)? And so I am free from all guilt of sin, clothed with the "robe of righteousness" (Isa 61:10), and precious in God's eyes. Well, you would be right to echo all this. . . so long as you don't leave it at this. In the words of J.I. Packer, "A half-truth masquerading as the whole truth becomes a complete untruth."¹ In our case, to describe God's love as unconditional won't suffice. There is simply more to it than that.

God's love, toward the elect in Christ, is conditional as well – he does not love all of his people the same; his love for you can increase!

Church history

Provocative statements like the above obviously need support. And while the best place to which one can appeal for support is the Bible, allow me to do so via church history. Dating as far back as the early church fathers and resounding throughout church history is a threefold distinction concerning the love of God for his people:

1. The love of benevolence;
2. The love of beneficence;
3. The love of complacency.

Let me explain these. God's love of benevolence refers to his goodwill toward the creature from eternity, by way of election. This love of necessity is unconditional; God has loved us before time began, considering us set apart and pleasing to him in his Son. See John 3:16 and Ephesians 1:4-6.

God's love of beneficence (literally, "good doing") is often considered a subset of his love of benevolence. Why? It

refers to God's doing in time what he willed in eternity. It is his love by which he redeems and sanctifies his people according to his goodwill. This too is a love unconditional, where he loves us as we are and in spite of who we are, because of Christ. See in this case Romans 5:8, Ephesians 5:25, and Revelation 1:5.

Love of complacency

Sometimes words deceive. When we hear the word "complacency," we think of someone who has a smug satisfaction with himself, and so coasts along with little regard for potential obstacles ahead. But lots of theologians love Latin. So here the meaning of "complacency" comes from its Latin root, "to please." God's love of complacency, then, is not one of smug self-satisfaction, but "his love of delight or friendship. . . whereby he rewards his people according to their holiness."² And this love is conditional, in that God takes increasing pleasure in the believer who grows in conformity to the image of Christ. Thus, God's love of complacency is a love of *degrees*; it is a love "by which he delights himself in the creature on account of the rays of his image seen in them."³

I hasten to add that as God's benevolent love precedes his beneficent love, so it also precedes his complacent love. This means that if I believe (a fruit of God's love of benevolence and beneficence), my obedience or disobedience cannot add to or subtract from my salvation.

Multiple loves?

It may sound from all this that God has within himself multiple kinds of loves. That appears to challenge our confession in Article 1 of the Belgic Confession, that God is simple, not made up of compound parts. We speak here, however, not of three loves but of a threefold love. It is a love of three degrees, and they all hold together, with a logical development from one to the next – that is, a love displayed in electing, and redeeming, and now rewarding. God's love for us is multifaceted: it is strong (seen in election), steadfast (redemption), and dynamic (rewarding holiness, today and in life to come). It is something like a fire that cannot be contained but grows stronger over time, to climax one day when we shall be like him (1 John 3:2).

Well, if God's simplicity is not threatened, what about his immutability, another word in Article 1? If God cannot change on account of the actions of creatures, how can his love increase? Again, it's a matter of degree. While God is certainly not a God of mood swings, his voluntary love toward his creatures remains dynamic, and thus can increase when believers become more and more like him.

Complacent love and Christ

It will help to see how this teaching relates to Christ, specifically to God's love for his Son. May we speak of God's love for Christ as strictly eternal, and therefore unconditional? Or may we also speak of this love as one of degrees, where God's love for his Son can increase?

Consider the following texts. In John 10:17, the Lord Jesus says, "For this reason the Father loves me, *because* I lay down my life that I may take it up again." How is it that Jesus can say the Father loves him because of his death and resurrection? The answer comes later, in 15:10, where Jesus says, "If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love." Christ speaks of obedience to the Father's commandments as the way he abides or stays in the Father's love. That is, Christ speaks about the love he enjoys from the Father in conditional terms!

