

The Standard Bearer

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recommend...”

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our teenagers, and ourselves

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of Romans 11 (2)

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Contents

Meditation

- 99 Love covers all sin
Rev. James Slopsema

Editorial

- 101 “We unhesitatingly recommend...”
Prof. Barrett Gritters

All around us

- 104 Smartphones, depression, our teenagers, and ourselves
Rev. Erik Guichelaar

Taking heed to the doctrine

- 106 “What saith the Scripture?” The Bible’s perspicuity
Prof. Ronald Cammenga

Things which must shortly come to pass

- 109 Premillennialism (16): Premillennial explanation of Romans 11 (2)
Prof. David Engelsma

When thou sittest in thine house

- 113 A Bible study in Myanmar
Mrs. Margaret Laning

Pertaining to the churches...in common

- 115 The work of your home missionary
Rev. Audred Spriensma

Bring the books...

- 116 *Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed*
Rev. Martin VanderWal

Activities

- 118 News from our churches
Mr. Perry Van Egdom



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Meditation

Rev. James Slopsema, minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches

Love covers all sin

Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins.
Proverbs 10:12

Is there a great deal of strife in your life? Are there others with whom you are constantly contending and arguing? Do you find that you have a running battle with certain individuals? Perhaps it is a spouse, a family member, a coworker, or a fellow student?

The proverb (wise saying) that we consider for this meditation speaks about this kind of strife. It tells us that strife is stirred up by hatred.

This hatred and strife are contrasted to love. Love does not stir up strife. Love, rather, covers sin and thus eliminates strife. Love brings peace.

There is implied here a calling. Do not stir up strife in hatred. Rather, cover all sin in love.

A wonderful love!

This wonderful love is contrasted to hatred.

The use of this word “hatred” in the Old Testament indicates that there are degrees of hatred. Sometimes that hatred is intense, so that one completely despises and abhors another. This was the case with Joseph’s brothers: “And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him” (Gen 37:4). We also see this hatred with Amnon after he had sexually defiled Tamar: “Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her” (II Sam. 13:15). Then again, this word is used to describe a situation in which a person simply does not love another. This appeared to be the case with Leah, the first wife of Jacob: “And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren” (Gen 29:31). This does not mean that Jacob had an intense hatred for Leah but simply that he lacked love. This is properly called hatred, because you either love or hate. There is no middle, neutral ground.

The hatred of which this proverb speaks is a *sinful* hatred.

There is a righteous hatred. In Psalm 139:21-22 David writes, “Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee?

and am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.” There is a sense in which we are to hate those that hate God. This is a righteous hatred rooted in the love of God.

However, most often hatred is a sinful hatred. It is a hatred that arises out of our sinful, depraved nature that became horribly twisted at the Fall. It is a hatred that despises God and His goodness and despises anything that reflects the goodness of God. It is a hatred that arises also out of a self-seeking, self-serving spirit. The fallen sinner does not seek God but himself. Neither does he serve God but only himself. This self-seeking, self-serving spirit leads him both to love and to hate. Yes, even the fallen, depraved sinner can love on the natural level. He is attracted to and seeks the friendship of those that give him pleasure and can serve his selfish purpose. But he hates those who, in his estimation, work against his self-seeking goals. And he hates more than he loves.

This hatred is found not just in the world but also in the church, as is evident from the sad stories of Joseph, Leah, and Tamar.

How much is that hatred found in your life?

In contrast, this proverb speaks of love.

The love that is spoken of in this proverb is the love that arises out of the work of God’s grace. By nature we are so corrupt and depraved that we are prone to hate God and our neighbor. In Jesus Christ God transforms His elect people into new creatures. This transformation is called a new birth, a resurrection of the dead, and a new creation. This radical transformation is accomplished on the basis of Christ’s death and in the power of His resurrection. The result of this glorious transformation is love.

We ought to notice the character of this love.

This is a love that is rooted in a love of God. When one is transformed by the grace of God, he comes to love God and His goodness. This is because he has been made in the likeness of God’s goodness. Being made in God’s likeness, he is drawn to God and seeks

His fellowship in Jesus Christ. This deep love he has for God he also reflects to his neighbor. He loves his neighbor. This love comes to highest expression with his believing neighbor, who also has been transformed into God's image. The same thing that draws him to the God of his salvation draws him to such a neighbor! He delights to fellowship with him. But the transformed believer also loves his unbelieving neighbor as God calls him to. However, this is not the love of attraction. It is a love, however, that seeks the welfare of the neighbor.

And that brings us to the fact that the love given to the transformed believer is not the self-serving love of the depraved sinner, but a love that is selfless and giving. When this love is directed towards God, it seeks the glory of God by giving Him praise and honor. When it is directed towards the neighbor, it seeks the welfare of this neighbor—even the sinful, self-serving neighbor. Love does this because that reflects God's love to him. God in His love gave His only begotten Son and in Him gives us all things. God gives this to us even though we were self-serving sinners. Anyone so transformed by this love of God will reflect that kind of love to others.

We find numerous examples of this kind of love in Scripture. There was the love that David and Jonathon had for each other. There was the love that Abraham had for Isaac. There was the love that Ruth had for her mother-in-law Naomi.

This is the love that also must be found and promoted among us.

A wonderful covering!

“Hatred stirreth up strifes.”

The word “strife” emphasizes contention and discord. This strife can take many different forms. It usually involves words; for example, bickering, arguing, tearing each other down, and name-calling. There is also gossip and slander, that is, spreading evil reports. Sometimes this strife becomes physical with pushing and shoving, blows, or other acts of physical harm, even murder.

Strife is a great destroyer. It destroys marriages and families. It has torn apart many churches. It has led to war among nations with all its destruction.

Hatred stirs up this strife.

“To stir up” literally means to awaken, to arouse. It suggests that contention and discord are part of the nature of man. Strife is likened to a terrible beast within each of us that is asleep but easily awakened. But, once it is awakened, it rears its ugly head to devour, destroying our homes, our church, and all that we hold dear. And the thing that arouses this horrible beast of strife is hatred.

There are various things that trigger this hatred.

This proverb points to sin. The word for “sin” emphasizes a breach in a relationship. Relationships bring responsibilities and expectations. Sin breaches or violates those relationships by failing to meet one's responsibilities and falling short of expectations. And this triggers hatred in one controlled by a self-seeking, self-serving spirit. But hatred is also triggered by many other things in the heart of one controlled by a self-serving spirit. His hatred is triggered by an annoying personality, a contrary point of view, or the success of another in which he does not share. Hatred is triggered by anything that a person views as a threat to attaining his self-seeking goals.

And that brings strife between people. Sometimes this is because hatred seeks revenge. Sometimes this is because hatred seeks one to protect his self-seeking, self-serving interests.

There are many examples of this in Scripture. In hatred Esau sought to kill Jacob after Jacob sinfully stole the birthright blessing from him. In hatred Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery because their father loved him more. Are there examples similar to this in your home?

On the other hand, love covers all sin.

Understand well that there are sins that should be exposed and not “covered up.” This is the case of one who persists to pursue and live in a sin without repentance. This sin needs to be exposed to the church for the sake of the sinner and those who may in the future be hurt by his sin. The procedure for doing this is given to us by Jesus in Matthew 18:15-17 as being part of the proper discipline of the church. Love does not cover up these kinds of sin so that a person is allowed to continue in them. Love exposes these sins in the proper way.

But there is a proper sense in which love covers sin.

Love leads us, for example, to bear with the faults and weaknesses of each other so that we overlook them instead of contending about them. Many arguments and fights are over small things that are better overlooked and endured. Love leads one to overlook these rather than contend about them.

Love also leads us to prevent as much as possible sins in our neighbor that arise out of his character faults. Each of us has character faults and weaknesses that have the potential of leading us into sin, perhaps great sin. Love seeks to prevent that in each other.

Love also leads us to bring the sinner to Christ to find the covering of the cross for his sin, that he may be forgiven and reconciled to God.

Finally, love leads us to forgive for Christ's sake those who sin against us.

And notice that love covers *all* sin. This is the sin of every neighbor, even the neighbor that irritates us or hates us. This is sin of every kind, even the sins that have injured us.

An important calling!

All too often the hatred that stirs up strife is found among God's people instead of the love that covers sin. Because God's love has transformed them in Jesus Christ into new creatures, they are able to love God and to love their neighbors. However, because God's transforming

work is only begun, they still retain a sinful nature filled with hatred that is easily aroused and stirs up strife.

Our calling is to have and show the love of which this proverb speaks.

Love is the great commandment of the law (Matt. 22:37-39). And in that love we are called to cover the sins of our brother in Christ and our neighbor. "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins" (I Pet. 4:8).

Let us cultivate and walk in that love, that we may enjoy peace and not strife.



Editorial

Prof. Barrett Gritters, professor of Practical Theology and New Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

"We unhesitatingly recommend..."

These words—"we unhesitatingly recommend"—could well be hung on the wall of all consistory rooms of Reformed congregations. In large enough print, that every time the council members walk into the room they see and are aware of them.

These words are the heart and center of the "Letter of Recommendation" that a council must give to their minister if he leaves for another church. The elders and deacons must declare: "We unhesitatingly recommend our minister to you."

One of the more important (even if infrequent) decisions that a consistory must make is the decision to write this recommendation. A minister may not leave a church, and a consistory may not send him, without this letter.

In fact, whether elders and deacons are aware of it or not, every church—Redlands, Lynden, Lacombe—has sent this "Letter of Recommendation" when their minister took a call to go to a different church. They "unhesitatingly recommended" their minister to the church he went to.

Where is this letter?

I would guess, though, that very few church members are even aware that such a letter exists. Even elders and deacons. This is a weakness that ought to be remedied. It is not too strong to say that the moment any minister

begins a new pastorate, whether his first charge or fifth, consistory members must be thinking about this letter.

The letter is not found in the back of our Psalter. It is not included in the "Green Book," that is, the *Confessions and Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* which many young people carry to catechism. The only place it can be found is on page 142 of the green, plastic, spiral-bound book, which contains the Church Order and other lesser-known documents of the Protestant Reformed Churches.¹ I include this document here in a shaded box (see next page).

