

The Standard Bearer

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Spiritual sowing and reaping

Rev. Michael DeVries

The name above all other names

Rev. Rodney Kleyn

What saith the Scripture: The Bible's perspicuity

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Teaching our children love for the church

Rev. Arie denHartog



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Meditation

Rev. Michael DeVries, pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Spiritual sowing and reaping

Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.
Galatians 6:7, 8

Another growing season is winding down in North America. In the Spring, seed was committed to the soil of countless gardens and fields. Many have been enjoying the fresh produce harvested from these gardens. And when each crop is mature, the combines and harvesters roll through the fields bringing in the wheat, soybeans, corn, and many other crops. So it goes from one year to the next. And we are well aware of rules, laws that God, according to His providence, has established to govern His creation in this regard.

A gardener or farmer is certainly aware of the hard and fast rule that the type of seed that is sown will produce the same kind of crop. That was plain in the creation from the very beginning. According to Genesis 1:11, 12 the various plants, herbs, and trees would bring forth seed or fruit after their kind. So, if a farmer desires to raise corn, in the Spring of the year he plants corn in his fields. And if you want green beans from your garden, then you will invariably plant green-bean seed. You certainly will not sow the seed of thistles, or even the seed of some other vegetable when what you want is green beans.

This is a basic rule of planting and harvesting that is sure and unchangeable. If it were not true that the kind of seed that is sown will produce the same kind of crop, it would simply be impossible either to farm or garden. The result would be chaos and confusion. Only a fool would disregard this invariable rule.

Undoubtedly all of this seems so obvious that it is senseless to belabor the point. We know this so well that we do not give it a second thought when we are ready to plant our fields or gardens. But the trouble is, that what we take for granted in the realm of the

natural, we sometimes pay no attention to in the realm of the spiritual. Then man thinks that he can plant something of one kind and reap an altogether different harvest. He thinks that he may walk in a way of sin as he pleases, but still reap the blessings of salvation. He supposes that he can believe what he chooses and still go to heaven. He maintains that, regardless of what he sows, the harvest will turn out all right. What is a hard and fast rule in creation he thinks has no significance in his spiritual life.

The temptation to forget or minimize this rule of God is very great for us too. It *was* for the *Galatians*. Paul had warned them in this letter of the serious errors of the Judaizers with their return to the practices and ceremonies of ancient Jewish law, emphasizing that circumcision was necessary unto salvation. In contrast, the apostle emphasizes the blessed truth of justification by faith without the works of the law. He proclaims the cross of Christ as the sole ground of our salvation. He insists that the cross has delivered us from the bondage of the law that we might live in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free—free to walk in sanctification of life in distinction from licentiousness.

So these words come as a warning to them and to us: “Be not deceived; God is not mocked.” What we sow we shall surely reap!

The sowing

There is no doubt in our minds that we may expect to reap a crop identical with the type of seed that we sow. In this way God has ordered agriculture. We know that at no time will it ever be any different. But we must also live in the consciousness that the same holds true *spiritually*. We must realize that in our lives in this world we are sowing spiritually—every day, every hour, every moment. Every thought, every desire, every word, every action or deed we perform is a seed that we drop into soil. Notice that the apostle speaks of two kinds of soil, as well as two kinds of seed. We are constantly sowing seed, whether it be into the soil of the flesh or into the soil of the Spirit.

The soil of the flesh is our old nature that is corrupted by sin. We are born into this world with a nature that is corrupt in every respect, totally depraved. Our minds are filled only with evil thoughts. Our wills can only produce evil lusts and desires. And our bodies are the instruments of sin through which we carry out our evil desires and corrupt ideas. Obviously, this flesh can never produce any good seed. If this were all that could be said, then our whole life we would sow seed produced *by* our flesh, and sown in turn *in* our flesh. There would only be a repeated sowing of bad seed into bad soil. And there would only and ever be a bitter harvest of corruption leading to eternal desolation in hell. So it is for the ungodly, “because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7).

But, the apostle also speaks of a soil of the Spirit. This soil of the Spirit is not found in everyone, but only in those whom God has chosen from all eternity. Christ has purchased His people with the price of His own precious blood and has shed abroad His Spirit into our hearts. The Spirit of Christ creates within us a new heart, so that we are renewed within the depths of our life and so that we now have a soil of the Spirit! That does not mean that we no longer sin, for we still must live in the body of this death. So, the result is that the true child of God, living in this world, produces in his life two kinds of seed. There is the good seed of good works, which are the fruit of the Spirit by faith. And there is also the seed of our own sinful flesh.

We go forth, from the moment we are born to the moment we die, sowing seed. In every thought, word, and deed we are sowing seed in either of these two soils. Sad to say, much of the time we sow to the flesh. Each wicked thought, word, or deed is another seed dropped into the soil of the flesh. That is true of all of our sin—our lying, our cheating, our jealousy and envy, our gossip and evil speaking, our lusts and uncleanness. In the previous chapter the apostle has warned concerning the works of the flesh. To follow after sin and the carnal desires of the flesh is to drop seeds into the soil of the flesh. To deny the truth and create discord in the church is sowing corrupt seed. To rebel against God and despise all that is holy and good is to take seeds germinated in our flesh and sow them again into the same soil. What a horrible sowing!

The reaping

Make no mistake, the harvest surely comes! What we sow we shall reap. The type of seed that we sow will also reappear in the harvest. One who plants a seed must expect the harvest. The day comes when he must

reap the fruit of what he has sown. As true as that is in creation, so true it is in our lives from a spiritual viewpoint.

The seeds of sin and wickedness and the lie sown in our confession and walk will produce a harvest of corruption. You simply cannot expect to sow one kind of seed and reap another kind! That is the way it is. It is a rule of God that we can never change. To say that you can walk in ways of sin and reap a good harvest is sheer folly! It will never happen. Once you have committed yourself to a way of sin, if you do not turn from that way in sincere repentance, the harvest will grow in your life. Once you have committed yourself to compromising the truth of God’s Word, if you do not return from that way, the bitter harvest will grow in your life. You will reap in the days to come all the grievous fruit of the seeds you have sown.

But thanks be to God, for one who sows in the Spirit, the opposite is true. He takes the seeds of the fruit of the Spirit which have grown in his life, and he sows them again. The fruit that the Spirit produces is love for the truth. And in our lives the Spirit works so that we take the truth and grow in it—we love it, cherish it, are willing to fight for it and defend it. And we reap the blessings of more good seed produced by the Spirit; we sow it in the same soil from which it came forth.

The same holds true from a practical point of view as we see the fruit of the Spirit in our lives. Paul tells us in chapter 5:22, 23, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance....” As we sow in the Spirit, we grow in sanctification. We see our sins; we confess our sins; we flee from them; we forsake them. Yes, we reap the harvest: we grow daily in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. And in so doing we sow seeds into the soil of the Spirit ever and again. And the harvest continues through life. We reap the fruit of comfort, joy, strength, peace, patience, and hope even in the midst of all the trials of life. We come to enjoy in all our life the glorious harvest of the seeds that we, by grace, have sown.

The seriousness

Do we see, then, how serious this matter of sowing and reaping is? We may not think that our sins will have no effect upon us. We may not think that we can sin with impunity, that there are no consequences. Do not forget we are sowing!

And let us not think that this does not apply to the youth for, after all, we speak of youth as being a time “for sowing wild oats.” How shockingly ironic is this expression in light of this Word of God! How easy it is

to consider our youth, the teenage years, as a carefree, fun-filled period of life when we may do as we please. After all, we can get serious and straighten up when we are older.

The apostle declares, “Be not deceived; God is not mocked!” We cannot sow wild oats when we are young and suppose that we will not have to face up to the harvest! Seeking our fellowship with unbelievers, walking in the lusts of the flesh, being entertained by the movies and music of the world—the list goes on—remember we are sowing! We are sowing seeds of sin in the soil of the flesh, and the harvest will be bitter! There will be sorrow and trouble and misery. And only by God’s grace can we pray, “Lord, remember not the sins of my youth.” But still we reap from those evil seeds. We can make mistakes, fall into sins that affect us the rest of our lives. Think of sins of fornication, drunkenness, drug abuse, and other criminal acts. We shall surely reap later on all the fruits of the seeds that we have sown. And, apart from the grace of God, the harvest is reaped forever in the desolation of hell.

Let us remember too that this harvest is not only reaped in *our* lives, but also in the lives of our *children*. The harvest continues to bear fruit in the generations that follow us. Our lifestyle, our faithfulness or negligence regarding spiritual things, in all of this we are sowing seeds. We will not only reap the harvest, but our children will also. Seeds of sin and wickedness

will bring forth a bitter harvest also in the generations to come.

If this were not the case, God would be mocked. If we could sow corruption and reap blessings, God’s justice would be a plaything. People could then afford to sneer at God and mock His holiness. But this is never the case! God is the sovereign One. And man can never change that in any respect. God is holy, just, and good. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked!”