How can that be? Well, as second person of the Trinity, Christ is both true God and true man. That puts a certain spin on God's love for him – it is twofold: 1) a necessary, involuntary, and everlasting love of Christ in his divine nature; 2) a voluntary love of Christ as Mediator, as Christ grew in obedience and thereby could "abide" in God's love.⁴

This helps make greater sense of the above mentioned passages of John 10 and 15. It also gives added clarity to a passage like Luke 2:52, where Jesus "*increased* in wisdom and stature and *in favour with God* and man." Christ grew in the Father's favour, or delight. A little further on, in 3:22, God declared at his Son's baptism, "You are my beloved Son; with you I am *well pleased*." He enjoyed God's love of complacency. And ultimately that should come as so little a surprise, since Christ, now seated in the heavenly realms, "is the image of the invisible God," "the radiance of the glory of God" (Col 1:15; Hebr 1:3). God delights in his own image and therefore image-bearers insofar as they *reflect* his image. For if God's favour toward his only-begotten Son can grow, then the same can happen toward all those united to Christ by faith. So the more we become like our God, the more he will delight in us and show his favour toward us.

Complacent love and us

Consider more of God's Word in this respect. In John 14:21, 23, our Lord says, "Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me *will be loved* by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him. . . . Jesus answered him, 'If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father *will love* him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.'" Without

the distinction between God's love of benevolence and complacency, any attempt to understand the text rightly would fail. Our love for God proceeds from God's love (of benevolence) for us. But Jesus says that if we love him, we will keep his word, and he will love us. How can that be? And how can it be that soon afterwards Jesus adds, "For the Father himself loves you, *because* you have loved me and have believed that I came from God" (16:27)? These passages can only make sense if the Father's love here refers to him delighting in us when we obey him. It is a love that is conditional, dependent on what we do and how we do it. And that's his love of complacency!

To summarize, then, I refer again to Turretin: "By the love of benevolence, he loved us before we were; by the love of beneficence, he loves us as we are; and by the love of complacency, he loves us when we are (*viz.*, renewed after his image)."⁵

Fatherly displeasure

Let's approach the matter from a different angle. Just as there is such a thing as God's fatherly pleasure, so there is such a thing as his fatherly displeasure. Hebrews 12:5, 6 says, "And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? 'My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives.'" God disciplines his adopted sons. Does that not suggest that God can be displeased or angry with us while still loving us? His love of benevolence does not change, but his pleasure, or his love of complacency may change. It is influenced by our holiness, or lack thereof. To be sure, God does not always discipline for sin; sometimes he disciplines to prevent sin. Either way, the believer – one forever loved by God – can displease God and incur his anger. In the face of David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah, we read in 2 Samuel 11:27, "But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD." Thus, God's love for his elect is subject to change.

And as God's displeasure extended toward his creatures, it also was cast toward his Son. In stark terms, Mark Jones says, "As Mediator, Christ was the object of God's twofold love [benevolence, complacency], as well as his displeasure. God was never happier with his Son than when he was angry with him – at the cross."⁶ God both delighted in his Son's obedience at the cross and was displeased with his Son at the cross insofar as he became sin to bring us to God (2 Cor 5:21). God's love for or pleasure in his elect has everything to do with our holiness before him.

Christ's love of complacency

If this is the Father's way with us, you might expect something similar from God the Son. And you'd be right. Christ, too, loves his people to different degrees and upon certain conditions; his love can increase. Just think of his love for his disciples. He loved them all (John 13:1), though he knew one of them would betray him. Within that special group, however, he had a "best friend," the disciple "whom Jesus loved" (John 13:23; 20:2; 21:7, 20). That this title came to be is surely a result of a unique fellowship that Christ enjoyed with this disciple. He took greater pleasure in the one than the other, as he experienced deeper bonds of friendship with one over the other.

And at the same time, Christ can be displeased with believers. A clear example is when his disciples were rebuking parents for bringing their children to the Lord Jesus. His reaction was not even just displeasure; he was outright "indignant" with his disciples (Mark 10:5). Another instance is his reaction to the church of Laodicea. He judges the Christians there to be "neither cold nor hot," and vows to spit them out of his mouth. This church's indifference toward the gospel displeased him greatly, so much so that there is within it nothing for him to commend. Yet he also makes plain that he does love this church: "Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline, so be zealous and repent" (Rev 3:15, 19). He can both love and be displeased with a church at the same time. His love for his people is both benevolent and complacent.