The Church Order's requirement

When a minister receives and accepts a call to another congregation, the congregation may not receive him without a "Certificate of Dismissal and Testimonial" (the official title of the document we are talking about). Article 10 of the Church Order says, "until he has

¹ *The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches, and Constitutions of Standing Synodical Committees, Rules and Regulations, By-laws, Forms, Declaration of Principles* (2015). The lengthy title indicates its contents. This book is printed by the Synod of the PRCA, revised and updated every five years according to synodical regulation, and usually made available to officebearers in the PRCA. It can be purchased through the seminary. (This form may also be found on the PRCA website—prca.org—under "Resource Library" — "Forms/Certificates."—"Ministerial Certificate.")

**MINISTERIAL CERTIFICATE
of
DISMISSAL AND TESTIMONIAL**

The Consistory of the Protestant Reformed Church of _____ declares by these presents that the Rev. _____, in this church from ____ 20 __ to _____ 20__, has ministered in the office of minister of the Divine Word faithfully and diligently, adhering in doctrine and life to the Word of God, as interpreted by our Forms of Unity and the Church Order.

And considering that sufficient reasons have been adduced for the consistory to acquiesce in his acceptance of the call of the church of _____, we unhesitatingly recommend him to the Classis _____ and to the church of _____, with the prayer that the great King of the church, who says to this one of His servants “go” and he goeth, and to that one “come” and he cometh, may make him there also a rich blessing.

Resolved to give him this testimonial of dismissal at our meeting of _____, 20__.

The consistory of the above-named church,
_____, President
_____, Clerk

presented a proper certificate of dismissal from the church and classis where he served.” Article 5 requires that the minister himself present “good ecclesiastical testimonials of doctrine and life” to classical and synodical representatives before he may be installed in the new congregation.

The process for a man receiving and accepting a call goes something like this: When a man receives a call to another congregation, and before he leaves, the consistory he presently serves must “consent” to his departure (see CO Article 10—also found at prca.org). An essential part of this consent is the consistory’s willingness and ability to give this recommendation, *unhesitatingly*. Whether they give consent early in the process when he first asks permission to consider the call, or late in the process after he makes his decision to leave, is a good question. At some point, though, according to Article 10, the minister himself must “ask of the consistory...to grant him” this “fitting testimonial bearing witness to faithful service performed.” The council must make a decision, by a formal motion recorded in the minutes, to grant it.

This is no *formality*. It should not be done in the consistory room quickly before the worship begins.

There are different ways a church and her minister may proceed when a call is received.

In some churches, immediately after the minister receives the call, he asks permission to “consider” it. During his consideration, the consistory gives him their input. Then, after he has considered the call, if he believes he must go, he informs the consistory that God has led him to go. The consistory has no more say in the matter.

If this is the consistory’s practice, they must give the permission to “consider” with their eyes wide open to this fact: this decision is, in fact, a commitment to sign the letter of recommendation. They have decided that they are able to recommend their minister to the next congregation *without hesitation*.

In other churches, the consistory’s practice is to make *two* distinct decisions—first, permission to “consider,” followed later by another permission to “accept.” With this practice, the latter decision must be made in full awareness of what they are doing. Consistories should examine their practice to make sure it serves them well.²

Either way, giving permission to a minister to leave is a weighty decision. The motion should be made carefully and the discussion should be open. The consistory sends him on with the highest testimony. We “unhesitatingly recommend.” May we say this?

The reason for the requirement

This “Certificate of Dismissal and Testimonial” has a history that reaches back centuries before the formation of the PRCA. It was formulated to protect churches. First, the church a man presently serves must have a voice in whether their pastor is still needed and ought not leave. The man’s current consistory must consent to him leaving. In the early days after the Reformation, some ministers were too inclined to abandon a church for ‘greener pastures.’

But the “Certificate” is intended also to protect calling churches that may naively be interested in a man who, before God, is unfit to serve them, a man who has been unfaithful to his ministerial calling.

Thus, a consistory may allow a minister to leave them to go elsewhere only when they are able to give him sterling credentials.

To put it frankly, no consistory may merely ‘put up with’ a man, secretly hoping that he will get a call to labor elsewhere, at which point they breathe a sigh of

² This second way of making two, separate decisions, is cumbersome and unnecessary, it seems to me. Does a man receive permission to consider, come to the conviction that it is the Lord’s will that he leave, and then find out that his consistory will not permit him to leave? Better to have this discussion early in the process, so that permission to “consider” is indeed permission to leave if the minister is convinced of it.

relief and send him on his way. Those who do so, sign the “Certificate” dishonestly.

What signing the “Certificate” does not mean

At this point, it is important to be very careful and clear.

The certificate does *not* require the sending consistory to say that their minister is one of the best preachers in the denomination. Signing it is not their testimony that the man has gifts of teaching catechism that they cannot imagine living without, or that his pastoral abilities are second to none.

Each minister has his own gifts. Each also has his own weaknesses. The form does not rate the man’s abilities. It does not say that the man has no weaknesses. As well, each man has his own personality. Some personalities are more attractive than others. The form does not declare about the man’s personality.

Rather, the form says that the man has “labored faithfully and diligently.” That language is critical. Because of *faithful and diligent labor* they now “unhesitatingly recommend” him. He may well have been more difficult to listen to than other preachers, not as clear a catechism teacher as the neighboring minister, not as gifted at the graveside or in the hospital room as his colleague, even less ‘fun’ to visit with socially. Nevertheless, he labored “faithfully and diligently.”

With the gifts and abilities God gave him, he labored with might. He worked hard to make two edifying sermons every week. He was prepared for catechism lessons, and excited about them. When the sick or distressed called him, he visited them. He loved the people and taught them to love God. He submitted to, and did not resist, the consistory’s oversight and rule. And when, with greatest reluctance, the consistory may have seen fit to correct him, he received the correction with humility, admitted his faults, and quietly worked on remedying them.

That is, his labor among them was “faithful service.” In *faithfulness* to his calling from Jesus Christ, he was a *servant* to the people of God. This earthly shepherd represented properly the Chief Shepherd.

To *that* man the consistory gives the unhesitating recommendation. The testimony is not a testimony of gifts, therefore, but of service—diligent and faithful service.

What the “Certificate” does forbid

If a consistory cannot say that their pastor labored faithfully, they are forbidden to give the man permission to consider a call.

If they do, they *themselves* are unfaithful. Unfaithful, not only to the minister who needs their correction and of whom they now rid themselves, but especially to the next congregation to whom they faithlessly send the

man. When they sign the “Certificate” they must be pretending not to know what they are signing.

But Caveat Emptor (“buyer beware”) is not on the certificate.

How thankful we can be for this “Certificate of Dismissal and Testimonial.” By it, we can live together in our denomination. When my own faithful pastor leaves our congregation some day and we must call another man, I can be confident that this next man comes with a rock-solid testimony of his former consistory: He has labored faithfully; we commend him to you without reservation.

What a beautiful (and safe!) way to live in the churches.

Hang it on the consistory wall?

This might be good for both the minister and the consistory.

It could be a sobering reminder to me, as a minister, when my sinful nature might tempt me to be unfaithful in any way. Some day the consistory must say about me, “We unhesitatingly recommend him.” If ever I was tempted to ignore, or even minimize in the slightest way a consistory’s rebuke or exhortation, the certificate would be a wake-up call to me. “Unhesitatingly recommend!”

Of course, a minister’s motivation to work faithfully and serve selflessly is *gratitude*. Always! Gratitude for his Savior’s faithfulness to him!

Yet warnings have their place. And this certificate is one powerful warning.

Also for the elders and deacons the phrase is a quiet reminder: “Brothers, we may never let things go in Christ’s church. We may never harbor the wish that if we put up with this for just a while longer, the man will be gone. In love for our neighbor congregations, love for our own congregation, and love for our minister(!), we need always to work together openly, faithfully. And if *ever* there is a time that we could *not* sign this certificate with honesty before God, we must take action.”

Even the members of the churches have a responsibility. Even though they do not sign the form, the elders and deacons sign the form for the congregation. Implied in the form is the entire congregation’s testimony of the man’s faithful service.

I am not suggesting that anyone rush off to the sign-maker to make such a plaque. Perhaps instead of a sign reading “unhesitatingly recommend...” this would be wiser: “Labor faithfully and diligently.” I like that.

God bless our ministers with faithfulness. God strengthen our councils for faithful rule. May He preserve us in neighborly love so that we do to the next congregation what we would have them do unto us.



All around us

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Randolph, Wisconsin

Smartphones, depression, our teenagers, and ourselves

I think most of us have gone through the experience, in one way or another. I need only give one example for you to know what I am talking about. You are at home Sunday night after church. You have invited friends and family to come over for a time of fellowship. Everyone has gathered themselves into the living-room, and there are two or three different conversations taking place. But as you pause from your own conversation to look at how things are going elsewhere in the room, this is what you see: one, two, three people (or more), simply sitting there staring at their smartphones. They are checking their Facebook page, or reading their email, or carrying on a conversation with someone via text-messaging or Snapchat. And the thought crosses your mind: “Can’t these people just socialize with each other and stay off their phones for a few hours?”

This does not happen only on Sunday nights, does it? It happens during the weekdays at the supper table. It happens in the car. It happens in the gymnasium. It is a common phenomenon. I confess that I have been guilty of this kind of behavior myself. And it is very common among the younger generation. Not only are many people slaves to their smartphones; their slavery is preventing them from socializing with people in face-to-face conversation.

A question that comes up in my mind is this: “Can this really be healthy for people? God has made us social beings. And just at those times when we have the opportunities to be social, we give it up for the sake of staying connected to the Internet. Can this really be healthy?”