Let us be encouraged in the fact that also the opposite is true. To sow good seed in the soil of the Spirit is to reap a blessed harvest, not only for ourselves, but also for our children. Our covenant God will save His children from our children. The seeds planted by grace in the soil of the Spirit will bear their fruit! That unfailing promise of God is an incentive to spur us on to faithfulness. What are you sowing? If you are walking in sin, repent and confess and forsake every evil way lest the fruit appear in the harvest of corruption! Take refuge in the cross of Jesus Christ! Seek grace to walk in righteousness and truth, and the harvest for us and for our children is life everlasting!

May we think on these things, as we behold the creation round about us in every season. Oh, the wisdom of God who has created the earthly to be a picture of the heavenly, spiritual realities! As we see the beauty of God’s creation now in this season of harvest, let us take heed unto our spiritual sowing and reaping.

Editor’s Notes

Prof. Russell Dykstra

With all thanks and praise to God, we begin the 94th year of printing the *Standard Bearer*. The first issue of the *SB* consisted of sixteen pages, containing nine articles and three poems. Four men made up the entire staff. I am more thankful than I can express that in the upcoming year the *SB* has a total of 38 different writers who have agreed to contribute articles—from two articles to ten or twelve. By God’s grace working in these men and women, the *SB* will continue to be a Reformed magazine devoted to defending and expounding the Reformed faith over against error.

A new year typically brings changes of some kind to the *SB*. The changes in design and color are obvious. We hope you approve. Changes also occurred in the writing personnel. With appreciation for their past contributions, we bid farewell (for only a short time, we hope) to Revs. Garry Eriks and Martin Vander Wal. We extend a hearty welcome to two new writers—Rev.

Joshua Engelsma in “Strength of Youth,” and Mrs. Sue Looyenga in “When Thou Sittest in Thine House.” For the rest, observant readers might notice some shifting of writers. And, the “head” editor position transfers back (it moves every three years) from Prof. Barry Gritters to Prof. Russell Dykstra.

The editors take the opportunity to thank all the writers for their contributions in the last year. You have never allowed the Managing Editor’s file of articles to empty. And that leads to a final word of sincere and heartfelt thanks to the Managing Editor, Mr. Charles Terpstra, and to Mrs. Judi Doezeema, article organizer and typesetter extraordinaire. Without the diligent labors of these two, the *SB* would not appear in your mailbox as it does twenty-one times a year.

We covet your earnest prayers for God’s guidance and blessing as we begin a new volume year of the *Standard Bearer*.



Editorial

Rev. Kenneth Koole, pastor of Grandville Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

A CRC committee proposal for approval of same-sex marriage (2)

As we informed the reader last article, in 2014 Classis Grand Rapids (GR) East of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC) appointed a study committee on human sexuality, giving it the mandate “to examine and summarize the biblical/theological support currently offered by Christian proponents of same-sex marriage.”

In 2016 the committee submitted its report to Classis GR East, a report composed of “ten-strands of arguments woven together” of sufficient strength, its committee was convinced, to justify approving same-sex marriage in the name of contemporary Christianity. After twenty centuries of New Testament-age ignorance, man’s knowledge of biology has developed enough to warrant a reinterpretation of Scripture and to convince the CRC it is time to inform society (and its members) that she pronounces her blessing upon homosexual marriages.

The committee’s conclusion was in keeping with the mandate given it by Classis GR East. The report, in its “Background” section, informs the reader that Classis GR East “...has on two recent occasions unsuccessfully asked Synod for a re-examination of the biblical/theological arguments in the Synod 1973 report.”

Why these persistent petitions to Synod to re-examine the arguments of its 1973 report?

Because, as the report states, the official position of the CRC since 1973 has been that homosexual practice “...must be condemned as incompatible with obedience to the will of God as revealed in Holy Scripture.”

It is this that Classis GR East wants rescinded.

Its study committee returned in 2016, giving to its Classis a document of 142 pages presenting arguments to be used to challenge the 1973 decisions, a ten-strand approach the study committee felt could not easily be refuted.

To the best of our knowledge this report has not as yet been treated at the synodical level.

But the CRC is well-aware that the issue of homosexual unions is very much alive in its denomination.

The 2016 Synod appointed a five-year study committee to examine the whole issue of human sexuality, with

an emphasis on providing “biblical foundations” for gender in order to provide pastoral guidelines for its homosexual and lesbian members. But the committee was also to take into consideration “conclusions arising from [recent] scientific and social-scientific studies” (2016 CRC *Acts*, p. 916).

This can only mean that the Classis GR East report, which focuses on the recent social-scientific studies and their conclusions (as the liberal leaders in the CRC are well aware), remains very much in play.

The debate within the CRC is by no means settled. Its liberal leaders will not allow it to be.

Having in our previous article offered a brief overview of the classical study committee’s report, we now offer a brief critique of its main arguments.

The first ‘strand’ the committee presents for justifying same-sex marriage is its appeal to the “Guidance of the Holy Spirit in the Reinterpretation of Scripture.”

The committee argues,

At various times in history, the Holy Spirit prompted and guided the church into reinterpretation [!] of some parts of Scripture through a variety of means (p. 7; also cf. pp. 12-20).

The report then offers a number of historical evidences. For instance, the early church, seeing that the Holy Spirit fell upon uncircumcised Gentile believers, ceased requiring that her Gentile members needed to be circumcised and to refrain from unclean meat, as Scripture once required. Later the church was forced to concede that Galileo’s scientific discoveries were true, thus altering her interpreting Scripture to teach a flat earth and that the sun revolved around the earth. And there are other instances as well, such as the church changing her view on slavery and on loaning money at an interest rate.

In light of such evidence the committee concludes:

Comparing the issue of same-sex marriage to these other historical cases suggests that this might be another occasion in church history when the Holy Spirit is prompting a re-examination of Scripture (p. 7).

Without responding to each example cited, we simply state that the report's argument is specious, to say nothing of profane.

The difference between Christ's church declaring that Gentile believers no longer needed to be circumcised and a church declaring homosexual marriage to have God's approval, should be transparent. In the one instance, the change of Old Testament requirements took place with *apostolic approval*, in fact, by apostolic command. In the other, a church committee is seeking to *set aside* an apostolic doctrine. Homosexual practice is an issue that was directly addressed by the apostles in the Spirit-inspired Word. And there, in the New Testament age, such practice is forbidden and condemned.

To go contrary to the apostolic Word, and then claim to be led by the Spirit?

One defames the Spirit.

In reality, what the report is proposing is not change based on *reinterpreting* Scripture, but a change based on *dismissing* the apostolic teaching altogether.

Nor, for that matter, when it comes to Galileo's discoveries and the church (as a result, changing its view of the solar system) is one talking about the church being led to a *reinterpretation* of Scripture. Rather one is talking about believers, due to insufficient scientific knowledge, misinterpreting Scripture's description of the earth and the starry heavens, which misunderstanding of the solar system was *corrected* by believers as they came to greater scientific knowledge.

We say again, the seriousness of the committee's appeal to the guidance of the Holy Spirit in their promoting homosexual marriage cannot be overstated. It is an audacity.

There, however, is a Word of God that does apply at this point, one that the committee should seriously consider, namely, that of Acts 19:13ff. There the seven sons of Sceva tried to cast out a demon without apostolic authority. Said the evil spirit, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who [in the world] are you?"

And falling on them, that demon-possessed man drove them out with a fury.

And that was done with the approval of the Holy Spirit!

A second main argument that runs through a number of the report's 'strands' has to do with the difficulty of gender identification.

The committee points to cases where gender identification is difficult to determine at birth; or again, makes the claim that psychologists with the assistance of scientific studies have 'proved' that some are born with an attraction to the same gender and others are

predisposed to a transgender view of themselves, male psyches in female bodies, and vice-versa.

Proving what?

According to the committee, that when it comes to gender, we must not view it as a dichotomy of male and female, either-or, but as "a spectrum" (cf. p. 9, section 2), ranging from hard-wired male to hard-wired female with a rainbow of variation between. And surely, concludes the report, this "has profound implications for our understanding and definitions of *same-sex* marriage." (p. 7)

Therefore, the report claims, Scripture's reference to male and female must be seen as a "descriptive way of speaking, not prescriptive or technical" (p. 8). In other words, when Scripture (through the eyes of its *pre-scientific* writer) declares that "male and female created he them," all the passage is really doing is *describing* them physically ("a descriptive way of speaking"), it is not 'prescribing' (*determining* in precise biological terms) what these persons really were in their deeper, biological, psychological sense.

That, evidently, God left for each to discover for him- or herself.

Which all leads the report to conclude:

Numerous advances in science over the last few decades lead us to reconsider whether various forms of same-sex attraction and intersex conditions should be seen as "creational variants" (p. 8, sect. 3).

"Creational variants"!

A phrase pregnant with implications.

The phrase implies that God created man not only as male and female (and as such meant for each other and needing each other), but now, as our advanced scientific knowledge makes plain, all the variations in between must also have been part of God's creation plan—meaning, we are to view them as made for each other and needing each other, just as Adam did Eve.

So, let each determine as best one can, who he/she really is, and then on that basis determine who along the spectrum will best answer one's needs and thus complete one's identity.

This, the report suggests, has been God's good will and intention all along.

We have neither the time nor space to respond to all this social-psychobabble. It is enough to keep in mind that this is the committee's rationale for justifying same-sex marriage.