Parent-child relationship

This dynamic relationship between God and his children finds a parallel in earthly family relationships. Think of a father with two children. Neither child is his by degree; both are fully his own and always will be. He loves his two children unconditionally, but also conditionally. He wants the very best for them. But sometimes they sin, and that incurs his displeasure. So sometimes his pleasure lies more in the one than the other. But though he is displeased with the one, he still loves him, and so he disciplines him. He loves him, even when he takes no delight in his child for his disobedience. And it is for the child's good that he experiences fatherly displeasure, for in that way he is disciplined toward maturity. So too, God reveals that on account of sin he is displeased with his child, redeemed and loved as he may be. He wants to turn him toward obedience, and thereby enjoy again the delight of his God.

Rewards

Why is all this worthy of our attention? For one, the matter arises out of God's self-revelation, and thus it is for us to ponder with delight. Another reason is, if you can give the Lord (greater) pleasure by obedience, why would you not want to know that? These are perhaps the more obvious answers. And by giving due priority to these, we show ourselves all the more loyal to our God, desirous to give him delight.

Yet there is still another reason why the topic matters. It has everything to do with the fact that a believer can *tangibly* enjoy God's increasing delight in him: he may enjoy a growing communion, a growing love of friendship, with God and Christ. And so Abraham was called the "friend of God" (2 Chron 20:7; Isa 41:8; James 2:23), as was Moses (Exod 33:11), and all who are taught by Christ (John 15:15). A friendship is dynamic, and it brings joy and gladness as rewards. So the obedience of his children God rewards, as an outworking of his love of complacency. Hebrews 11:5, 6, "By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken *he was commended as having pleased God*. And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him." God rewarded Enoch's faith with his divine pleasure, that is, his love of complacency.

God rewards with increasing favour when we become increasingly like Christ, and his rewards carry forward from this life into the next (Matt 5:12).⁷ He is of course not indebted to us, for as we confess in Lord's Day 24, answer 63, any reward he gives "is not earned; it is a gift of grace." Any increase in his love of complacency is ultimately not according to our merits, but Christ's! For it is Christ working in us to obey. And so any reward God gives is essentially an expression of God's countenance shining upon his own work. We can please our Father only because Christ pleased his Father, and now lives in us.

And the truth is that God's complacent love will carry forward into our glorified state. Life will not be static once the heavenly Jerusalem descends. As glorified saints united

with the glorified and triumphant Christ, we will increasingly enjoy the rewards of knowing God face to face. We will in that way experience a forever-growing sense of his precious love for us as he, the fountain of all good, blesses us with more and more of himself.

Please!

What more shall we say? God's Word says it infinitely better than we, so to him is given the last word. He urges us repeatedly to please him and his Son. Regarding the call to please God, we think of Paul's words in 1 Thessalonians 4:1, "Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought *to walk and to please God*, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more." Or Ephesians 5:10, "Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord."⁸ And the call to please the Lord Jesus? Colossians 1:10, "...walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." Or 2 Corinthians 5:9, "So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him."

The thrust of Scripture on the matter is clear: please God, and enjoy his countenance shining upon you the greater. There is something you can do to make God love you more! This view has been greatly appreciated among Reformed theologians from the Reformation forward. Let it also be an emphasis among Reformed folks today. We have excelled in highlighting God's love of benevolence and beneficence, even if not in those words. Let's also strive for excellence in understanding and stressing and cherishing God's love of complacency. That's what pleases God and his Christ, after all!

¹ J.I. Packer, "Introductory Essay," in *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, by John Owen (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 2.

² Mark Jones, *Antinomianism: Reformed Theology's Unwelcome Guest?* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 84.

³ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, III.8.5.

⁴ Jones, 88-9.

⁵ Turretin, op. cit.

⁶ Jones, 95.

⁷ See also Matthew 6:20; 16:27; 1 Corinthians 9:25.

⁸ See also Romans 14:18; Philippians 4:18; 1 Timothy 5:4; Hebrews 13:21; Jude 21.



Celebrate 1517 in 2017

Celebrate 1517 Committee

Inge de Visser
Jason Heemskerk
Keith Sikkema
Christine Van Halen
Ted Van Raalte

Five hundred years ago the shape of much of the western world began to be changed. These changes were not just the echoes of one man's hammer but the effects of a renewed understanding of Scripture.

Now, at the beginning of 2017, the Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary (CRTS) and the Covenant Canadian Reformed Teachers College (CCRTC) would like to announce some plans to make all of 2017 a year to celebrate God's wonderful faithfulness in the Great Reformation. By way of this short article, together with our websites, we are now ready to encourage your participation.