In an article for *The Atlantic*, Jean M. Twenge, professor of psychology at San Diego State University, asks this very question with respect to our teenagers. Although I do not think that what she has to say is surprising, I do think it is good for us to hear. In the article entitled “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?” Twenge makes the argument that our teenagers are on the brink of a mental-health crisis, and smartphones have something to do with it:

The arrival of the smartphone has radically changed every aspect of teenagers’ lives, from the nature of their social interactions to their mental health.... Some generational changes are positive, some are negative, and many are both. More comfortable in their bedrooms than in a car or at a party, today’s teens are physically safer than teens have ever been. They’re markedly less likely to get into a car accident and, having less of a taste for alcohol than their predecessors, are less susceptible to drinking’s attendant ills. Psychologically, however, they are more vulnerable than Millennials were: Rates of teen depression and suicide have skyrocketed since 2011. It’s not an exaggeration to describe iGen [those born between 1995 and 2012—EJG] as being on the brink of the worst mental-health crisis in decades. Much of this deterioration can be traced to their phones.... There is compelling evidence that the devices we’ve placed in young people’s hands are having profound effects on their lives—and making them seriously unhappy.¹

What’s the connection between smartphones and teen depression and anxiety? Twenge mentions a few connections. The first connection is the way that smartphones can hinder face-to-face socializing with others:

The number of teens who get together with their friends nearly every day dropped by more than 40 percent from 2000 to 2015; the decline has been especially steep recently. It’s not only a matter of fewer kids partying; fewer kids are spending time simply hanging out.... The roller rink, the basketball court, the town pool... they’ve all been replaced by virtual spaces accessed through apps and the web.

You might expect that teens spend so much time in these new spaces because it makes them happy, but

1 Jean M. Twenge, “Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?,” *The Atlantic*, September 2017 Issue, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/09/has-the-smartphone-destroyed-a-generation/534198/>, accessed October 21, 2017.

most data suggest that it does not. The Monitoring the Future survey, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse and designed to be nationally representative, has asked 12th graders more than 1,000 questions every year since 1975 and queried eighth- and 10th-graders since 1991. The survey asks teens how happy they are and also how much of their leisure time they spend on various activities, including non-screen activities such as in-person social interaction and exercise, and, in recent years, screen activities such as using social media, texting, and browsing the web. The results could not be clearer: Teens who spend more time than average on screen activities are more likely to be unhappy, and those who spend more time than average on non-screen activities are more likely to be happy.

There's not a single exception. All screen activities are linked to less happiness, and all non-screen activities are linked to more happiness....

If you were going to give advice for a happy adolescence based on this survey, it would be straightforward: Put down the phone, turn off the laptop, and do something—anything—that does not involve a screen. Of course, these analyses don't unequivocally prove that screen time *causes* unhappiness; it's possible that unhappy teens spend more time online. But recent research suggests that screen time, in particular social-media use, does indeed cause unhappiness....

Social-networking sites like Facebook promise to connect us to friends. But the portrait of iGen teens emerging from the data is one of a lonely, dislocated generation. Teens who visit social-networking sites every day but see their friends in person less frequently are the most likely to agree with the statements "A lot of times I feel lonely," "I often feel left out of things," and "I often wish I had more good friends." Teens' feelings of loneliness spiked in 2013 and have remained high since.²

What is another connection between smartphones and teen anxiety and depression? Twenge goes on to say the following:

For all their power to link kids day and night, social media also exacerbate the age-old teen concern about feeling left out. Today's teens may go to fewer parties and spend less time together in person, but when they do congregate, they document their hangouts relentlessly—on Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook. Those not invited to come along are keenly aware of it. Accordingly, the number of teens who feel left out has reached all-time highs across all age groups. Like the increase in

loneliness, the upswing in feeling left out has been swift and significant.

This trend has been especially steep among girls. Forty-eight percent more girls said they often felt left out in 2015 than in 2010, compared with 27 percent more boys. Girls use social media more often, giving them additional opportunities to feel excluded and lonely when they see their friends or classmates getting together without them....

Girls have also borne the brunt of the rise in depressive symptoms among today's teens. Boys' depressive symptoms increased by 21 percent from 2012 to 2015, while girls' increased by 50 percent—more than twice as much. The rise in suicide, too, is more pronounced among girls.³

Is there another connection between smartphones and teen anxiety and depression? Twenge mentions one more thing:

Curious, I asked my undergraduate students at San Diego State University what they do with their phone while they sleep. Their answers were a profile in obsession. Nearly all slept with their phone, putting it under their pillow, on the mattress, or at the very least within arm's reach of the bed. They checked social media right before they went to sleep, and reached for their phone as soon as they woke up in the morning (they had to—all of them used it as their alarm clock). Their phone was the last thing they saw before they went to sleep and the first thing they saw when they woke up. If they woke in the middle of the night, they often ended up looking at their phone....

It may be a comfort, but the smartphone is cutting into teens' sleep: Many now sleep less than seven hours most nights. Sleep experts say that teens should get about nine hours of sleep a night; a teen who is getting less than seven hours a night is significantly sleep deprived. Fifty-seven percent more teens were sleep deprived in 2015 than in 1991. In just the four years from 2012 to 2015, 22 percent more teens failed to get seven hours of sleep. The increase is suspiciously timed, once again starting around when most teens got a smartphone....

Sleep deprivation is linked to myriad issues, including compromised thinking and reasoning, susceptibility to illness, weight gain, and high blood pressure. It also affects mood: People who don't sleep enough are prone to depression and anxiety.⁴

I do not think any of this is shocking. But it does

3 Twenge.

4 Twenge.

2 Twenge, "Have Smartphones Destroyed a Generation?"

serve as a healthy reminder. Furthermore, none of this even begins to touch upon the sexual filth that can be accessed through our smartphones, which is also certainly plaguing many teenagers (and adults). There's certainly more than one reason to withhold smartphones from our teenagers, or strictly monitor their use.

What are the rules you have set up in your household concerning technology? What conversations have you had with your teenager about the use of Snapchat, or Facebook, or smartphones generally? Are you aware

of what your children are doing on their phones? Are you aware of the example you are giving them through your own use of your smartphone? And when it comes to Sunday night fellowship, or family time around the Christmas holidays, what are you going to do when you see your loved ones disconnecting themselves from family and friends simply in order to be on their smartphones?

Technology can be both a help and a hindrance. How are you allowing it to function in your home?



Taking heed to the doctrine

Prof. Ronald Cammenga, professor of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary

Revelation, inspiration, and infallibility (21)

“What saith the Scripture:” The Bible’s perspicuity

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2017, p. 14.

Introduction

In our recent articles we have been considering together the truth of the perspicuity of Holy Scripture. By the perspicuity of Scripture we mean that the Bible is clear. The ordinary believer is able to understand Scripture, know with confidence what the meaning of Scripture is, and is able to judge all teaching in its light. We have seen what this truth means and what it does not mean. We have also demonstrated that Scripture teaches its own perspicuity.

The truth of the perspicuity of Scripture is a vital aspect of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture. In a very real sense, the whole truth that Scripture is the infallibly inspired and authoritative Word of God depends on the Bible’s clarity. To deny that Scripture is clear and understandable is effectively to undermine Scripture’s authority. For how can Scripture function as the authority in the church if it is unclear, a deep mystery, and a book filled with dark sayings, the meaning of which can only be deciphered by a select group of professional theologians? It cannot! Scripture’s authority is based on and demands Scripture’s clarity. That is true to our experience, too. A father expects obedience from his children because he makes very clear to them what is and what is not pleasing to him. So it is with God.

The Reformation, as is well known, aimed to put the Bible back into the hands of the ordinary members of the church. The Reformers strove to do that out of the conviction that the ordinary, Spirit-filled members of the church were able to understand the Bible. And they were able to understand the Bible because the Bible is clear. They were ultimately motivated in their endeavor by their conviction of Scripture’s perspicuity. We must not forget this in our celebration of the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation this year. As part of their insistence on *sola Scriptura*, the Reformers insisted on Scripture’s perspicuity.

Rome’s ban of Scripture

The Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Reformation vigorously opposed the Reformers’ efforts to put the Bible into the hands of the common people. Not only did Rome oppose this endeavor, but did everything in her power to take the Bible out of the hands of the common people. Deliberately and intentionally, the Roman Catholic authorities banned the reading of the Bible by members of the church. Those who were caught reading the Bible or convicted of owning a copy of the Bible, particularly a translation of the Bible other than

the sacrosanct Latin Vulgate, faced fines, imprisonment, and even death. Bibles were banned and burned, and so were they who sought to read or own one.

It is hard for us to imagine such a situation. Most of us own many Bibles. We have them throughout our homes, by the sides of our beds, in our schools, cars, and church pews. They travel with us in our briefcases and backpacks, or on our iPads or smart phones. But there was a time in history when the Bible was banned as a dangerous book! That time lasted for nearly a thousand years, from about A.D. 500–1500. That is why this period is sometimes referred to as the “Dark Ages”—a fitting name for a time when the light of God’s Word was deliberately obscured by the one organization that was called to cause the light of God’s Word to shine throughout the world.

Several Roman Catholic councils officially prohibited owning and reading the Bible. Two of these councils were the Council of Toulouse and the Council of Tarragona.

Council of Toulouse (A.D. 1229): “We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books.”

Council of Tarragona (A.D. 1234): “No one may possess the books of the Old and New Testaments in the Romance language, and if anyone possesses them he must turn them over to the local bishop within eight days after promulgation of this decree, so that they may be burned....”

The Bible was even placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* by Pope Pius IV in 1559. He decreed: “Whoever reads or has such a translation [of the Bible]... cannot be absolved from his sins until he has turned in these Bibles.... Books in the vernacular dealing with the controversies between Catholics and the heretics of our time are not to be generally permitted, but are to be handled in the same way as Bible translations.” Book burnings that included Bibles were common at the time of the Reformation. Possession of a Bible was a criminal offense, carrying stiff penalties and even the possibility of death. Those who were caught translating, publishing, or distributing the Bible were arrested and often executed. John Foxe reports in his well-known *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs* that “it was a common practice to fasten about the neck of the condemned heretic such of these scraps of Scripture as were found in his possession, which generally shared his fate.”¹

Oxford professor and theologian, John Wycliffe, was the first to translate the New Testament into English in order to “...help Christian men to study the gospel in that tongue in which they know best Christ’s sentence.” For this grievous “heresy” Wycliffe was posthumously condemned by the decree of the Council of Constance in 1415—the same council that condemned John Hus to the stake. Wycliffe’s body was exhumed and burned, after which his ashes were scattered over the Swift River.² When Hus was burned at the stake on July 6, 1415, it is reported that pages from Wycliffe’s English Bible were used as kindling for the fire that consumed him. In 1536, William Tyndale was burned at the stake after he was betrayed by a friend. His capital offense was translating the Bible into English. As the fire consumed him, he was heard to cry out in a loud voice, “Lord, open the king of England’s eyes!”