The argument is clear. There are those who are attracted to others of the same gender, some by nurture, others by nature (as they are born with 'same-gender' inclinations, it is said). And the very fact that some

have these inclinations should justify their being called **not** to resist and refrain from their defiled inclinations, but to satisfy them.

A dangerous argument, as all anti-biblical perspectives are.

The question arises, what about pedophiles? Do not the social-scientists also consider them part of ‘the spectrum’? Of course, they do. If the other deviations are to be labeled ‘creational variants,’ so then is the pedophile inclination. And the argument for their sexual desires needing to be met must also follow.

And probably will be—by a future study committee.

We do not doubt that, at present, the classical study committee would oppose such, insisting that those with pedophile inclinations should rightfully be expected and required to deny themselves, not yielding to their defiled inclinations.

To which we respond, if Christ’s church can rightfully expect its members fighting *that* inclination to live celibate and to find the grace to do so as required by the apostolic Word, why can she not rightfully expect the same from those struggling with these other defiled inclinations?

If the church can argue that the ‘enabling’ grace can be found for the one, and then insisting that such live accordingly, certainly the grace can be found for these other deviant inclinations, the church insisting that such also live accordingly.

And such grace has been and can be found. Just read I Corinthians 6:11-13.

Another of the report’s arguments for today’s church not being bound by the apostolic Word condemning homosexual practices is its contention that the apostles were speaking of *abusive* sexual practices, not marriage unions.

Same-sex practices in ancient cultures typically involved pagan temple prostitution, pederasty, or high-status males using their power to convince or coerce low-status males...into submitting to exploitive sex. These practices constitute sinful disobedience to God and a disordering of the creational purposes for sex. The idea of life-long same-sex unions of equal partners was rare in ancient times.... For these reasons, when biblical writers justly condemned same-sex practices of their times, they were teaching against...the common practices with which they were familiar and had no way of considering the possibility or the potential benefits of life-long same-sex unions of equal partners... (sect. 8, p. 8).

There you have it.

It was abusive homosexual relationships, so common

in their age, that the apostles saw as corrupt and justly condemned, not the relationship as such. They were not considering loving, life-long relationships with attending benefits.

Sheer sophistry!

As if two exchanging vows suddenly sanctifies the defilement.

Scripture is clear—the relationship itself is ‘unnatural.’ The apostolic Word is plain. The affection itself is labeled as ‘vile’ (Rom. 1:26). And those who give themselves over to it the apostle charges with “chang[ing] the natural use into that which is against nature.”

To attempt to ‘sanctify’ the defilement by bringing God’s marriage ordinance into play only increases the audacity.

To be sure, no explicit apostolic word is to be found forbidding two males from ‘marrying’ each other. The reason is simple. It was something so ludicrous that Roman and Greek society, for all their immoralities, did not even consider this as plausible. They would have laughed the twenty-first century social scientists out of school!

“Are you Christians really such fools as to buy into that?”

And one more thing before we take leave of this report.

The committee argues its case in terms of “life-long committed relationships,” and then the wonderful benefits of such relationships homosexuals are being denied.

Life-long committed relationships.

This is something the CRC does not require even of its *heterosexual* members.

Nor would this committee dream of requiring such of those contemplating marriage. For such the CRC has argued for the benefits of divorce (on any grounds) if so desired. Surely, those contemplating marriage, for their psychological health, need to be assured that their vows do not necessarily commit them to something life-long at all.

But for their LGBT members they speak of wonderful benefits of “life-long commitments.” This to put the best spin on their proposal.

It is transparent dishonesty.

The committee is no more interested in the CRC requiring a life-long commitment of her homosexual members than she does of her other members. It is simply proposing the use of a vow to ‘justify’ a same-sex relationship. Which means, when the two weary of each other, as they will soon and often, they are free to end the charade and find another, all with the church’s approval.

And this all proposed in the most pious manner.

To this point, the CRC majority in its broadest assembly has resisted changing its present stance of forbidding same-sex marriages.

But, as the biblical phrase puts it, “The hand-writing is on the wall.”

That leaders within the CRC can speak in favor of

what the Classis GR East committee has proposed, and not be *de facto* suspended and deposed, means the enemy is under the wall and divine judgment is falling.

How long it will be before the CRC rescinds its 1973 decision and caves in to approving same-sex marriages in the name of Christian love remains to be seen.



All around us

Rev. Martyn McGeown, missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland.

Victory for street preachers in England

In recent years, there has been a troubling trend in the United Kingdom, in which the freedom of speech of street preachers has been increasingly curtailed. Whatever one might think of the practices and methods of street preachers, freedom of speech and freedom of religion are precious gifts that we enjoy (for now) in Western democracies, something our brothers and sisters in other lands do not enjoy. Americans have the First Amendment, while in the United Kingdom freedom of speech is generally protected in law.

The United Kingdom has several statutes designed to prevent public disorder and violence. Unfortunately, Christian preachers are being caught in the legal net that was originally designed to prevent riotous behavior, such as public drunkenness, brawling, and verbal abuse. For example, Section 31 of the *Crime and Disorder Act* (1998) makes it an offense to use “threatening or abusive words or behaviour or disorderly behaviour within the hearing or sight of a person likely to be caused harassment, alarm or distress thereby, and the offense was religiously aggravated.” As is often the case with legal matters, it comes down to definitions: what is harassment, alarm, or distress? When is it religiously aggravated? Is the mere mention of hell, sin, or the cross alarming or distressing? Is not the preaching of the cross an offense (a stumbling block)?

In February 2017, two preachers, Michael Overd and Michael Stockwell, both of whom are seasoned street evangelists, were convicted of such an offense at Bristol Magistrates’ Court. The case concerned an incident that took place the previous summer. The two evangelists

had been preaching in a shopping mall in Bristol when a group of spectators began to become agitated at the content of the sermons. As is often the case, they began asking hostile questions on the “hot topics” of the day, Islam and homosexuality, in an attempt to get the men to say something “offensive.” When the preachers answered the objections from the Bible, by insisting that Islam is not the way to God and that homosexuality is sinful behavior condemned in God’s Word, the crowd became more agitated and hostile, shouting abuse at the preachers. Eventually, the police were called and the preachers, who were deemed to be the cause of the trouble, were arrested. Take note—the hostile crowd or the hecklers (who were shouting obscenities at the preachers) were not arrested—the *preachers* were arrested. In fact, four preachers were arrested that day, but only the cases of Overd and Stockwell came to trial. Charges for the other men were dropped due to lack of evidence.

I tried to find an official transcript of the trial, but was unsuccessful in locating it. Therefore, I have to rely on the secular and Christian press reports, which, as you might imagine, vary in their perspectives.

Widely reported on the *Christian Concern* website were the remarks of the public prosecutor, Ian Jackson, who said, “Although the words preached are included in a version of the Bible in 1611, this does not mean that they are incapable of amounting to a public order offence in 2016.” Then he added the troubling words, “To say to someone that Jesus is the only God is not a matter of truth. To the extent that they are saying that the only way to God is through Jesus, that cannot

be a truth.”¹ It is one thing for a public prosecutor to *dislike* what the preachers were announcing about the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, but it is quite another for him to argue that the evangelists should be *forbidden* to preach it. Jackson is reported to have said that publicly quoting parts of the King James Bible in modern Britain should be “considered to be abusive and is a criminal matter.”² If it is unlawful to preach the Bible or certain parts of it on the street, when will it become unlawful to preach it in the church building or to publish it online via live-streaming, YouTube, or Sermonaudio websites? Bristol magistrates ruled against Overd and Stockwell and ordered them to pay just over £2,000 each (fines, “victim surcharges,” and prosecution costs), stating, “We feel it has been proved that both defendants’ behaviour went beyond preaching the virtues of their religion.”

The secular *Daily Mail* newspaper reported that the street preachers “ranted about other religions” and shouted “Mohammed is a liar” and “Allah is the greatest deceiver,” among other offensive statements. Video evidence presented to the court reportedly showed Stockwell saying, “Allah is the greatest deceiver—that’s in the Koran. You will die for your sins and be cast into hell.” Overd reportedly told the crowd, “Mohammed is a liar and a thief, just like you and me. Buddha isn’t on the cross—he is a liar, just like you and me.” During a discussion about sexual ethics, Overd reportedly remarked concerning David Cameron, the former British Prime Minister who championed the legalization of “same-sex marriage” in Britain, that “David Cameron is no more Christian than my dogs.”³

If what the *Daily Mail* reports is true (and I have not seen the video evidence to confirm it), what Overd

and Stockwell said was not criminal, but it was unwise. Shouting insults at people, even if the insults contain religious *truth* (it is *true* that Allah is a false god; it is *true* that Mohammed is a false prophet; it is *true* that Buddha did not die for our sins; and it is *true* that unrepentant sinners will be punished in hell, for example), is not the same as preaching, witnessing, or evangelism. It is also not the same as merely quoting in public from the King James Bible, which was the evangelists’ defense. Christians must not respond to hecklers with insults: we must give an answer “with meekness and fear” (I Pet. 3:15), “not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should receive a blessing” (I Pet. 3:9). I cannot imagine the apostle Paul standing in front of the temple of Diana in Ephesus shouting, “Diana is a deceiver and you are all going to burn in hell for worshipping her.” Of course, Paul preached *against idolatry*, but what was his *manner*? Listen to the testimony of the town clerk of Ephesus: “Ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess” (Acts 19:37). Clearly, Paul’s behavior was above reproach. I hope that this is true of Overd and Stockwell.