How did this come about?

In the summer of 2016 a joint committee of representatives from both institutions, along with two other persons, was formed. We called ourselves the Celebrate 1517 Committee. To help everyone celebrate, we needed to find ways to stimulate reading and research regarding the Reformation. All Protestant churches trace their history back to the great events of the sixteenth century, yet after 500 years what do we still know about these things? How many of us live with caricatures and stereotypes instead of knowing what really happened?

Thus, to stimulate research in forms which would help everyone rejoice in the Lord's grace, we decided to pursue a number of opportunities in the arts. These include music, drama, visual arts, poetry and song, research essays, and narrative performance. If any of these categories interest you as an author, artist, teacher, or as someone who likes to learn through diverse media, read on.

Big thanks to our subcommittees

Before describing in more detail the opportunities that are being created, we should give a big nod to the four separate subcommittees that have been formed. Individuals from all over Canada have teamed up to formulate guidelines for submissions in a) the visual arts; b) poetry and song; c) research essays; and, d) narrative performance. Some of them meet in person, others via electronic means like Skype, but each committee has come up with some very helpful ideas. Thank you all; you know who you are!

Commissioned music and drama

First, a word about the music and drama. For these two categories, instead of forming subcommittees and inviting submissions, we decided to ask gifted individuals in our church communities to compose and write some new material. Many gifted individuals could have been asked, but in the end we settled for one musician from the beautiful mountainous West, another from the fruitful Great Lakes region, and a playwright from grain belt middle of the country to connect them. New variations on the Genevan Psalm 68 – a Psalm tune well loved by Reformed churches and used by Huguenot armies entering battle in France in the 1580s – and on Luther's famous hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," should be completed by the time you read this. The musicians have been asked to adapt their composition to various settings, such as high school band, strings orchestra, organ, etcetera. We would like as many people as possible to be able to practice the music in time for celebrations at the end of October 2017. The drama is being written in five distinct parts, so that school drama clubs and other local ensembles can choose to perform one or more parts, depending on their time, money, and expertise. If any club is able to perform all five parts, all the better! They are woven together by a theme. If not, any one of the five parts can stand alone and will present an event of the Reformation in an edifying, educative, and entertaining way.

The visual arts

A subcommittee based in the West has drawn up guidelines for two-dimensional art in separate elementary and middle school categories, and two- or three-dimensional art in the high school senior and undergraduate categories. A fifth category, called "advanced open" has been created in each of the four areas (visual arts, poetry, essays, narration) as well. We are distributing their helpful guidelines to all of the Reformed schools that have regular contact with our Teachers College, encouraging the art teachers to incorporate these opportunities into their courses as much as possible. Homeschoolers and other individuals can access the guidelines via our institutional websites. Google us!

Research essays

The research essays subcommittee has carved out a category for high school seniors, undergraduates, and an advanced open category. They are looking for evidence of good historical research in primary and secondary sources, with clear and vigorous writing. This committee has supplied a number of suggested areas for research, in case authors are looking for direction. Once again, we are working with the Christian schools, but also seeking to attract submissions from university students and other interested persons.

Narrative performance

Presenting a narration includes writing a compelling historical account, perhaps like a short story, perhaps like an action-packed movie. Then this account needs to be presented orally before an audience in a compelling and engaging way. We know there are some great story tellers among us. It's also possible that a great writer would team up with someone who has public speaking gifts. Whatever the case, here also we will be looking for submissions in the high school, undergraduate, and advanced open categories.

Poetry and song

Finally, some people express themselves most memorably in exquisitely-crafted poetry. Here too a series of categories have been created. The guidelines, as in the other artistic opportunities, are meant to give the necessary minimal direction, yet stimulate – not stifle – creativity. Some poets love to write music for singing. We hope that a number of poets will try this.

The “advanced open” category

What is the “advanced open” category? It is for anyone who does not fit in the other categories but is educated in and/or practiced in this particular art form. People may submit entries in more than one art form, or they may submit more than one type of creative work. However, we do ask that the same work not be submitted in multiple categories, e.g., an undergraduate who also submits in the advanced open category. So, all of you poets, narrative performers, researchers, and visual artists who love the Lord – we ask you to use some of your time in 2017 to educate yourself further on the great work of God in renewing his church in the sixteenth century. Then find ways to express what you have learned in such a way that your fellow believers will taste something of what you've learned and will be strengthened in their faith. Anyone can read all the guidelines, etc., on our CRTS and CCRTC websites.