Rome’s denial of Scripture’s perspicuity

Rome took the Bible out of the hands of the common people and banned the translating, distributing, and reading of the Bible out of a strong prejudice against the Bible’s perspicuity. Rome denied—adamantly—the right and the ability of the ordinary members of the church to understand Scripture. Rome’s view was that the ordinary believer was not equipped to interpret Scripture, in distinction from the clergy who were supposed to possess this ability. Rome’s view was that encouraging the members of the church to read and interpret Scripture was an open invitation to misinterpretation and the spread of heresy.

Several things contributed to and exacerbated Rome’s denial of Scripture’s perspicuity. For one thing, the official translation of the Bible that was elevated to supreme authority in the church of the Middle Ages was the Latin Vulgate, the translation of the church father Jerome. The Latin language was the language of scholarship at this time. But the lay members of the church did not usually know Latin and, therefore, could not read the Bible in a language that was understandable to them. Written as it was in a foreign language throughout most of the Middle Ages, the official translation of the Bible used by the church in worship could not be understood by the ordinary members.

Secondly, contributing to the loss of the doctrine of perspicuity was Rome’s denial of the right of private interpretation. Rome taught that only the church was capable of interpreting the Bible and that all interpretation of Scripture was subject to the approval of the church. In the end, “the church” meant the clergy, the priests, bishops, and car-

¹ John Foxe, *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*, ed. William B. Forbush (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967), 138.

² Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 139.

dinals of the church. Ultimately, the infallible interpreter of the Bible was the pope—the supreme head and ruler of the church. Despite the fact that the Bereans searched the Scriptures daily and compared the teaching of the apostle Paul to the supreme standard of Scripture (Acts 17:11), Rome denied the right of the individual believer to judge the teachings of the church by the Word of God.

Contributing to the loss of the doctrine of perspicuity, in the third place, was the bizarre and random method of interpretation of Scripture that was in vogue in the church at the time of the Reformation. That method was the *allegorical method* of biblical interpretation. Different levels of meaning were held to be embedded in the text of Scripture. Hidden meanings were to be uncovered, which no novice or ordinary church member could possibly discover. The text of Scripture was spiritualized and given a meaning altogether different from that which was the plain, grammatical sense of the text. This was something that only trained clergy could do, only those who were adept at peeling away the literal meaning to uncover what was considered the more important meaning of the text. By using this method of interpretation—a method promoted by various theologians and Bible teachers throughout history—Scripture could be made to teach almost anything.

And then, what also tended to promote Rome's denial of the perspicuity of the Bible was the exaltation of other authorities alongside of Holy Scripture. Scripture could not stand on its own, but needed other authorities to clarify and support its teaching. Rome elevated the authority of the apocrypha alongside Scripture. Besides the apocrypha, Rome also elevated the writings of the church fathers and the decisions of church councils alongside Scripture. They were needed, in Rome's view, in order to assist in determining the meaning of Scripture. Scripture is not in itself clear, at least not so clear that it can stand as its own interpreter.

Contemporary challenges to perspicuity

As was the case in the days of the Reformation, so also today the church faces significant challenges to Scripture's perspicuity.

For some time, one of the most serious threats to the Bible's perspicuity has been the teaching of theistic evolution. According to the teaching of theistic evolution, the opening chapters of Genesis are not to be interpreted at face value. Rather than what appears to be the meaning of Genesis 1, that God created the universe in seven literal, successive, twenty-four-hour days, God actually created all things over millions and billions of years by a process of evolution. God created the first life-forms, but then withdrew and allowed all things to

evolve on their own according to fixed natural laws.

When it is pointed out that this is simply not Genesis 1, the response is that we can only understand God's Word in Scripture (special revelation) in light of God's word in creation and history (general revelation). Genesis 1 must be interpreted in the light of the latest scientific evidence, it is alleged, and the latest scientific evidence supports the teaching of evolution. Despite what Genesis 1 appears to teach, despite what any young child or new convert to the Christian faith might suppose, the chapter does not teach that God created all things in six, literal, twenty-four-hour days.

The result is that the perspicuity of the Bible is lost and the church is made subject to a new pope. That new pope is science and science falsely so-called. Scripture is not clear, but what appears to be the teaching of Scripture must be subjected to an authority other than that of Scripture itself. For my part, I would rather be subject to the pope. Christians must see this new challenge to the perspicuity of Scripture and reject it.

The same sort of thing is true of those who are promoting the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP). This is not the time or place fully to describe and evaluate this heretical movement, which is currently making inroads into evangelical and Reformed churches. There are resources available for those who are interested in studying this movement and its unorthodox theology, especially its denial of the classic Reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone apart from works. But our interest in the NPP has to do with its view of Scripture and, particularly, the perspicuity of Scripture.

Spokesmen for the NPP, such as N. T. Wright, retired bishop of Durham and world-renowned Anglican theologian, champion a new reading of the apostle Paul. They challenge the traditional understanding of Paul's doctrine of justification, going so far as to claim that the Protestant Reformers misread Paul. The Reformation's identification of "the article of a standing or falling church," arose out of a misunderstanding of what Paul actually teaches in Romans and Galatians. This new evaluation of Paul's teaching on justification is based, in large measure, on what is alleged to be a clearer understanding of Second Temple Judaism. On the basis of the contributions of Second Temple Judaism, Paul could not possibly be defending a doctrine of justification by faith alone. Such is the contention of the NPP.

Altogether apart from the question whether the proponents of the NPP are correctly evaluating Second Temple Judaism—and there are those who argue convincingly that they are not—the appeal to Second Temple Judaism in order to interpret Scripture's teaching on justification is a fundamental assault on the perspicuity

of the Bible. The presupposition is that Scripture is not clear, or at least, not sufficiently clear, on the truth of justification. Something is needed outside of Scripture and in addition to Scripture in order to clarify Scripture's meaning. But what ordinary believer has access to and is able to decipher the tenets of Second Temple Judaism? This is certainly beyond the capabilities of the believer in the pew, or the young child in the Christian school classroom, or the aged saint in the nursing home. Thus, the church in its understanding of Scripture is held captive by scholars and theologians. Through their understanding of a phenomenon like Second Temple Judaism, they are qualified to inform the rest of the church what the real teaching of Scripture is.

But these are not the only or even the most serious

threats to the perspicuity of Scripture. The most serious threat is our own lack of zeal for serious Bible study. Rather than to search the Scriptures diligently, rather than to compare Scripture with Scripture, rather than to use those aids that are readily available to every believer, we too easily give up in our striving to understand God's Word. We suppose that the Scriptures are too difficult for us and we neglect what we know is our calling faithfully to read, study, and meditate on the Scriptures. Shame on us! Since the Scriptures are clear and are capable of being understood by the humblest member of the church, we ought to be motivated to read and study them, like the Bereans "searching the Scriptures daily" in order to judge "whether those things are so" (Acts 17:11).



Things which must shortly come to pass

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The premillennial explanation of Romans 11 (2)

Chapter five: Premillennialism (16)

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2017, p. 471.

"Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob: For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins."

Romans 11:25-27

Introduction

In the preceding article I briefly described the premillennial explanation of Romans 11. The passage is of fundamental importance to the doctrine of the last things of dispensational premillennialism.

The premillennial understanding of Romans 11 is that the chapter promises a future salvation of multitudes of racial Jews. God will then restore them as His kingdom on earth, in old Canaan, with the earthly city of Jerusalem as capital, for one thousand years.

Especially significant for premillennialism's interpretation of Romans 11 are verses 25-27. According

to premillennialism, when sometime in the future God has finished gathering His church from the Gentiles, the present spiritual blindness of Israel—physical, racial Jews—will be healed. The result will be, in the words of verse 26, that "all Israel shall be saved." This coming salvation of all Israel will include God's establishing the nation of Israel once again as His earthly kingdom. He will bless the Jewish nation with abundance of material riches, tremendous political power, and blazing, earthly glory. With the risen Jesus ensconced on a material throne of ivory in the Jerusalem "which now is" (Gal. 4:25), this Israel will rule the world for a thousand years.

This conception of the future glory—*carnal* future glory—of a Jewish nation, oddly, is presented by dispensational premillennialism as the great hope of us Christians, indeed as the main hope of Christian eschatology.

There is no need to demonstrate that this explanation of Romans 11 dovetails with the premillennial ex-

planation of the other passages of Scripture that feature largely in the premillennial theology, particularly Revelation 20 and Daniel 9. The premillennial explanation of these passages I have already examined in this series.

Leading traditional premillennialists on Romans 11

Now I demonstrate that the erroneous explanation of Romans 11 I have sketched in the previous article in this series, especially with regard to verses 25 and 26, is the false doctrine, not only of the older, original, traditional premillennial theologians, but also of the more recent, purportedly more “moderate” dispensationalists, including, of late, a professing “Calvinistic” premillennialist. At the same time, the quotations will indicate the mistaken exegesis of Romans 11 by all premillennialists, “moderates” as well as radicals.

C. I. Scofield appealed to Romans 11:1, 11, 24-26 in support of his theology, that “Israel as a nation” has a future on the earth that is distinct from the promise to the church. This future will be that “Israel as a nation” will be “restored” so that that nation “is yet to have her greatest earthly splendor and power.”