I understand the temptation to get into a heated debate with hecklers (it is even easier to do so online); but we must resist that temptation, for we represent both in our words and behavior the Lord Jesus. What appears to have happened here is as follows: the men were preaching Christ in (I hope) a proper manner, explaining who He is and what He has done, and calling the hearers to repentance. Certain onlookers were offended, especially at the message of “Christ alone.” These offended individuals, some of them seemingly supporters of Islam, tried to silence the preachers with argumentative questions. The preachers, provoked by the hecklers, exchanged words with them in which they shouted at the offended individuals. The result was increased offense and the threat of violence (not from the preachers, but from the hecklers), which led to the arrival of the police and the arrest of the preachers. What the police should have done was to disperse the hecklers who were shouting obscenities. If the obscenity-shouting hecklers had not moved on, *they* (and not the preachers) should have been arrested.

Happily, the preachers won their appeal at Bristol Crown Court and their conviction under Section 31 of the *Crime and Disorder Act* (1998) was overturned on June 29 of this year. Judge Martin Picton cited freedom of speech and freedom of expression concerns as he granted the appeal, remarking that while the

1 “Street Preachers Who Quoted Bible Convicted In ‘Modern-Day Heresy Trial,’” *Christian Concern* (February 28, 2017), <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/freedom-of-speech/street-preachers-who-quoted-bible-convicted-in-modern-day-heresy-trial> (accessed July 17, 2017).

2 “Christian Street Preachers Acquitted of Public Order Offences,” *Christian Concern* (June 29, 2017), <http://www.christianconcern.com/our-concerns/freedom-of-speech/christian-street-preachers-acquitted-of-public-order-offences> (accessed July 17, 2017).

3 “Evangelical Christian Preachers Confronted by Angry Mob After they Shouted Slogans About Mohammed and Allah Face Religious Abuse Trial,” *Daily Mail* (February 24, 2017) and “Preachers Fined £300 Each for Shouting ‘Mohammed Is A Liar’ and Telling Shoppers ‘Being Gay Is Immoral’ Have Their Convictions Overturned After Judge Rules That ‘They Were Just Expressing Religious Beliefs,’” *Daily Mail* (June 30, 2017), <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4255848/Evangelical-Christian-preachers-face-religious-abuse-trial.html> and <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4653742/Preachers-fined-300-convictions-overturned.html> (accessed July 17, 2017).

preachers “seemed to take some satisfaction in ‘working the crowd,’ [they] had not committed a public order offence,” the *Daily Mail* reported. Moreover, the court found that people do *not* have the right not to be offended, for an offended person can simply continue on his way without engaging an “offensive speaker” in debate. Commenting on the court victory, Stockwell said, “Our motivation for public preaching is love. We want people to have access to the good news about Jesus Christ. When we were convicted of public order offences in February, I was shocked that God’s message of love is now considered by some to be hateful and dangerous.... Today’s result is such a great victory.”

The day is coming when preachers will be silenced not only on the streets of England, but also in the churches. When the law of man forbids the preaching of the gospel, the true church must respond despite the world’s threatening, “We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20). And when the two witnesses of Revelation 11 are finally killed, which refers to the final silencing of the church’s public ministry, the time will be very short before the Lord Jesus returns, for then the preaching of the gospel will have accomplished what God intended, the salvation of the elect church.



Believing and confessing

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The name above all other names

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 36

Q. 99. What is required in the third commandment?

A. That we, not only by cursing or perjury, but also by rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God; nor by silence or connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and, briefly, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence; so that He may be rightly confessed and worshiped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

Q. 100. Is then the profaning of God’s name by swearing and cursing so heinous a sin that His wrath is kindled against those who do not endeavor, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

A. It undoubtedly is, for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of His name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death.

The Ten Commandments teach us not only what we should be and do, but also who and what God is. The first commandment teaches us that God is “one,” that He is God alone, and so demands our exclusive worship. The second commandment teaches us that God is Spirit, that He is invisible and altogether distinct from us, and so must be worshiped as He has distinctly commanded in His Word.

In the third commandment we learn that God is holy: in Himself, in His name, and in His revelation. Therefore, we are to treat with reverence all that is related to the holy name of God.

The wonderful name of God

The *name* of God refers to His person and character and all that He uses to reveal Himself to us.

It is common, in the Scriptures, to find that one is given a name that reflects his character or role. We can think of many examples of this: Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Samson, Joshua, Samuel, etc. In a similar way, the name of God tells us about His character of Being. However, in two important ways there is a difference: 1) God’s name is a perfect description and match to His character, and 2) God’s names are never sufficient to describe in human words His infinite Being

Because of this, God is given many, many names in the Bible. These include not only His personal names and titles (such as God, Jehovah, Lord of Hosts, etc.), but also all His attributes (infinity, eternity, immutability, wisdom, omnipotence, holiness, justice, mercy, truth, love, etc.), and the many biblical descriptions and illustrations of His character (a Rock, a Shepherd, a Refuge, a High Tower, etc.). The totality of God’s revelation is His name.

This means, also, that Jesus Christ is the name of God. In Scripture He shares the names and titles of God, as for example, His being called “Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace” (Is. 9:6). He is also said, in the New Testament, to receive a “name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:9), which points not only to the exaltation of His human nature, but also to the fact that He possesses the highest name, that is God’s own name. This, too, is why Christ is said to be the fullness of the revelation of God the Father (John 1:18 and Heb. 1:1ff.).

Because God also reveals Himself in His creation and works, there is also a sense in which the entire creation is a revelation of the name and character of God. Recently, I watched a total eclipse of the sun and the words of the psalmist came to mind, “The heavens declare the glory of God” (Ps. 19:1). Hence, we read in Psalm 8 that God’s name is “excellent in all the earth.” We interact daily with this aspect of the name of God, His self-revelation in creation and providence, but so often and easily we forget He is speaking to us.

Perhaps the most wonderful thing about the name of God is that we can and do know it. “Canst thou by searching find out God?” (Job 11:7). “Is not God in the height of heaven?” (Job 22:12). “...the world by wisdom knew not God...” (I Cor. 1:21). “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14). “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not” (John 1:5). I quote all these verses, not only to show the natural ignorance of man, but also to highlight the wonder that we can and do know God at all. The explanation is not in us, but in the fact that God speaks savingly to us, to communicate Himself to us, and to open our hearts by the Spirit and the gospel.

Especially marvelous is that He makes us know His personal name, that is, He gives us to know Him not only by a title, but in person. This is the idea in Scripture of His revelation through Moses to Israel of His name, Jehovah (Ex. 3:13, 14). A man may hold a public office and have a title, but to his children he is “father.” God, in the covenant, brings us to know Himself intimately and personally, not just to know about Him and His high position. This is accomplished, primarily, through the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us, so that in Him we might behold the glory of the Father, and that through believing in Him we might be called the sons and daughters of the living God (John 1:12-14). To us this revelation comes through the preaching of the gospel (I Cor. 1:21).

God’s condescension, however, does not change who He is nor the infinite majesty of His character, and so

our becoming familiar with God through His revelation ought not breed “familiarity” but reverence and awe.

A serious sin

To “take in vain” the name of God is to treat it lightly, to treat it as nothing, to use it without thought of the God whom the name represents. Because God’s name is His revelation, there are a variety of ways that one can fall into this sin.

The most obvious and blatant abuse of God’s name is by “cursing and swearing.” This involves a deliberate act of cutting down the name and honor of God. People often “damn” things in the name of God, or swear in the name of God when they are displeased with something or someone. Even more blatant is the ridiculing of God and the Bible by atheists and other unbelievers (for example, *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins).

The careless use of God’s name is another way one breaks this commandment. This may be in unnecessary expletives that are “soft” references to the name of God (“Jeez” or “Gee” for Jesus, “Gosh” for God, etc.) or in “vain repetitions” of God’s name as filler in our prayers. We should not babble on like the pagans do as though this will attract the attention and pleasure of God, but should use and speak His name with meaning.

Another way that we may become guilty of this sin is by silently allowing others to treat God’s name with disrespect. How quickly we are offended when someone defames a national symbol such as a flag or a historical figure, but often little is said about the sin and offense of treating God’s name with disdain. Both our jealousy for the name of God and our concern for the one who commits such a grievous sin should move us to speak in defense of God’s name and in warning against such abusers.

Perhaps the worst sin against this commandment is the teaching and promoting of false doctrine. When one fabricates and presents as true something that is contrary to God’s own revelation of Himself, he not only misrepresents the name of God, but under the name of Christianity (in God’s name) despises the very name of God Himself in His revelation in Scripture. How careful we must be in our doctrine and teaching!

Unbelief is another way that one takes the name of God in vain. To hear the gospel of Jesus Christ and then to disobey the call to believe in Jesus is to say something different about Him than is true. It is also to deny God’s revelation about yourself as a sinner.

As Christians, we bear the name of God. This means that all hypocrisy is the taking of God’s name in vain. For example, when we confess one thing in worship, and then live privately in contradiction to that confession, we are using God’s name as a cloak for our sin.