The end goals

While our desire is to be used by the Lord to encourage Reformed Christians in delighting in the blessings we have received, all of this work needs to come together in various places and times in order to edify whole communities. Our committee suggests that this should happen locally. We cannot bring together all Reformed Christians in Canada into one place. Instead, we have two end goals.

First, we envision that local schools and clubs might showcase all the local talent around October 31, 2017, or that local existing Reformation Rallies might incorporate some of the results of people's efforts into their rallies. The new music and drama can be performed, visual arts can be displayed, poetry recited and displayed, research essays showcased and explained, and narrations presented. The Lord willing, all those attending will leave with deep thanks to God for his grace.

Second, we will be putting the entries through a selection process for publication in a high quality commemorative book. In the school-related categories, teachers will pass on students' work that best meets our guidelines; others will submit digital copies of their work directly to us (that will mean recordings of the songs and narrations, pictures of the art work, and text files for the essays). By the end of December 2017, our subcommittees and other adjudicators will hopefully have finished assisting us in selecting the most edifying entries for publication. After this, a significant amount of editing and formatting will need to take place, and then later in 2018 these selections will be published in a high quality commemorative book, that will be available for purchase. It will include high quality photos of all kinds of artwork, published copies of stories and essays, copies of the commissioned music and drama, and access to digital media. We hope that it will stand for many years as a sign that God's people were moved to give him all the praise and glory for his Word, his Christ, his grace, and the faith he has given us.

Fundraising

Our respective institutions don't budget for such unique undertakings as this one. Thus, our Celebrate 1517 committee is fundraising outside of the regular budgets. If you would like to support this venture, please consult us via our email address, Celebrate1517@gmail.com. We have a modest budget of about \$14,000 and would be happy to receive your assistance. Please pray that throughout 2017 and always, we as believers and churches would grow in our praise of the Lord and our appreciation of the rich heritage he has entrusted to us.



Freedom of Speech?

Cornelis Van Dam
*Professor emeritus of Old Testament
at the Canadian Reformed
Theological Seminary in
Hamilton, Ontario
cvandam@canrc.org*



Freedom of speech is increasingly under siege. This was highlighted in the widely publicized trial of Geert Wilders, a Dutch parliamentarian and the leader of the Party for Freedom (PVV). For the first time, a court in The Netherlands has criminalized dissenting opinions about Islam by convicting Wilders of “inciting discrimination and insulting a minority group.” His crime? He had asked his supporters at an election rally in 2014: do you want “fewer or more Moroccans in your city and in the Netherlands?” The crowd had answered: “fewer!” This response should be understood in the context of the fact that Moroccan immigrants appear to commit many crimes out of all proportion to their relatively small number in the general population. However, it is not politically correct to be critical of minority groups. Whether what you say is true or not is irrelevant. The trial of Geert Wilders has shown that to be the case.

The attempt to enforce political correctness regardless of whether the truth is told or not also plays out in other European countries. In Austria, Christoph Biró has been charged with “hate speech” for an article he wrote as columnist and editor of Austria’s largest newspaper. The accuracy of the article was not contested. The case will be decided in court. Giulio Meotti in his article “Critics of Islam on Trial in Europe” mentions other examples of critics of Islam being charged with hate speech and taken to court. He notes: “It is an alarming but very common sight today, where ‘hate speech’ has become a political weapon to dispatch whoever may not agree with you.”

Unfortunately, Canada is not safe from such danger. On October 26, 2016, Canada’s Parliament unanimously passed a motion condemning all forms of Islamophobia. Although a motion does not have any legal effect, it is, as Judith Bergman noted, alarming that this motion was passed “without making the slightest attempt at defining what is meant by ‘Islamophobia.’ What exactly are they condemning? Criticism of Islam? Criticism of Muslims? Debating Mohammed? Depicting Mohammed? Discussing whether

ISIS is a true manifestation of Islam? Is any Canadian who now writes critically of Islam or disagrees with the petitioners that ISIS ‘does not reflect in any way the values or the teachings of the religion of Islam’ now to be considered an ‘Islamophobe’?”