This traditional dispensational premillennialist, a founding father of the sect, charged that the application of the promises made to Israel in the Old Testament to the New Testament church of believing Jew and Gentile constitutes “the Judaizing of the Church.”¹ This charge—“the Judaizing of the Church”—by a father of dispensational premillennialism is significant. A contemporary proponent of dispensational premillennialism, Barry E. Horner, has picked up on this hoary charge by a father of premillennialism and developed it into the accusation that Reformed amillennialism is “anti-Judaistic,” in fact, the “arrogant anti-Judaism that Paul so adamantly opposed in Romans 11.”² After Nazi Germany’s atrocities against the Jews in the twentieth century, this charge has strong emotional legs. The amillennial denial of a future earthly, Jewish nation as the biblical kingdom of God’s Messiah is tainted with Nazi anti-Judaism.

Dispensational theologian John F. Walvoord explains Romans 11—“the classic passage in the New Testament on the issue of Israel’s restoration”—as teaching that the nation of Israel “is destined for a glorious future.” Disregarding that Romans 11:26 states that “so all Israel shall be saved,” not “*then* all Israel shall be saved,”

Walvoord declares that “the day is coming when the present time of Gentile blessing or fullness will come in and then Israel’s hour of blessing will follow.” After the “fulness of the Gentiles be come in,” according to Walvoord, will take place “*Israel’s national salvation.*” What this “national salvation” of Israel will consist of, Walvoord describes as follows:

Israel will also be delivered in that day from her persecutors, regathered from all over the earth and brought back to her ancient land, and there blessed spiritually and materially.

“[The nation of Israel, made up exclusively of racial Jews] has a future, a glorious one, which will be fulfilled subsequent to the return of her Deliverer.”³

“Moderate” premillennialists on Romans 11

So-called “moderate” dispensationalists do not differ fundamentally from their more extremist dispensational forebears with regard to the interpretation of Romans 11. Writing in the volume that advertises itself as an expression of “moderate” dispensationalism, J. Lanier Burns insists that “Paul argues for a future for ethnic Israel in Romans 11.” This future for ethnic, national Israel will occur after the fullness of the Gentiles: “Once Gentile fullness is attained, Israel’s hardness will end.” Then comes “the conversion of the fullness of Israel’s elect,” the “future salvation of Israel.” “Ethnic Israel has a future because the unbelief of the majority of Israelites will not last forever...because God will accomplish salvation for Israel according to his new-covenant promise. This awaits the fullness of the Gentiles, when Israel’s hardening will be removed.”

Israel’s history is not yet fulfilled. There is a future transition in history at the Parousia when the nation [of Israel, made up of racial Jews, and exclusive of believing Gentiles] will enjoy what only a remnant has presently experienced.⁴

Similarly, Kenneth L. Barker writes that “Romans 11 clearly affirms that all Israel shall be saved; God yet has a future for national Israel.”⁵

Robert L. Saucy also proposes the restoration of Is-

3 John F. Walvoord, *The Millennial Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1959), 187-193.

4 J. Lanier Burns, “The Future of Ethnic Israel in Romans 11,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church: The Search for Definition*, ed. Craig A. Blaising and Darrell L. Bock (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 188-229.

5 Kenneth L. Barker, “The Scope and Center of Old and New Testament Theology and Hope,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 327.

1 C. I. Scofield, “The Jew, the Gentile, and the Church of God,” in *Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth* (New York and Chicago: Fleming H. Revell, n.d.), 7-17. The emphasis is Scofield’s.

2 Horner, *Future Israel: Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged* (Nashville, Tennessee: B&H Academic, 2007), 188.

rael as the kingdom of God on earth on the basis of Romans 11: “The apostle’s...teaching of the divine mystery concerning a future work with Israel (Rom. 11:25-26).” The basis of this premillennial hope is the “many Old Testament promises that remain as yet unfulfilled.”⁶

Bruce A. Ware makes clear that, for “moderate,” modern dispensationalists as for their extremist predecessors in the past, dispensational hope concerning Israel is national and carnal, not spiritual, and that this hope is based on Romans 11, especially verse 26:

Israel still awaits a future action of God whereby he will bring “all Israel” (Rom. 11:26), or the nation of Israel as a whole, under the provision of forgiveness of sin and Spirit-indwelling *as well as territorial and political restoration that it will surely enjoy in their fullness when Christ comes again.*⁷

Alva J. McClain spoke for both extremist and moderate dispensationalists when, in explanation of Romans 11, he said that “the time will come when the nation itself [of Israel] will be restored to its ancient place of favor and supremacy (Rom. 11:11-26).”

Indicating the fundamental agreement of premillennialism and postmillennialism in looking for a carnal kingdom of God on earth within history, McClain went on to announce “a ‘Golden Age’ upon earth in history.”⁸

How many millions of professing Protestant Christians hope for the “golden age” of a carnal, earthly kingdom of God in history! In this vain hope, they are one with the Roman Catholic Church, which has been dreaming this dream and mightily exerting itself to realize it for centuries.

As only a remnant believe with true faith, so only a remnant hope with genuine hope. Genuine hope is the longing and expectation of a perfected, spiritual, heavenly, everlasting kingdom in the new creation as the *goal* of history in the day of Christ.

6 Robert L. Saucy, “The Church as the Mystery of God,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 155.

7 Bruce A. Ware, “The New Covenant and the People(s) of God,” in *Dispensationalism, Israel and the Church*, 96; emphasis is added: for premillennialism, “moderate” or extremist, the all-important future blessing of Israel is “territorial and political.” “Moderate” premillennialists now acknowledge a spiritual dimension of the future blessing of Israel, whereas the traditional premillennialists omitted this aspect of a future blessedness of Israel altogether. Nevertheless, also for the “moderate” dispensationalists the “territorial” and “political,” that is, carnal, characteristics of the coming earthly kingdom of God continue to hold pride of place.

8 Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom: An Inductive Study of the Kingdom of God* (Winona Lake, IN: BMH Books, 1959), 399, 530.

An explanation of Romans 11 by a “Calvinist” premillennialist

Brilliantly illustrating the difference between mere “Calvinism” and the full-fledged Reformed faith, Barry E. Horner has recently written a vigorous defense of premillennial dispensationalism. Horner claims to be a Calvinist in his doctrine of salvation. But he is also an avowed dispensational premillennialist: “The basic premillennial model of biblical prophecy, and especially as it relates to ethnic and national Israel, is closest to the truth of Scripture.”⁹

As the sub-title of Horner’s book expresses, a major theme is that opposition to premillennialism, which Reformed amillennialism surely is, necessarily amounts to “anti-Judaism”: *Why Christian Anti-Judaism Must be Challenged*. Lest anyone living after the Nazi regime of the 1930s and 1940s miss the implications of the sub-title, Horner expressly relates a rejection of the Judaism implicit in dispensational premillennialism with Hitler’s attempt to destroy the Jews.¹⁰ The issue between premillennialism and Reformed amillennialism, thus, is settled by the historical event of Hitler’s monstrous, genocidal assault upon the Jews.

The tactic is clever, if despicable. But, braving the false charge of anti-Judaism, which is, of course, redolent of the vicious charge of anti-Semitism, we Reformed think that doctrinal issues must be decided by appeal to Scripture and the creeds. In the light of these authorities, Reformed amillennialism is not “anti-Judaism,” but, to play off the language of Horner, “pro-church.”

The implication of “pro-church,” as the truth about amillennialism, for Horner’s premillennial theology, is intended. By ascribing the glories of the Messianic kingdom of God to a fictitious, future earthly kingdom of racial Jews, Horner, in concert with all dispensational premillennialists, is anti-church. He robs the church of Jesus Christ of her rightful honor. This is a far worse sin than “anti-Judaism.”

Having dismissed, if not demolished, his Reformed amillennial adversaries by the charge of anti-Judaism, “Calvinist” Horner argues for the standard eschatological doctrine of dispensational premillennialism. Basic to the argument is the typical premillennial explanation of Romans 11. On the basis of Romans 11:26, 27, Horner proposes a “future salvation of national Israel.” “‘Israel’ here refers to a future national conversion of Israel, the larger unbelieving segment in particular, that results in Israel serving under Christ

9 Horner, *Future Israel*, xiv.

10 Horner, 33-36, 105-146.

in the promised land [earthly Canaan] with restored glory.”¹¹

According to Horner, the “national salvation of all Israel” will take place *after* the fullness of the Gentiles, spoken of in Romans 11:25, has come in. Israel’s present hardening, or blindness, will end sometime in the future. Then will follow the national conversion of Israel. “There is,” on the reading of Barry Horner, “clear chronological connection...between vv. 25 and 26 [of Romans 11].”¹² “Chronological connection” is temporal succession. This assertion, despite the grammatical fact that verse 26 of Romans 11 does not state, “And *then* all Israel shall be saved,” but, “And *so* all Israel shall be saved.” The salvation of all Israel does not follow the coming in of the fullness of the Gentiles: *then*. But the salvation of all Israel takes place “*so*,” that is, ‘in this way’—the way indicated in verse 25, namely, that blindness is happened to Israel “*in part*.”

But why should mere grammar stand in the way of a campaign against “anti-Judaism,” or help to frame a doctrine of the last things, even though the grammar is the biblical grammar inspired of the Holy Ghost?

There must be a national conversion of Jews in the future to restore old Israel to its former power and glory. “‘All Israel will be saved’ (v. 26) *en masse*, nationally, eschatologically.”¹³ This national conversion will be accomplished by “the return of Jesus Christ...from the heavenly Zion...to earthly Zion in its present ungodly state.”¹⁴ Then there will be, for a thousand years, “a regenerated nation of Israel in the land under its acknowledged Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹⁵ Still more, with regard to the risen, exalted Jesus Christ, there will be a “future millennial reign of Jesus Christ on earth.”¹⁶

With the glorious colors that Scripture reserves for the perfection of the kingdom of God in Christ in the day of Christ, when the present form of creation gives way, through fire, to the new heavens and earth, when all the wicked shall be banished into the lake of fire, when the saints shall have been perfected in their resurrection body, and, especially, when there will be no sin in all of God’s renewed creation, Horner paints premillennialism’s earthly, millennial kingdom, in which there are yet sin and sinners, including reprobate sinners, indeed, the vulnerability to Satan himself:

The regenerate nation of Israel will inhabit the fruitful

promised land under the reign of Jesus Christ from Jerusalem surrounded by regenerate Gentile nations. In this heaven come to earth, Israel and the Jewish people will be fulfilled (Rom. 11:12...To this end was the gospel sent forth.¹⁷

Carnal—“fruitful...land”; “heaven come to earth.”