It is important for us to think about all the possible ways that we might use God's name in vain, for this is a most serious sin. Its seriousness comes out in the commandment and is stated very strongly in the catechism—"there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of His name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death." We must "endeavor" therefore to prevent and forbid this sin as much as we can.

This sin, which was punishable by death in the Old Testament, is a sin worthy of discipline and excommunication in the New Testament church. The greatest scandals in the church are not those sins that hurt us, but those that attack the name of God. As God is jealous of His name, so ought we to be. As John Calvin said,

It becomes us to regulate our minds and our tongues, so as never to think or speak of God and His mysteries without reverence and great soberness, and never, in estimating His works, to have any feeling toward Him but one of deep veneration.

A careful obedience

It is wrong to say, "Well, if God's name is so holy, and if it is so easy to break this commandment, then I will not use the name of God at all." This was what the Jews said when they refused to speak the name JHWH and instead said "Adonai." Similarly, the Anabaptists refused to use God's name in swearing an oath (we'll come to this in the next Lord's Day).

No, it is incumbent upon us to use God's name. In fact, the Word of God demands this of us—"Let them praise thy great and terrible name; for it is holy" (Ps. 99:3). The holiness of God's name demands that we *use* His name.

But how?

"...no otherwise than with fear and reverence..."

This indicates a careful obedience. We must rightly know, confess, and worship God's holy name.

To treat God's name as holy is, "first, rightly to know" God (Q&A 122). We know God from His abiding revelation in the Holy Scriptures. Our primary objective in studying God's Word is to learn more about Him. The Scriptures are also the foundation for all other learning, so that everything else we learn is tested through the knowledge of God from His Word. This means that education has a greater purpose than learning how to live in this world (in job or career preparation). As we learn, we learn about God's world and are never just learning for the sake of knowing.

We use God's name especially in confession and

worship. Confession is what we say to others. Worship is what we say to God. We are called to both, and both demand great care in the use of our words. Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 warns those who go "to the house of God" against a rash and hasty use of God's name and calls us to "be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools," (which sacrifice is to speak without thinking, Prov. 29:11). When it comes to matters of theology (the knowledge of God), we must not speak hastily as though we have all the answers, but rather have a teachable and humble spirit.

"And they that know thy name will put their trust in thee" (Ps. 9:10). The primary way to treat the name of God with reverence is to believe, that is, to put our faith in Jesus Christ who is the Word and revelation of God.

Do not say, "I don't and can't know God." God has declared His name openly (Ps. 98:1-4).

Do you believe?

Questions for discussion

1. What is it to "take the name" of God? Is this limited to our speech, or are there other ways we take up the name of God?
2. What is included in "the name" of God?
3. Think of at least three names of God and find their meaning. Do the same with the attributes of God.
4. What does the name "Jehovah" mean and what is its special significance in Scripture and among all the other names of God?
5. How is Jesus, our Mediator, "the name" of God?
6. How does this commandment show to us the wonder of our knowing the name of God?
7. In what ways is the Bible related to this commandment?
8. How is false teaching a form of taking God's name in vain?
9. What different types of bad language are forbidden by this commandment?
10. Since a Christian may not use immoral speech, how can he add strong emphasis to his speech when it is needed without sinning? Can you think of examples from Scripture?
11. When is it appropriate to speak out against the blasphemous use of God's name? When might it not be appropriate? Do you speak up in defense of God's name, or do you make excuses for your silence?
12. In what ways must we properly use the name of God?



Taking heed to the doctrine

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

Revelation, inspiration, and infallibility (3): “What saith the Scripture?” The Bible’s perspicuity

Previous article: May 15, 2017, p. 370

At bottom, the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was a return to the supreme authority of Holy Scripture. The Latin phrases coined by the Reformers to express their conviction were *sola Scriptura* and *prima Scriptura*. Scripture alone is the rule of faith and life. What Christians believe and how they live is determined only by Scripture. Scripture rules over the individual believer and over the church as a whole. It rules over the local church and over all church assemblies and councils. Nothing apart from Scripture need be believed or obeyed, and nothing contrary to Scripture may be believed or obeyed. Scripture is the supreme authority because Scripture is the Word of God—the Word of God in the words of men. Everything depends on that. Scripture is the supreme authority because Scripture comes to us with the authority of God Himself whose Word the Bible is.

Standing behind the authority of Scripture is the truth of Scripture’s *perspicuity* or *clarity*. That only stands to reason. How can Scripture function as the authority in our lives, if it is a book whose contents are unclear, mystifying, perplexing, or contradictory? It cannot. If Scripture is authoritative, it must also be perspicuous. The message of Scripture is not hidden in befuddling allegories, as some have taught. God is not playing “hide-and-seek” in the Bible, concealing Himself behind allegorical trees in a deep, dark forest. Rather, God is making Himself and His will known in the Bible. The Bible is *revelation*, God speaking to men in such a way that they are able to understand—truly to know Him and His truth.

In our last article we began to treat the truth of the perspicuity of Scripture, one of the attributes of Scripture. We explained what is and what is not meant by this important doctrine. In this article, we will demonstrate and prove the perspicuity of Scripture, a cherished truth to Reformed Christians.

The Reformers and Reformed Creeds on perspicuity

The great Reformer Martin Luther led the way in championing Scripture’s perspicuity. Significantly, in the beginning of his monumental work, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther defended the clarity of Holy Scripture. He did so in opposition to Erasmus of Rotterdam, who had written in defense of the freedom of the will of fallen man. Whereas Erasmus had taught that Scripture was unclear and obscure and, therefore, unable to be a final court of appeal on the issue of the freedom or bondage of the will, Luther defended Scripture’s clarity.

Luther began his defense by inveighing against “that pestilential saying of the Sophists that the Scriptures are obscure and ambiguous.” He said that “it ought above all to be settled and established among Christians that the Holy Scriptures are a spiritual light far brighter than the sun itself, especially in things that are necessary to salvation.”¹ He went on to say that “those who deny that the Scriptures are quite clear and plain, leave us nothing but darkness.... In opposition to you [Erasmus] I say with respect to the whole Scripture, I will not have any part of it called obscure.”² In support of Scripture’s perspicuity, Luther appealed to Scripture’s own teaching concerning itself. “Psalm 119:130 says: ‘The opening of thy words gives light; it imparts understanding to the simple.’ Here the words of God are represented as a kind of door, or an opening, which is plain for all to see and even illuminates the simple.”³

John Calvin was in complete agreement with his fellow Reformer. Writing in his *Institutes*, Calvin said “God, the Artificer of the universe, is made manifest to

1 Martin Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, trans. Philip S. Watson, in *Luther’s Works* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 33:91.

2 Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 33:94.

3 Luther, *The Bondage of the Will*, 33:92.

us in Scripture, and that what we ought to think of him is set forth there, lest we seek some uncertain deity by devious paths.”⁴ Later, he appealed in support of the clarity of Scripture to Psalm 19:7 and 8: “The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes.” On the basis of this text, Calvin said that Scripture “is the very school of God’s children.” The Bible is God’s school, in which He teaches the smallest children about Himself and about the whole of the universe.

Many times and in many places in his commentaries, Calvin appealed to and defended the perspicuity of Scripture. One example of this is his commentary on Deuteronomy 30:11, “For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.” He writes that “Moses commends... the Law, on account of its easiness; because God does not propound to us obscure enigmas to keep our minds in suspense, and to torment us with difficulties, but teaches familiarly whatever is necessary according to the capacity, and consequently the ignorance of the people.”⁵

Following the lead of the Reformers, the Reformed confessions also attest to the perspicuity of Scripture. The Belgic Confession of Faith treats extensively the doctrine of Scripture in Articles 2-7. At the outset, in Article 2, the Confession teaches that in Scripture God “makes himself more clearly and fully known to us...as far as is necessary for us to know in this life, to His glory and our salvation.” The Westminster Confession of Faith treats the doctrine of Scripture in its first chapter. Paragraph seven is devoted to perspicuity:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all; yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed, for salvation, are so clearly propounded and opened in

some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them.

There can be no doubt that part and parcel of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture is the Reformed conviction concerning Scripture’s perspicuity. It is not an exaggeration to say that the entire Reformed doctrine of Scripture stands or falls with the perspicuity of Scripture. Take away the truth of Scripture’s perspicuity and the whole edifice of the Reformed doctrine of Scripture comes crashing to the ground.

Biblical support for the doctrine of perspicuity

The Reformers were persuaded of the truth of Scripture’s perspicuity and the Reformed confessions articulate this doctrine because this is the teaching of the Scripture itself—if I may say, *clearly* the teaching of Scripture. What is the biblical support for the doctrine of the perspicuity of Scripture? In different ways and by various lines of argument the Scriptures testify to their own clarity.