Bergman rightly observed that the initiator of the petition, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated Samer Majzoub, knows what the point of the motion is. It is to advance Islam and to silence any critic. Indeed, a motion like this “will almost certainly deter people from speaking up, for fear that they will be labelled ‘racists’ or ‘Islamophobes.’ . . . There were, of course, no parallel motions in Canada’s parliament to condemn ‘Christianophobia’ or ‘Judeophobia,’ the latter being much more prevalent than ‘Islamophobia.’ In fact, according to statistics, Jewish Canadians are more than 10 times as likely to be the victim of a hate crime than Muslim Canadians.”

Bergman pointedly noted that a democratic parliament should not be cowing its citizens into silence with this bully tactic. “Parliamentary bullying and reckless disregard of the freedom of speech should have no place in a society that cares about the values of freedom and national security. Canada has already seen, to its disgrace, attacks on free speech against Mark Steyn and Ezra Levant, among others. Is this the country Canada wishes to become?”

The imposition of this type of political correctness should be resisted. Let Muslims participate in the political arena on a level playing field with Christians, Jews, and secularists. But to single Islam out for special treatment and so silence any justified criticism of their cause does not promote justice and righteousness.



Sources used are from the Gatestone Institute website: Giulio Meotti, “The Dutch Death Spiral” and “Critics of Islam on Trial in Europe;” Judith Bergman, “Canada: Parliament Condemns Free Speech.”

Clarion Kids

King Saul

1 Samuel 8-15

The people of Israel often did not listen to what God told them to do. He sent many judges to help them, but they always disobeyed again after the judge died. The Israelites decided that they really wanted a king, but God did not like this. God wants to be the only king we serve, but he told Samuel to anoint a king anyways. God chose Saul to be the first king of Israel. Saul was a good king at first, but one day he tried to serve God in his own way, instead of the way God wanted. Then God told him that his son Jonathan would not be king because he had been disobedient. He would make someone else king after Saul.

Go to www.clarionmagazine.ca to print and colour this picture!



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

Find these words!

Anoint	God	Israelites	Samuel
Disobey	Good	Judges	Saul
		King	Serve

Matching: Draw lines to match words and phrases from the story!

Judges	Anointed a king for Israel
Samuel	Serving God in our own way
Jonathan	God sent them to help the Israelites
Saul	Saul's son who would not be king
Disobedient	Israel's first king

by Emily Nijenhuis

William den Hollander
Minister emeritus of the
Bethel Canadian Reformed Church
of Toronto, Ontario
denhollanderw@gmail.com



Q How important is it to say “the Lord willing”?

It is with concern that I write this. More and more we receive mail from Christian organizations informing us of things or meetings they are planning, with date and time and place, but never giving God the glory by saying “the Lord willing.” Yet, we ought to do this, according to God’s Word in James 4:15, and if we don’t it is accounted as sin. Personally I have refused to read this material or listen to radio programs that invite you to meetings or trips to the Holy Land or other places, giving dates but never saying, “The Lord willing.” I hope you will deal with this for me and our fellow-believers.

A The point that’s made in this question (or request, rather) is an important one. In times past I have been concerned that it could just be a habit, a cliché, to include in our announcements expressions such as “the Lord willing,” or the Latin “*Deo Volente*” (D.V., i.e. “if the Lord will”), but it’s more serious indeed when this is omitted more and more. It should not be done out of habit or as a custom but rather as a confession of our dependence upon the Lord’s leading of our life; an expression of humbleness and awareness of God’s plans with our lives.

The expression “the Lord willing” is directly related to the instruction and exhortation in the epistle of James (4:15) and therefore often called “the condition of James” (in Latin, the *conditio Jacobi*). We find the same or similar expressions in Acts 18:21; Romans 1:10; 1 Corinthians 4:19; 16:7; Philippians 2:19, and Hebrews 6:3. Evidently, for the believers in the early church this was a serious matter; a way of life and an attitude that differed from the way people live in the world. The believers knew themselves dependent upon the will (plan) of God with their life. Their way of

life and approach to their plans was rooted in the Word of God, which says in Proverbs 19:21, “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand.” Proverbs 27:1, also, enters the aspect of arrogance and boasting into the picture, as James does as well (!), where it says, “Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring.” In Luke 12, the Lord Jesus exposes such boasting as foolishness where he tells the story of the rich farmer who lost sight of the fact that his life was not his but the Lord’s: “Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?”