Absurd—“the reign of [the exalted, heavenly] Jesus Christ from [earthly, sin-filled Jerusalem]” over a world that includes unregenerated, God-hating wicked, who in the end will revolt against Him.

Derogatory of the church, the beloved bride, precious body, and, yes, glorious kingdom of Jesus Christ—“the regenerate nation of Israel will inhabit the...promised land”; “Israel and the Jewish people will be fulfilled.”

Utterly mistaken as to the “end” or “goal” of the gospel—“To this end [of the carnal kingdom of the Jews for a thousand years] was the gospel sent forth.”

Summing up

All dispensational premillennialists explain Romans 11 as predicting a restoration of racial Jews, in the form of the nation of Israel, as the restored kingdom of God in the territory that in the Old Testament was Canaan.

Basic to this explanation is the understanding of verses 25 and 26 of Romans 11 as teaching that at some future date the salvation of the Gentile church will conclude. Thereupon, *at that time*, Christ Jesus will save multitudes of racial Jews, so that they can take form once again as the nation of Israel in Palestine.

As the restored nation of Israel, these Jews will rule the world and enjoy material prosperity for a thousand years—the millennium of Revelation 20.

During this millennium, within history, the risen Jesus Christ in His resurrection body will function as king of earthly, still sinful Israel in earthly Jerusalem, in the midst of a world where dying and death continue, reprobate enemies of God and Christ live out their wicked lives, and Satan, though bound, is still a real threat.

And it is this restored, earthly, only very imperfectly holy kingdom in a world of sin and death that will be the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament and, in fact, the goal of all God’s works and ways.

That any Gentile Christian, indeed any believer at all, finds this prospect attractive is a mystery. It holds no attraction for the Reformed Christian.

This false interpretation of Romans 11, on behalf of a misbegotten idea of the Messianic kingdom of God and an utterly mistaken view of the last things, I examine critically in the next installment of this series on eschatology.

(to be continued)

¹⁷ Horner, 252.

¹¹ Horner, *Future Israel*, 260.

¹² Horner, 260.

¹³ Horner, 294.

¹⁴ Horner, 261.

¹⁵ Horner, 255.

¹⁶ Horner, 210.



When thou sittest in thine house

Mrs. Margaret Laning, wife and mother in Hull Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa

A Bible study in Myanmar

It is a sweltering, humid day—a clarion call of the coming monsoon season. It will not be long before God opens the heavens with thunderous sheets of water, turning roads into rivers of muddy black and ocher. The electricity is sporadic—a reminder that reliable electricity is a luxury here. The odor of wet dog wafts in the heavy air as we sit in plastic patio chairs inside a long, narrow room. From young to old, most of the women wear traditional skirts, or *tamein*. Upon their faces pale yellow circles on each cheek, an ancient sunscreen called *thanaka* made of ground tree bark. With a few dogs stretched at our feet and with Bibles in hand, we begin our ladies' Bible study in Yangon, Myanmar in May 2017.

The ladies look forward to the study and fellowship. This is especially so since Arminian teaching is all too common among the relatively few nominal Christians in Myanmar. The rich truth that our sovereign God always accomplishes His will in our salvation as summarized in the Three Forms of Unity and expressed in the Five Solas is rare. For more than 20 years the Reformed faith has been proclaimed by Rev. Titus. In those early years the Lord graciously opened a door by having Rev. J. Kortering and Rev. A. denHartog work with Rev. Titus. Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan has been laboring faithfully ever since. What a privilege to get to know believers from such a different culture but one in faith with us! How important it is for our Protestant Reformed families not merely to know where these nations are on a map or some of their unique cultural characteristics, but also to endeavor to know the actual people we come in contact with, to hear their thoughts, as the Lord directs our churches in mission work.

We read in English and Burmese the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10. “Was it wrong for Martha to be busy preparing food for Jesus?” someone asks. The ladies shake their heads and one says, “It was not wrong. It is good to serve one another. Cooking is just one of those ways.” Her words rang true. We watched many of these women during the Bible conference that

week drenched in sweat, cheerfully cooking delicious food in large pots over open fires. There was plenty of chopping and more chopping, children busily washing dishes, and enormous rice cookers on all day. These women were great examples of selfless serving.

A follow-up question is raised, “So what did Martha do to receive this gentle rebuke from Jesus?” We ponder this question. “I think Martha was wrongly judging her sister, Mary,” answers someone. We nod that this is a good point. After all, Jesus pointed out that Mary, who was sitting at His feet and listening to His teaching, had chosen the one thing that is needful—that good part. We cannot lose sight of that good part, either, even in our serving. If we do, we will find ourselves becoming critical of each other instead of building one another up in the Lord. We exchange glances of how we need to be reminded of this. We move on, discussing personal devotion times and other such ways we listen to Jesus.

We talk about the importance of being a godly witness—we are being watched. Over a period of a couple years, Rev. Titus and his family witnessed to a Buddhist who was a boarder in their home. By God's grace, Soe Win converted to Christianity—as well as his parents and siblings. Thirty years later, Soe Win is a missionary pastor who loves the Reformed faith and works closely with Rev. Titus. He humbly confesses it is God's mercy that he believes when many do not.

What a blessed life in contrast to the hopeless religion of Buddha! Earlier, we visited a large pagoda and saw little boys sitting on their fathers' shoulders brought in and left behind to become Buddhist monks. The monks with their shaven heads and red robes epitomize a spiritual, meritorious life in hope of a better reincarnation. We watched people pour water over statues for good karma and exhibit self-denial by sitting in the scorching sun.

As we continue to discuss witnessing, a woman shares a story about her work in a garment factory with Buddhists. Since Buddhism is by far the most common religion in Myanmar, she is one of the only Christians. Her co-workers watch her closely and even notice her higher paychecks. In a country where inflation is often

on the rise while wages are not, they were furious. They went to the supervisor and demanded to know why this Christian was getting special treatment. The answer was simple: closed-circuit television where diligence and laziness cannot be hid. The woman told them she did not know about the cameras but labors for Christ's sake. We thank God to hear of her witness, working "...heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men" (Col. 3:23).

Others express their desire to be a godly witness. A teen girl sits pensively in the study. She shared with us earlier how poorly she is treated in school because she refuses to bow before her teacher. The Buddhist religion maintains that student must worship teacher. Other young people in the church echo a similar experience of sometimes being mocked, given the most and worst chores at school, and even beaten. A heavy trial for such young ones, but they are comforted to know their names are written in heaven and that saints across the world are praying for them.

Even the saints in Myanmar are learning to put cultural differences aside. A young Christian woman from the Karen tribe is present. Myanmar is made up of many ethnic groups often referred to as tribes: the Bamar, the Chin, the Kachin, the Karenni, Karen, Mon, Rakhine, Rohingya, Shan, and more. Her Christian husband happens to come from a rival tribe to the Karens. "We encourage these marriages!" said Rev. Titus. "Which tribe one comes from does not matter when we marry in the Lord. We all come from different backgrounds, so we must learn to bear with one another."

Rev. Titus and his wife, Cer te, are from the Chin tribe. This tribe is unique because most are nominally Christian. Over a century ago missionaries came to the hilly Chin State (one of the regions within Myanmar) during the British Empire. Though nominal Christians are in the majority, the Burmese government stations its army battalions—comprised mainly of Buddhists—to control the Chins with an iron fist. Many Chin do not speak Burmese, and most Burmese do not speak Chin, which exacerbates the problem. Though Cer te grew up in the Chin State, Rev. Titus lived in a variety of regions. In God's providence, this has given him a broad education and understanding of Myanmar and its peoples. It does not take long to observe that he is not a mere book worm and that people are comfortable talking with him.

"What do Protestant Reformed families talk about with their children during family devotions?" asks a mother of several children. Good question—what would you say in response? Would you mention that after a long day of school and work that it is good to

come together at the evening meal and talk about our day, read and apply the Scriptures, pray, and maybe even sing the Psalms? Or, say that our children have struggles they need to talk about, mainly their struggle against their own sinful nature that wants them to be like this world? How we need to encourage them to pray for grace to put off that old man and put on the new throughout the day. We discuss a number of these things and the mother nods enthusiastically. Rev. Titus translates: "Yes, yes, it is just the same with our children. They struggle against their sinful nature too." We look to the same cross and know that we are not so different after all.

My attention is drawn to a cluster of bright-eyed pre-adolescents and teenage girls intently listening. It appears they sense this is a very important meeting. They are the precious future of the church in Myanmar—citizens of one of the poorest nations, yet rich in faith. It is a difficult life, but there are some improvements. An historic democratic election took place in 2015. Communication is another area making advancements.

Our delegation asks the ladies if they have opportunities to encourage one another during the week, perhaps meet for a Bible study. They express a desire but admit they do not have much contact except on Sunday. There may be more options in the future. Even though Myanmar's transportation infrastructure is a work in progress (think two, three people balancing on a bicycle weaving in and out of traffic, overcrowded buses, open trucks with passengers partly or completely hanging on the outside, and few traffic signals), their mode of communication is growing by leaps and bounds.

Just a few years ago hardly anyone owned a smartphone. Today foreign investors are building solar-powered cell phone towers across Myanmar, most notably in remote areas. As of June 2017, ninety percent of the country's roughly 54 million people have access to a phone with Internet service, according to a recent article quoting the Myanmar Computer Federation in *Bloomberg Businessweek*. With smartphones, some going for less than \$20, and with domestic calls for just two cents a minute, citizens of Myanmar finally have instant communication with each other and the outside world.