One can defend Scripture’s perspicuity by appeal to the doctrine of God’s covenant. How foundational to all truth is the covenant of God! As a covenant God, God intends through His Word to commune and fellowship with His people. Real communion and intimate fellowship demand clarity

One can defend Scripture’s perspicuity by appeal to the doctrine of God’s covenant. How foundational to all truth is the covenant of God! As a covenant God, God intends through His Word to commune and fellowship with His people. Real communion and intimate fellowship demand clarity on the part of those who intend to commune and fellowship with each other.

on the part of those who intend to commune and fellowship with each other. God is a covenant Father, and as a Father He intends to communicate His love, His will, and His truth to His dear children. God is a Husband, and as a loving Husband He intends to communicate with His wife, that is, the church that He loves. Scripture’s perspicuity follows necessarily from the truth that the God of Scripture is a covenant God.

The doctrine of the perspicuity of the Bible can also be established by asking the question, “To whom is the Bible addressed?” For whom was Scripture written? Is the Bible only for the scholars who have their Ph.D.s and exceptional intellectual gifts? Is the Bible addressed to those only who have a working knowledge of Hebrew and Greek? Has it been written only for those who have an acquaintance with ancient Near-Eastern culture and religions? Or has it been written for those only who

4 John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1.6.1; 1:71.

5 John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*, trans. Charles William Bingham (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, repr. 1984), 2:412.

have expertise in Second Temple Judaism or Greco-Roman customs?

The obvious answer to these questions is, “Of course not!” Scripture is addressed to the ordinary believer. The Bible is addressed “To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (Rom. 1:7). It is addressed to “the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours” (I Cor. 1:2). Or, “to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops [elders] and deacons.” Note that. Paul did not write to the elders and deacons in the congregation at Philippi exclusively, as if they alone were capable of understanding what he would write. But the Spirit directed him to write to “all the saints” in Philippi, *including* the elders and deacons. And so it is with all the New Testament epistles. God’s Word is addressed to the church, the church as a whole, to all the members of the church: young and old, male and female, single and married, laymen and officebearers alike. God addresses His Word to all the different members of the church because they are all, by God’s grace and through the Spirit, capable of understanding His Word.

The two classic passages of the New Testament that teach Scripture’s infallible inspiration also teach the truth of Scripture’s perspicuity. That is very striking.

The first of those passages is II Timothy 3:16 and 17: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.” But Scripture is profitable and serves for the instruction of the believer and thoroughly furnishing the child of God unto all good works **only** if Scripture can be understood. How in the world can Scripture serve the purpose for which God gives it, according to II Timothy 3:16 and 17, if Scripture remains a deep, dark mystery, a book full of conundrums and riddles? It cannot. If Scripture is to be profitable and serve the purpose for which God gives Scripture, it must be understandable—understandable to the ordinary believer.

Significantly, the immediate context of II Timothy 3:16 and 17 contains a powerful testimony to Scripture’s perspicuity. In the two verses that precede, the apostle exhorts Timothy, “But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and has been assured of, knowing of

whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” Notice that. As is the case with our own covenant children, already “from a child” Timothy had “known the Holy Scriptures.” Already as a child! What a testimony to Scripture’s perspicuity!

The other classic passage on the infallible inspiration of Scripture is II Peter 1:19-21: “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: knowing this first, that no prophecy of the Scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” Scripture is a

light that shines in a dark place—the only light that shines midst the deep, deep darkness of the evil world in which God’s people are called to live.

That is consistently the biblical description of and metaphor to which

Scripture is compared. Scripture is a lamp and a light: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple” (Ps. 119:130). Scripture is not a deep, dark book out of which believers can neither make heads nor tails. Not at all, but rather, Scripture is a lamp and light, that is, clear and understandable to the people of God.

I thank God that He has given us His Word in such a way that we are able to understand it, to comprehend it, to grow and develop in it. A conviction concerning the perspicuity of Scripture has motivated me to preach the Scriptures for nearly forty years. It has led me to presume to be able to teach aspiring seminary students, as well as young people and children in the catechism classes of the church. It led my wife and me to read and study the Scriptures with our children as they were growing up, especially in family devotions. Now it motivates us when we are able to do the same with our grandchildren when they, as they often do, visit in our home. It is the incentive for our own personal devotions and the devotions we have with just the two of us before we turn the lights off in our bedroom at night. We are able to read and to understand the Word of God.

How precious practically is the perspicuity of Scripture in the everyday life of the believer! Let us never take this grand truth for granted.

Scripture is not a deep, dark book out of which believers can neither make heads nor tails. Not at all, but rather, Scripture is a lamp and light, that is, clear and understandable to the people of God.



When thou sittest in thine house

Rev. Arie denHartog, a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Teaching our children love for the church

Previous article: March 1, 2017, p. 255.

The Reformed believer has greater incentive than anyone else for teaching his children to love the church of God. We have the clearest and most biblical understanding of what the church is and who her members are. The church is God's holy dwelling place with His chosen people. There God reveals His glory and salvation. Outside of the church there is no salvation. The membership of the church is determined by God, not by man's choice. The Lord gathers His church with believers and their covenant children. This is God's way from the beginning to the end of the world. God's redeemed people are gathered to be members of the church that they together might worship and glorify their God and give Him thanks.

Covenant children are from birth members of the church. God saves and blesses them even before these are able fully to understand the wonders of God. They are not merely external members of the church institute. The Lord causes them truly to be members of His church through the work of His Spirit in their hearts.

Psalms 128 speaks of God's blessing on Zion (the church of the Old Testament) "Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel." Psalm number 407 (based on Psalm 149) begins with these lines: "O praise ye the Lord and sing a new song, Amid all His saints His praises prolong; The praise of their Maker His people shall sing, And children of Zion rejoice in their King." The reference to the children of Zion in this psalm could be to all the members of the church or particularly to the covenant children who are found among the members of the church. Psalm 144:12 speaks of God's promise concerning the sons and daughters of the covenant in this way: "That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

There are many passages in the New Testament that also speak highly of the children of the church. The church of the New Testament is the reality of what in

the Old Testament was called Zion. One of the beauties and blessings she has is that in her are joyful children saved by Jesus Christ to be citizens of His everlasting kingdom.

Jesus builds His church through saving and blessing her members (see Matt. 16:18). When godly mothers and fathers brought their covenant children to Jesus when He was on earth, He took them up into His arms and embraced them and blessed them and said concerning them, "of such is the kingdom of heaven."

On the day of Pentecost the church by the Spirit of Christ burst forth from the limitations of national Israel. The exalted Christ began to gather His church from all nations, tribes, and peoples of the earth. The inspired apostle Peter declared that from Pentecost on, the Spirit of the exalted Christ would be poured out on the sons and daughters of the covenant. Not just on a people few in number, not just on adults, but also on children (see Acts 2:17).

Peter went on to declare to those who repented and believed the gospel: "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call." This verse promises clearly that children of the New Testament church who are born of believing parents are by God included in the promise of the covenant. This is not true for every one of the children head for head, for God's decree of reprobation cuts across the lines of the covenant. The promise of God is particular to His elect and determined by the calling of the Lord. The purpose of God was finally to gather before His throne in heaven a church made up of an innumerable host of His elect. God will be praised by young and old as members of His glorious church whom He delights to save.

It is a grievous thing that leaders in Baptist churches and other evangelical churches, claiming to preach the gospel of Christ, exclude children from the covenant by their practice of refusing to administer the baptism to them. When Jesus was on earth, He declared that God ordained His praises from the mouths of babes and sucklings.

God commanded that the sign of the covenant (circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament), be administered also to covenant infants. The promise of the covenant was more gloriously realized and fulfilled when the Spirit of the exalted Christ was poured out on His church. God did not suddenly on the day of Pentecost announce that He would no longer include children of believers in His covenant of grace. The covenant of God maintained and realized at Pentecost was not, after all, an entirely different covenant but the same everlasting covenant that God made with our father Abraham, now in the New Testament gloriously fulfilled in Christ. Believers and their children are in this present age, together with the saints of God in the Old Testament, to be counted and distinguished from the world as the children of Abraham.

When the gospel was being preached after Pentecost to Jews and Gentiles and even throughout the world, we read repeatedly that God in His wonderful grace saved His people in families. Because of this common way of the Lord's working, whole families were baptized at once. Given the number of these family baptisms recorded in the book of Acts, we may assume that at least some of these included infant children. Parents were placed under solemn obligation to teach their children the fear of the Lord as they were growing up. By such instruction the work of the Lord would be accomplished in their hearts.

When the inspired apostle Paul later wrote letters to the apostolic churches, it is evident from several places in his letters that children were present in the congregation when the church gathered to worship God. They were highly regarded as members of the church. The great apostle of the Lord took the opportunity on numerous occasions to address these children of the church, speaking particularly to them of their calling and of the pleasure of the Lord in them when they learned from their parents to fear and obey Him.

There is no evidence in Scripture that in the apostolic churches the children were ushered out of the service before the gospel was preached only to the adults. It was not imagined that the preaching of the gospel to adults was so high and lofty that the children could not receive this preaching and be blessed with understanding of it. These children were not separated to receive some simplistic Bible stories with little moralisms sometimes taught by cartoon characters because they were not able to receive the preaching of the whole counsel of God. It is a wonderful thing that in the Reformed churches covenant children show amazing evidence of being able to receive God's Word

and are encouraged to speak of their child-like faith with their parents.