The important lesson James is teaching, therefore, is an exhortation always to realize in the plans we make that we depend on God’s will and way with our life! It is fine to make plans, and good to organize well, yet it must be done in the keen awareness that the execution and implementation, as well as the outcome and fruits, depend on God’s counsel and will. We should not even give the impression that we can do so without the Lord’s blessing or outside the will of God for our life! “Our life is fleeting,” David confesses in Psalm 39, “A mere handbreadth and the span of

our years as nothing; each man's life is but a breath" (or a mist, as James characterizes it). Hence David's concluding profession is, "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you." Thus we make our plans "the Lord willing," and we announce them as "we hope to do this or that."

Our life is not ours; it is the Lord's. Our days also are not in our control but the Lord determines them. Yes, the will of God, that pertains not only to the great and memorable events in our life or in the world; God's will also pertains to the smaller things, our everyday little concerns. God's will is about the nations and the kingdoms and it is about the sleepless nights of Ahasuerus and the hairs on my head. God's will determines the way the farmer sows the wheat and the cumin, the way he works the ground and harvests the crop (Isa 28), as it determines the fruit of his labours. It also directs our business, the weight of our burdens, and the extent of our struggles. That knowledge gives peace to our heart and security to our life, for God's counsel and will is always wise and good!

That is then also the "good" James mentions in his conclusion, which makes our life "good" (or beautiful, as the word he uses denotes literally!). When we don't live this way, don't have this attitude and awareness, or don't express this in our plans and announcements, we sin, James shows! Indeed, that is the *sin of omission*, which is no less serious than the sin of commission!



CALL ACCEPTED

Accepted the call by the Free Reformed Church in Byford, Western Australia:

Rev. Richard Eikelboom

of the Yarrow Canadian Reformed Church

Accepted the call by the Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk of Kaapstad (Free Reformed Church of Cape Town, South Africa:

Candidate Johan Bruintjes

Accepted the call to the Jubilee Canadian Reformed Church in Ottawa, Ontario:

Rev. Winston Bosch

of Église Réformée St-Paul de Repentigny, Québec

CALLS DECLINED

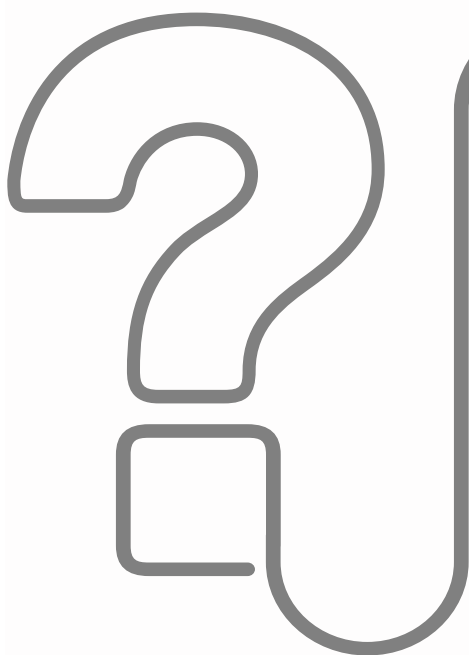
Declined the calls to the Free Reformed Church of Armadale for the Papua New Guinea mission, the Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk te Pretoria (Free Reformed Church of Pretoria), the Providence Canadian Reformed Church in Hamilton, ON, the Vrye Gereformeerde Kerk of Johannesburg (Free Reformed Church of Johannesburg), the Winnipeg Redeemer Canadian Reformed Church to serve as a missionary in Manitoba, the Smithville Canadian Reformed Church in Smithville, ON and the Fellowship Church in Burlington, ON:

Candidate Johan Bruintjes

Declined the call to serve as missionary for Lighthouse Ministries in London, Ontario:

Rev. Tony Zekveld

CHURCH NEWS



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

An answer you've been looking for?

Ask us a question!

Please direct questions to Rev. W. denHollander

denhollanderw@gmail.com

23 Kinsman Drive, Binbrook, ON L0R 1C0