For the church in Myanmar, this opens doors. When our ministers return home, they are able to continue live Bible studies by FaceTime connected to a wide screen. Some of our brethren in Myanmar have email addresses, some are on social media, and some can communicate via Skype or FaceTime. They can talk with each other during the week, and we in other countries can talk with them too. At one of our young adult Bible

studies in Iowa we greeted Rev. Titus and his family and chatted a bit together. In a chapel speech at our Trinity Christian High School the students watched some interviews with young people from the church in Yangon describing what it is like to be a Christian in Myanmar. Seeing and hearing real believers speak helps us pray for them more meaningfully, makes the distance seem shorter, and our common faith more precious.

As I glance around the Bible study, I desire to keep in touch in the future. A white terrier mix gets up, padding to the door. These dogs are something else. As

Rev. Titus merrily remarks, “Our dogs sing any Psalter number you like!” Sure enough, when the congregation sings, the dogs bark and howl a rousing descant. So now it seems they can sense when Bible study should end? Dog or no dog, this time of fellowship around God’s Word has been a highlight of our trip.

May the Lord continue to bless the saints in Myanmar and in all nations. May we, and our children, grow closer to these brothers and sisters in Christ, encouraging and praying for one another ever more so in the days ahead.



Pertaining to the churches...in common

Rev. Audred Spriensma, home missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches

The work of your home missionary

The question that has been asked many times of me is, “What are you supposed to do?”

What is the work of your new home missionary? What am I doing? What do I hope to do?

The home missionary is a preacher. The Reformed faith should always emphasize the great urgency of the preaching of the Word. Romans 10:15 asks, “How shall they hear without a preacher?” Christ gathers His church through the preaching. And that preacher must be sent. On September 17 I was installed in Byron Center PRC as a preacher who is sent by my calling church to go and preach. This follows that biblical principle of the church in Antioch sending out the missionaries Barnabas and Paul according to Acts 13:1ff.

So, where do I preach? To whom does the missionary preach? The answer to those questions is: wherever the Lord opens up a door. Therefore, I have preached in various of our churches that needed pulpit supply, and in that preaching promoted one of the tasks of the church, that the church may be faithful and zealous in the work of evangelism. My wife and I have gone to Franklin, Pennsylvania to preach to the Franklin Reformed Fellowship. The Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) tries to fill the pulpit for them at least once a month. These trips are not only to fill the need for lively preaching but also to gauge the interest and the viability of the group, as well as to make contacts with interested parties in the area. The work of missions includes both

the gathering of those who have gone astray and the calling of those who have never really heard the gospel. This means that the work of missions includes gathering the remnant of God’s saints out of the apostatizing church and preaching the gospel to the unsaved in our own land.

The home missionary has and will continue to be available to work with area churches who have questions regarding setting up Bible Studies in their chosen locals. Where will we seek to begin a Bible study? Whom are we targeting? Who will lead the studies? What approach will we use: a book of the Bible, chapter by chapter, or a systematic approach of what the Bible teaches concerning our need for Jesus and our salvation? The local churches are responsible for the cost and the labors of these Bible studies. If and when these local Bible studies have progressed in size and interest to desire to organize as a congregation, the calling church and the DMC will send the home missionary to begin Sunday worship services and give instruction to those interested. Currently, your home missionary is leading a Bible study in Wayland, Michigan for the Byron Center PRC, and in December, the Lord willing, will lead it in Dorrr, Michigan.

The home missionary has received from our Trinity PRC Evangelism committee a list of contacts that they have put together from their own and other of our churches, compiled of people that have responded to the

Standard Bearer, Reformed Witness Hour broadcasts, or interest in tracts or sermons from our churches. The home missionary plans to review this list from different locales and seek to make contact with those on this list to determine interest in a work in their area.

I have received material that has been put together by others of various decisions of our synod and DMC, so that in time with the DMC we can put together a manual for doing home missions in the PRC.

I also hope to begin writing tracts or short pamphlets on a third to fifth-grade level that will explain biblical teachings for those who do not come from a strong church or Christian background. As Pastor J. Kortering wrote, "All we need do is survey the material available and learn how unsuitable it is for reaching the non-Christian. We have many pamphlets and books on important subjects concerning Christian faithfulness, but none other to my knowledge on how one may become a Christian in the first place" (*Standard Bearer*, vol. 74, No. 9; Feb. 1998, pp. 212-213).

Because Byron Center PRC is the calling church for the denomination that sends forth the missionary, I will

be writing monthly reports for the Byron Center Council and the DMC so that they may supervise my work and assist me with their judgment on the work that we are called to do, just as the apostle Paul and Barnabas reported back to the Antioch Church of their labors after their missionary journeys.

With the good news that Byron Center's call to Rev. Andy Laning has been accepted, it is time that we vacate the parsonage of Byron. We have found another house nearby Byron that we will rent for six months. This will enable us to be near our calling church and labor closely with them. Our new address is 7758 Burlingame Ave, Byron Center, MI 49315.

The work of the home missionary and our denomination will only succeed with the Lord's blessing. Therefore, we always stand in need of prayer. So my request of you is this: pray for my wife and me. Pray for open doors. Pray as the apostle Paul requested of the churches: "that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19).

Your home missionary, Pastor Aud Spriensma



Bring the books...

Mr. Charles Terpstra, member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan and full-time librarian/registrar at the Protestant Reformed Seminary

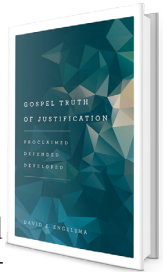
Gospel Truth of Justification: Proclaimed, Defended, Developed, David J. Engelsma. Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2017, 528 pages. [Reviewed by Rev. Martin VanderWal, pastor of Wingham, ON PRC.]

Thoroughly grounded and rooted is *Gospel Truth of Justification* by David J. Engelsma. Thoroughly grounded and rooted in Scripture, the book presents a strong and beautiful garden for every lover of the grace of God to enjoy. This is not a garden of flowers that live and die according to their seasons, but it is a garden of a tree of life that yields all manner of fruit. Deliciously sweet and nutritious are many kinds of fruits in this garden. Fruits abound of confidence, of comfort and assurance, of good works, and of everlasting peace with God. It is a garden to live in, and a garden to die in.

Because this garden is rooted and grounded in the truth of God's Word, it also means that it is surrounded by a wall with its foundations dug deeply into that same ground. The wall is immovable, both dividing and distinguishing. The wall makes clear distinction between the living good within the garden and the evil decay that is without. And without is plenty of decay and ruin.

Engelsma's work is also a thorough survey of this dark realm outside the boundary of Scripture and the confessions. The reader is brought to see not only how widespread the errors of legalism and works-righteousness are, but also their common roots of callous contempt for Scripture and the Reformed confessions and an evil yearning for the gates of Rome and its papal throne.

The believing reader, enjoying the fruit of this garden of



grace, will appreciate the way the author presents the powerful relationship between Scripture and the creeds of the Protestant Reformation on the topic of justification. He shows how thoroughly these creeds are rooted in Scripture and that they speak with one voice on the subject of justification by faith alone, based on the righteousness of Christ alone without the works of men in any sense.

Just as vigorously as the above is prosecuted, so vigorously is it applied to the present controversy over justification. On the basis of Scripture and the confessions, N.T. Wright is shown to be wrong and the doctrines of the Federal Vision and the conditional covenant are completely demolished. Manifold, carefully selected quotations from the proponents of these heresies constantly ensure that Engelsma is attacking no straw men of his own devising. The book is thus a powerful friend to the gospel, and in the power of that friendship is a bitter, unrelenting foe to its enemies.

The vast importance of this work is highly positive, however. First, *Gospel Truth of Justification* demonstrates the wonderful value of the true doctrine of justification. It alone brings peace with God and the true joy of salvation. It alone provides peace of conscience and heart before the judgment seat of God. The blessed fruit of assurance and the powerful motive of gratitude for a life of true godliness are made to stand alone upon the gift of the righteousness of Christ.

Second, the book develops doctrines related to justification. With this development it has much to contribute to the body of Reformed dogma. Two matters contend for the highest place for this contribution. One is the development of the doctrine of eternal justification and its relationship to predestination. Confusion is taken away by placing justification in the forum of the conscience, first, according to the emphasis of the gospel itself, and then making subservient to that mode of justification the work of the cross and God's eternal decree to justify the elect in Christ. This development highlights the point of gracious justification without works: the assurance the believer possesses and enjoys *in his conscience* through faith alone in Christ.

The other contribution is closely related: a thorough and masterful presentation of the truth of Christ's headship in the covenant of grace and its necessary relationship to justification. Positively, this presentation highlights the wonderful unity of Scripture and the gospel of Scripture. Negatively, it demonstrates the serious damage that is done to Scripture and the gospel when the doctrine of the covenant is separated from election and the headship of Christ.

Gospel Truth of Justification contains a wealth of insightful, penetrating statements such as these:

The new perspective [on Paul] is not able to penetrate to the heart of Paul's doctrine of justification: God justifies "the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). (31)

If evangelicals and Roman Catholics do not agree on imputation, they do not agree on justification. To affirm oneness on the doctrine, in spite of this fundamental disagreement, is a lie at best. At worst, it is the evangelical capitulation to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification as *infusion*. (54)

This confusion [between sanctification with justification] is not harmless. It prevents the publican from going down to his home justified. It is attempted robbery of the people of God of their joy and peace. It detracts from the obedience of Jesus Christ as the complete righteousness of the believing sinner, as though the obedience of the sinner must be added to the obedience of Jesus for the sinner's righteousness with God. (112–13)

The theology of the federal vision, which is essentially the ugly Arminian whore beautified in covenantal dress for contemporary seduction of Reformed churches, denies the teaching of Dordt and Westminster that the state of justification cannot be forfeited or lost. (230)

The great value of the book is its bold, incisive, and decisive character. It consistently follows a straight line between truth and error. That straight line runs clearly out of Holy Scripture throughout the whole book. It is also cause for sorrow that this delineating character is missing not only from so many works devoted to the same subject, but also from theological conversations of every kind and in the decisions of deliberative assemblies in so many Presbyterian and Reformed churches far and near.