All of the above gives Reformed believers great incentive to bring their children with them to church. From earliest childhood they must be taught love for the church. This instruction ought to begin by our word and by the godly example of their parents. Children can easily detect in their parents whether or not they have true spiritual regard for the church. Lack of this on the part of covenant parents will do great damage to the children and often cause them to grow up to despise the church and forsake her later in their life.

Teaching our children love for the church begins with teaching them the greatness, holiness, and truth of the God of the church. The church is the place where God dwells in the midst of His people; He shows His glory and greatness and majesty there. He is such a great God who must be worshiped with fear and trembling and with holy reverence and awe. He is to be worshiped with joy and thanksgiving, praising Him for His great salvation of His people and their children. Coming to church is not a form of entertainment similar to going to a concert or sports event. Neither is it to be considered a boring ritual only engaged in out of necessity or mere formal tradition. We do well as parents when we prepare ourselves sincerely and prayerfully for the holy exercise of the worship of God. Because our children have the same sinful nature as we parents do, there will be times when our children go to church grudgingly, desiring rather to use the Lord's Day for worldly pleasure and entertainment. This sinful attitude must be patiently and firmly resisted and driven from the sinful hearts of our children; certainly it must not be tolerated or made light of.

When the church gathers to worship God, God Himself speaks to His people as well as to the children there. They must be disciplined to listen quietly and reverently. Things like toys and coloring books should not be brought to church to entertain our children when the Word of God is being preached. The good practice of teaching careful listening by such things as note-taking, even by children, can promote a proper attitude in them.

We must be careful to speak well of the church in our homes. We must speak well of her officebearers and of her ministry. If the ministry of the church must be criticized, we must do this with great care when our children are present lest we breed in our children sinful thoughts and evil criticism of the church and an unholy attitude towards her.

We teach our children love for the church by teaching them love for her members and the special communion

in the common faith in the Lord we have with them. These members are fellow sinners/saints. They are not yet perfect; they have their faults, even as we all do. But as brethren with us through the salvation of Jesus Christ, they are to be regarded as washed by the same precious blood of Jesus Christ that we are. We must strive together to maintain the unity of the Spirit among the members of the church. We must pray for the peace of God to rule in the hearts and lives of the members of the church. We must teach our children in our homes to pray regularly for the members of the church who are going through great trials. Practical care and love for fellow members of the church must be instilled in the hearts of our children from earliest childhood.

It happens in some homes that, because of the conversation and behavior of parents, enmity is stirred up in the hearts of children against other members of the church. The home is made to be the center of gossip and evil speaking against the members of the church. There are few things more destructive to love for the church than such sinful behavior.

We teach our children love for the church when we

are regularly part of the communion and fellowship of the church. We do this by being active in the meetings of the church and delighting in the fellowship of her members. Our best friends as parents should be fellow members of the church. In this way, we give a good example to our children. If our children are finding their best friends in the world rather than in the church, we do well to consider whether this has happened as the result of poor parenting on our part. We ourselves need the friendship, support, and encouragement of the members of the church, and so do our children. If our children have their best friends in the world, they are in great danger of the worldly influence of these friends and the possibility of their drifting away from the church. Because of this influence, leaving the church becomes an increasing danger as they grow up to be teenagers and young adults.

Let us pray earnestly that God will bless us in the midst of His church. Let us rejoice together with our children in the glorious God of the church and in His wonderful salvation.



Go ye into all the world

Rev. Richard Smit, pastor of the First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

The use of the Heidelberg Catechism in foreign missions

That the Heidelberg Catechism was intended from the outset to be preached and taught in established churches is evident from the Preface written by its royal sponsor, Elector Frederick III of the Palatinate:

We do herewith affectionately admonish and enjoin upon every one of you, that you do, for the honour of God and our subjects, and also for the sake of your own soul's profit and welfare, thankfully accept this proffered Catechism or course of instruction, and that you do diligently and faithfully represent and explain the same according to its true import, to the youth in our schools and churches, and also from the pulpit to the common people....

Very soon after its publication, the Heidelberg Catechism was embraced by the Reformed Churches in

the Netherlands for preaching in their Sunday worship services. This became an established tradition in the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands when the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) mandated it in Article 68 of our Church Order. While the good tradition of the preaching and teaching of the Heidelberg Catechism in an established congregation is clear, can the same be said for the use of the Heidelberg Catechism in foreign mission work?

The main objection to the use of the Heidelberg Catechism in foreign mission work is that it is inappropriate in foreign context (for example, Asian countries) because that confession was forged in ecclesiastical controversy in Germany. It is argued that any confession used in foreign missions or adopted by an indigenous church ought to be developed by them

with the missionary, “from scratch,” and within their own culture. To require an indigenous mission church to adopt a creedal formulation from a foreign mother church would be presumptuous and make the confession of the indigenous church unauthentic.

On a practical level, some have argued that the confession is only suitable for established and educated churches and that it is much too heavy and deep for those whose spiritual appetite and educational ability can only handle the “milk” of the Word.

Much has been written to support these types of objections, yet we must dismiss them, first of all, from the perspective of the history and fruitfulness of Reformed foreign missions. The history of Reformed missions shows that it was the conviction of Reformed churches early on that the Heidelberg Catechism ought to be preached and taught in both domestic mission (to those within the sphere of the church world) and also foreign missions (to those who had never had the gospel preached to them or to their previous generations).

This conviction was nurtured in part by the confession itself. It is evident that the Heidelberg Catechism itself is mission-minded and born out of the need to witness and promote the true faith of Holy Scripture. There are many references in the Heidelberg Catechism that can be cited regarding the work of missions, but that subject will need to wait for another article.

That conviction about the good use of the Heidelberg Catechism in missions soon became evident after it was published in 1563. It was translated immediately from the original German into Latin by February 1563, which made it readily available to all the Latin-speaking people and scholars at the time. Within twenty-five years after its first publication, it had been translated into Dutch, Saxon-German, Hungarian, English, French, Polish, Lithuanian, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. In fact, for the purpose of missions among the Jews in Europe, it was also published in Hebrew. Interestingly, one of the converts from Judaism by means of the Hebrew translation was a professor of the University of Heidelberg named Tremelius. With a similar purpose in mind, the Catechism was translated into the Greek, with the objective that it might convert the Patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox church and extend the Reformation into Eastern Orthodoxy as well.

Although the Synod of Dordt (1618-1619) ran out of time to treat material regarding foreign mission work to the East Indies (Indonesia), subsequent national synods did treat this. When the Dutch Reformed missionaries were sent out to the Far East in the seventeenth century, they used the Heidelberg Catechism in the preaching and teaching. To assist in their work, the Catechism

was translated into Malay, Javanese, Singalese, Tamil, Chinese, and Japanese.

The Reformed Churches in America (RCA) used the Heidelberg Catechism in its foreign mission work abroad. For example, in an 1855 report of the work of the RCA in India, it was noted that the Catechism was being used consistently in the mission work in Vellore in the RCA’s Arcot Mission. Although reproached for doing so, they persevered in the use of the Catechism in their preaching and catechetical instruction. In their mission work in China RCA missionaries also used the Catechism in their preaching and instruction from the outset, not only with men for the ministry of the Word but also in the local congregations and mission outposts. The goal, of course, was that the indigenous churches become confessionally Reformed, not just in name, but also in the living faith in Christ Jesus.

In accord with Reformed foreign mission history, the call letter for foreign missionaries to our PRCA foreign fields includes the mandate that the missionary preach the Heidelberg Catechism. The call letter from the sending church states: “...The labors we expect of you, should it please God to send you to us as our missionary to [name of field of labor] are: to provide preaching of the Holy Gospel twice on the Lord’s Day, including Catechism preaching....” And, so it is today, that by the grace of God we observe, for example, that the Protestant Reformed Churches in the Philippines, our PRCA missionaries, and other Reformed churches and contacts in the archipelago, administer the Word of God in their preaching and teaching by means of the Catechism for the edification and gathering of God’s church.

As regards the practical objections mentioned above, indeed, it is not hard to imagine that a foreign missionary may face serious challenges with the use of the Heidelberg Catechism. Some of the challenges among mission contacts may be related to a lack of basic knowledge of Scripture or a lack of education for reading. There may be significant barriers of language and communication between the missionary and his contacts. Nevertheless, even recent and current Reformed mission work, such as in isolated outposts in Irian Jaya, Papua New Guinea, or outlying islands in the Philippines, indicates that the challenges of communication and levels of education are not insurmountable with the wise use of some legitimate tools. While some of these significant challenges might possibly delay the immediate and full use of the Catechism in some very specific situations, yet the goal must remain that it be used as soon as linguistically and educationally feasible. While linguistic, educational,

and economic barriers in foreign missions may appear impossible for us to cross, they have been crossed by the wonder-work of the Holy Spirit through the weak means of faithful missions for the gathering of His eternally chosen, catholic church.

The good use of the Catechism in foreign mission preaching and teaching is based upon good, biblical foundation. A reason that the Catechism ought to be used for preaching and instruction in foreign missions is found in the Catechism itself in Lord's Day 7. Question 22 asks: "What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?" Answer 22 states: "All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us."

