

Faith Made Perfect: Commentary on James. Herman Hanko. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2015. Hardcover. 304 pages. \$28.95
Reviewed by Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland

This is Herman Hanko's third commentary. He has written previously on Galatians and 1 Peter, and *Faith Made Perfect* follows the same basic format. This is a commentary not a series of sermons, although it is certainly the fruit of thorough exegesis. In the preface Hanko mentions that he had preached a series on Galatians. I believe he may have preached, or planned to preach, a series on James also. Be that as it may, *Faith Made Perfect* would be helpful to the preacher today who considered preaching a series of sermons on James.

However, like all of Hanko's books, and, indeed, like all of the books published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association (RFP), this book is not designed to be only for preachers, theologians, or biblical scholars. There are useful footnotes, in which various points of Greek grammar are elucidated, but these are not at all off-putting to the Christian without any knowledge of the Greek language of the New Testament. These notes are useful to the pastor as he struggles with exegesis. In addition, Hanko does not bore us with extraneous details of textual criticism, historical background, or other matters, but quickly, after a brief introduction, delves into the text of scripture, which is our spiritual meat.

The title of the book, *Faith Made Perfect*, captures the theme of the epistle—faith is made perfect by works. The purpose of James, and more importantly the purpose of the Spirit who inspired James, is to contrast the dead “faith” of the hypocrite with the living, works-producing faith of the child of God. Pivotal to James, and pivotal to *Faith Made Perfect*, is chapter 2, which in church history has been a battleground not only between Rome and the reformers, but also now between the Reformed and the men of the federal vision. In light of

this fact, every Reformed Christian *must* know what James means when he declares, “Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect?” and “Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only” (James 2:22, 24).

Something that impressed me about this book—and this is something that we ministers need to bear in mind when we preach series—is that Hanks never loses sight of his main theme as he works through the epistle. Always that main theme colors his exegesis and applications. For example, in his explanation of chapter 1, where James exhorts his readers to hear and to do the word of God, Hanks rightly remarks:

Immediately, the apostle slams the door in the face of all Arminians and those who teach justification by faith and works by pointing out that because we are regenerated, we are to perform these good works, which good works are what these admonitions require. James also closes the door to the antinomians, who claim that good works are unnecessary. He says, “You are regenerated, therefore God has given you the spiritual power to do these good works. Be what God has made you. You are justified by faith, and faith produces good works” (58).

Antinomianism is not an issue only in chapter 3—it is James’ concern throughout the epistle. Hanks never lets us forget it!

Another feature of *Faith Made Perfect* is the multiplicity of illustrations and applications. In this way Hanks follows the style of the book that he is expositing, for James uses many homely or earthy illustrations and makes numerous pointed applications. One need only list a few from chapter one—the wave of the sea (v. 6), the burning heat of the sun (v. 11), lust’s

conception and bringing forth of sin and death (v. 15), and the forgetful mirror-gazer (vv. 23–24). Hanks applies the word sharply and pointedly—to himself and then to us:

This is strange, but true. You can hear a child of God sing fervently God’s praises in church on the Lord’s day as he sits next to you in the pew. But when you stand near him outside of church, you may hear him curse someone as he relates what that person did to him. You are inclined to ask, “Can this be the same person?” Then it comes to you sharply and as a dagger. *You* do the same in your home. You lead the family in devotions, but suddenly you speak evil of someone within the congregation and repeat a juicy bit of gossip that was told you by one of your fellow workers on the job (169).

Faith Made Perfect combines good exegesis, sound theology, helpful illustrations, and heart-searching applications. The reader will understand the epistle of James when he has finished the book, which will be useful for Bible study groups and pastors alike. Not only will the reader understand James, but also, if he has read carefully and prayerfully, he will be found humbled and comforted at the feet of Christ, where all true faith leads us.