The host of errors described in this book and the vast company of the promoters and adherents of these errors must give every believer pause for thought. How can the very heart of the gospel be so abused and even vilified, such contempt and scorn heaped on it? For what mess of pottage is such a birthright sold? Only the most distressing answer is given: The pride of man and the refuge promised by Rome. Gone is all the righteousness of Christ. Gone with that righteousness is all true peace, all comfort and hope, all true godliness and good works. One cannot but see the mighty hand of God's judgment in all this.

There are several points of criticism of *Gospel Truth of Justification* of which the reader should be aware. The first is that the book suffers significantly from repetition. Illustrations, distinct points, and comparisons appear time and again in its pages. While each point of repetition has its fitting place in the surrounding context, the flavor given to the book is that of a collection

of essays, which detracts from the hard-hitting unity of its overall character.

The second is that the reader will run across sentences that are difficult to read and understand. While patient re-reading of these sentences will yield clarity, such sentences interrupt the flow of thought and soften the impact of the points being made. However, these difficult sentences in no way detract from the overall clarity of the book.

In summary, *Gospel Truth of Justification* is of inestimable value to the Reformed reader who wishes to grow in knowledge of and appreciation for this precious truth, which is at the heart of the gospel. May this outstanding work serve to keep the faithful church of Jesus Christ within the walls of her garden given by her God, enjoying the blessed fruit of this gospel truth to the glory and praise of her Lord, with never a thought of venturing out into the darkness and ruin outside its walls!



News from our churches

Mr. Perry Van Egdome, member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Doon, Iowa

Trivia question

Regarding the prior trivia question about surviving original members of the PRCA, responses are coming in nicely. As of November 1 we are awaiting responses from eight churches and the number of surviving original members is holding at eight also. We will keep you updated as things change.

According to the yearbook chart contained in the PRC *Acts of Synod*, how many of today's PRCA churches were organized before 1930? Answer later in this column.

Sister-church activities

From the bi-monthly report of Rev. A. Stewart and the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, Northern Ireland comes this comment: "We and the saints in the CPRC are looking forward to Prof. and Mrs. Engelsma tomorrow morning. We replaced the two broken garage doors at the manse, and bought a large, new bed and sheets for our spare bedroom. We want to avoid the problem of Isaiah 28:20: 'For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it.'" Good plan, Rev. Stewart!

The Classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines met November 1 at Maranatha PRC. The Contact Committee delegation of Rev. R. Smit and Elder Dave Kregel also met with them at that meeting.

The CERC in Singapore is holding their Covenant Keepers' Camp 2017 from December 19-22 at the Aloha Layang, Sea View Bungalow 1. Please visit their website <http://ckckscamp.weebly.com> or write to them at ckckscamp2017@outlook.com for more information. PRC youth 13+ are warmly invited to join them!

Congregational activities

The congregation at Lynden, WA PRC voted to remodel and repair their parsonage, with flooring, cabinetry, and the kitchen being some of the main focuses of attention.

The Activities Committee of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI planned a Rook tournament recently with refreshments served. The game Rook just seems to signify "intensity." Congratulations to the winners!

As Remembrance Day (Canada) was approaching, plans were being made for the annual Edmonton PRC Car Rally, one of the sure signs of Fall!

Denominational activities

Classis West of the PRCA met in special session on November 29 in Lynden, WA to examine pastors-elect B. Feenstra (Lacombe) and S. Regnerus (Lynden). The latter was scheduled to be ordained and installed on December 1.

Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada held a conference on witnessing with Rev. Allen Brummel and Rev. Angus Stewart as speakers. The conference was well attended by the Lacombe and Edmonton congregations. Copies of the speeches are available by contacting immanuelprcevangelism@gmail.com.

Pastor Wilbur Bruinsma of Pittsburgh, PA PRC spoke on the topic "John Huss: His Life, His Teachings, His Death" for the Reformation lecture held in their church.

On Reformation Day, the consistory of the Wingham, Ontario, Canada PRC sponsored a lecture by their pastor, Rev. Martin VanderWal, with a question and answer period and refreshments following. The speech was entitled: "Justification by Faith Alone: The Heart of the Reformation."

Rev. Brian Huizinga from Hope PRC of Redlands, CA traveled recently to our congregation in Spokane, WA to present the speech "Evangelism Driven by the Five Solas."

Rev. Erik Guichelaar, pastor in Randolph, WI PRC pre-

sented the lecture “Martin Luther’s Struggle for Peace and the 95 Theses.”

Crete PRC sponsored a lecture by their pastor Rev. Nathan Langerak entitled “Martin Luther: A Christian’s Quest for Assurance.”

Loveland, CO PRC held a Friday-Saturday Reformation conference with speeches given by Rev. S. Key, Rev. M. McGeown, and Prof. R. Cammenga.

The Siouxland area churches also attended a Friday-Saturday Reformation conference with speakers Rev. David Torlach, Prof. R. Dykstra, and Prof. B. Gritters.

Young people's activities

Young Calvinists hosted a gym/game night at Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI on a Saturday recently. Pizza and beverages were provided. There were volleyball, basketball, and board games. Additionally, there was an opportunity to serve in the afternoon of that day with the Special Needs Group. Young people were invited to socialize and assist some of the special needs members of our churches with fishing at the Wassink’s. An enjoyable combination. Hopefully, they caught a lot of fish!

The annual Michigan Young People’s Thanksgiving mass meeting was held on November 19 at Grandville PRC, with Candidate Dave Noorman presenting the speech.

The annual Doon PRC Young People’s Survival Run was completed in fine fashion, another sure sign of Fall!

School activities

Those at Covenant Christian HS (Grand Rapids, MI) and their families were a busy bunch at the end of October. On the 28th the Craft Show was held with over 100 handcrafted booths to shop from and a variety of homemade and gourmet items to eat! The proceeds benefited the band and boosters programs at Covenant. Then on Sunday evening, the 29th,

the Covenant choirs presented their program at Jenison Center for the Arts. Supporters also attended the joint band concert of Covenant and Heritage bands on Reformation Day, at Hudsonville Fine Arts Auditorium. “Make a joyful noise, all ye lands!” And we are sure they did!

On November 17 the 6th annual Christian Education Lecture sponsored by the Association for PR Education was held in Sioux Falls, SD. Rev. Cory Griess spoke on the topic “The Need for Protestant Reformed Schools in a Postmodern World” at Heritage PRC.

Covenant Christian School supporters in Lynden, WA made and sold blanket (an almond pastry) as a fundraiser. These delicious items are always a big hit!

Minister activities

The Councils of Zion PRC of Hudsonville, MI and First PRC of Holland, MI were advised by Classis East to proceed with the ordinations of Rev. Joseph Holstege and Rev. Justin Smidstra, respectively, which took place in late October. We rejoice in the gift of these pastors to our sister congregations.

On November 5, Southwest PRC voted to call Rev. J. Engelsma (Doon PRC).

Rev. Andy Lanning, pastor of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore announced his acceptance of the call to Byron Center, MI PRC.

First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI has called Rev. Brian Huizinga, pastor at Hope PRC of Redlands, CA to be their next pastor.

Trivia answer

The chart says nine of our present PRCA churches were organized prior to 1930, six in Classis East and three in Classis West. More trivia next time.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” Ecclesiastes 3:1.

Announcements

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Crete PRC extend our Christian sympathy to Mrs. Phyllis De Boer and family in the death of **Mel DeBoer**. We pray that they may receive comfort and assurance from the word of God in Revelation 14:13: “And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth; Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.”

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President
Ed Stouwie, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Kelsey and Ashley Van Bommel and to their children in the death of Kelsey’s mother, **Mrs. Gloria Van Bommel**. “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” (I Thessalonians 4:13, 14).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Announcements continued

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Darren and Karyn Solanyk and to their children in the death of their infant son and brother **Samuel**. “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young” (Isaiah 40:11).

Rev. Steven Key, President
Robert Van Uffelen, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Bill and Julie Reinholt in the death of Bill’s brother, **Richard Reinholt**. May their comfort be found in God’s Word where we read, “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness” (Isaiah 41:10).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Steve DeVries, Clerk

Wedding anniversary

With thankfulness to God for His covenant faithfulness to them and for their faithfulness to each other, we celebrated the 65th wedding anniversary of our parents, **Edward and Adriana Ophoff** who were united in marriage in Germany on October 30, 1952. We are thankful for the many years God has given them together and for their godly example, and it is our prayer that they will continue to experience the abundant grace and love of God. “It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

Eric and Marilyn Ophoff	Ray and Joy Schwarz
Ed and Libby Ophoff	20 grandchildren
Mark and Cindy Ophoff	39 great-grandchildren
Jim and Faith Noorman	Jenison, Michigan

Teachers needed

The Northwest Iowa Protestant Reformed School in Doon, IA, is seeking a teacher for grades 3 and 4 for the 2018-2019 school year as well as an Administrator. For more information or to apply please contact Brent Wynia—712-470-2757, brentwynia@hotmail.com or Joey Mantel—712-470-6493, jsmantel@outlook.com.

Teacher needed

The Edmonton Protestant Reformed Christian School is in need of a full-time teacher for the 2018-2019 school year. The school will be starting from grades 1-3, and the board is willing to work with the teacher on a curriculum suited to their preference. Please contact Gord Tolsma at gr.tolsma@gmail.com / 780-777-5780 or Scott Ferguson at s_r_ferguson@hotmail.com.

Classis East

Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 10, 2018, at 8:00 A.M., in the Hudsonville PRC, Hudsonville, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 11, 2017.

Gary Boverhof, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

- Dec. 3 “Studying To Be Quiet” I Thess. 4:11, 12
Dec. 10 “The Final Gathering of the Church”
I Thess. 4:13-18
Dec. 17 “Watching for Christ’s Return” I Thess. 5:1-6
Dec. 24 “No Room for Mary’s Firstborn” Luke 2:7
Dec. 31 “Great Is Thy Faithfulness!” Lam. 3:22