We confess from the truth of the Word of God that the faith which a Christian must believe is a "catholic undoubted Christian faith." The faith of the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, and the Athanasian Creed is catholic. The blessed faith of our Lord Jesus Christ that we must know and of which we must be assured is not restricted to one nation, tribe, and tongue, but is catholic—truly universal—for those ingrafted into Jesus Christ, according to election, from every nation, tribe, and tongue. The German Heidelberg Catechism, as well as the French Belgic Confession and the Dutch Canons of Dordt, belong to the catholic faith of the

infallibly inspired Word of God for God's people in every nation, tribe, and tongue.

That the Catechism is a confession of the catholic faith became evident in the early years after its publication. Though originally published as a confession of a German Protestant Church, yet it was recognized, adopted, and cherished by the people of God who were Dutch, French, Italian, Spanish, Hungarian, Polish, Lithuanian, and other European nationalities and languages. That warm embrace did not stop at the borders and shores of Europe. The confession continued to be embraced by the true catholic church of Jesus Christ, through mission work and by the wonder work of the Holy Spirit in many other nations, languages, and tribes in Asia, Africa, the Americas, and islands of the seas.

"What is necessary for me to believe?" Indeed, that is the burning question of the foreign-mission contact.

May foreign missionaries, burdened by that burning question, faithfully and enthusiastically answer with "all things promised to us in the holy gospel, which our catholic, undoubted, Christian, and Reformed faith—including our Heidelberg Catechism—sets forth briefly, distinctly, personally, and warmly."

May the Lord continue to bless the good use of Catechism preaching and teaching in faithful Reformed missions abroad.



News from our churches

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

Trivia question

Do you know how many PRCA churches have been organized since the year 2000? Answer later in this column.

Minister activities

On August 20 the congregation at Doon, IA PRC received a letter of decline from Rev. Clayton Spronk to be a missionary to the Philippine mission field. We are thankful for God's clear revelation to Rev. Spronk.

Also on August 20 the congregation at Byron Center, MI PRC called Rev. Brian Huizinga to be their next pastor. Rev. Huizinga declined this call on September 10.

Candidate Matthew DeBoer accepted the call

extended to him from the Edgerton, MN PRC and was examined by Classis West in September.

Candidate Justin Smidstra accepted the call extended to him from First PRC of Holland, MI and declined the call from Southwest PRC.

Rev. E. Guichelaar declined the call from Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB Canada. Their new trio included Candidates Brian Feenstra, John Langerak, and Stephan Regnerus, with Candidate Feenstra receiving the call on September 3.

The Council at Southwest PRC of Wyoming, MI announced a trio from which to call a pastor: Rev. A. Lanning of Covenant PRC of Singapore, and Candidates David Noorman and Stephan Regnerus. Candidate Regnerus received this call on September 10.

Rev. Tom Miersma bade farewell to the congregation in Lacombe, AB, and laid down the active pastoral labors for emeritation. We thank God for his 35 years of service, including years as missionary in Alamosa, Spokane, and Pittsburgh, and pray for God's continued blessing upon him and his wife Jan as they settle into their new home in Edmonton.

Evangelism activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Doon, IA PRC announced a conference on "The Foundations of a Healthy Marriage." This was held at the Rock Valley, IA high school auditorium on September 15-16 with Revs. A. Brummel, J. Engelsma, and J. Laning presenting speeches on this timely subject.

Miscellaneous

A new PRC Psalter app (Android) has been developed by Hope PRC member Jonathan Vermeer. You will find it in the Google Play Store. The app includes lyrics and tunes to all of our Psalter numbers and links to the Psalms themselves. Plus, it has a special "night mode" setting for use in the dark (as, for example, for campfire singing).

Sister-church activities

The Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland announces the dates for the 2018 British Reformed Fellowship Conference. The plans are for this to take place from July 21-28 at Hebron Hall near Cardiff, South Wales. So now you can start planning next summer's vacation!

Two times a month Rev. Vernon Ibe, pastor at the Berean PRC in Antipolo City, Rizal, Philippines, has been preaching in the nearby Kerruso Community Church in Tondo, Manila. He has also been teaching them the "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine" catechism, with the idea of moving on to the Church Order next. This congregation is small—about 9 families and 40 souls—and was originally an independent Pentecostal church. In the past, the PRC of Bulacan and Rev. John Flores spent time teaching this group the "Essentials of Reformed Doctrine." Through Rev. Flores' instruction the group became very interested in the Reformed faith. Many members also left in resistance to the Reformed teachings, which is almost always the case. In 2015 Pastor Ibe was asked by the consistory of the PRC in Bulacan to assist in the work of teaching and leading this small flock. According to Rev. Ibe "By the grace of God, they are growing in their knowledge of the grace and love of God in Christ and in their appreciation of the

same, manifest in their faithful hearing of the precious gospel of Christ both in preaching and teaching!"

In another small way the truth of the Word of God and the Reformed faith goes forth!

Denominational activities

The Protestant Reformed Seminary is sponsoring a conference commemorating the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The conference theme is: "Here We Stand!" It will be held at Faith PRC on October 27 and 28, 2017. There will be six speeches given by three professors and three ministers—Rev. S. Key, Rev. M. McGeown from the Limerick Reformed Fellowship, and Rev. David Torlach from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Please make plans to attend. Visit the special website for more details: www.500thReformed.com.

Classis East met Wednesday, September 13, while Classis West met on September 27 in Hull, IA PRC.

Rev. W. Langerak and Prof. R. Cammenga departed August 31 for 12 days (two Sundays) in South Korea on behalf of the Contact Committee and at the request of some ministers in the Koshin Presbyterian Church (a denomination of some 360,000 members formed in 1952) who became acquainted with the PRCA while studying for their degrees at Calvin Seminary in Grand Rapids, MI. Prof. Cammenga was asked to deliver the keynote address at a Reformation Day conference in Seoul Central Church. They also requested speeches in 3 more churches, lectures at 3 seminaries (in Anyang, Suwon, and Cheonan, which has over 400 students), and forums on topics such as theological education in the PRC, the Reformed doctrine of the church, the role of elders, common grace and the well-meant offer, and the history and practices of the PRC. Mrs. Karen Langerak and Mr. John Van Baren accompanied the delegation.

School activities

Here's an interesting school fundraiser from the Edgerton, MN PRC bulletin: "The Ladies Circle is sponsoring a fund raiser at Tucker's Walk vineyard where we will be picking grapes on the morning of September 9 from 8:00 A.M. to noon. Tucker's Walk provides lunch after we finish picking. Please consider joining us for a morning of fellowship and enjoying God's creation."

Covenant Christian High's Fall Festival is scheduled for October 7 with food and activities for all. The annual Craft Show is scheduled for October 28 with over 100 booths to shop from. Cinnamon rolls, pizza,

subs, and desserts are offered, with proceeds to benefit the band and boosters programs at Covenant.

Young people's activities

The young people of Randolph, WI PRC were invited to the parsonage for a kick-off of their society season. The evening included supper, games, and a camp fire.

Trivia answer

There have been seven PRCA churches organized since 2000. In Classis East: Trinity, Providence, and Zion in Michigan, along with Pittsburgh, PA. In Classis West: Calvary in Hull, IA; Covenant of Grace in Spokane, WA; and Heritage in Sioux Falls, SD. 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 the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Doug and Sarah Bishop, Brad and Lisa Bishop, Lane Bishop, and John, Jessica, Natalie, and Ethan Bishop in the death of their sister and aunt, **ARDIS MEJEUR**. May their comfort be found in God's Word where we read, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26a).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Steve DeVries, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express Christian sympathy to Arlene VanderWoude and Rodney and Sandy Kooiman in the death of their husband and father, **JOHN VANDER WOUDE**. May they find comfort and assurance in the words of II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Rev. Koole, Pres.
Herm DeVries, Asst. Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Southwest PRC expresses our Christian sympathy to Elder Tom VanderWoude and his family upon the passing into glory of his father **MR. JOHN VANDER WOUDE**. We also extend our sympathy to Deacon Jeff DeVries and his family and Elder Henry Kamps and his family upon the passing into glory of their grandfather and father-in-law, **MR. HENRY HOEKSTRA**.

Our prayer is that these officebearers and their

families will be comforted and will rejoice in the victory that God's people have in Christ Jesus our Lord. May the words of the psalmist in Psalm 16:11 give joy and comfort in the midst of their sorrow. "Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

Gordon Schipper, Assistant Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

The Council and congregation of Hope PRC in Walker express their Christian sympathy to Elder James Koole and his wife, Gladys, in the death of his father-in-law, **MR. HENRY HOEKSTRA**. May they be comforted in the words of Jesus Christ: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26).

Rev. David Overway, President
Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Notice

Please set aside October 5, 2017 to attend Prof. D. Engelsma's follow-up speech regarding spousal abuse in the Reformed community. This speech will be given at the Byron Center Van Singel Fine Arts Center, beginning at 7 p.m. All are welcome. The BCPRC Council encourages you to invite friends and young people as well.

Bound volumes

The September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer* completed volume 93. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the RFPA office before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.

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FRIDAY

4:00PM What was the Reformation?

Prof. Ronald Cammenga

7:00PM The Reformation's Return to Sola Scriptura

Rev. David Torlach

8:15PM The Reformation's Restoration of the Office of Believer

Prof. Barrett Gritters

SATURDAY

8:30AM The Reformation's Recovery of Right Worship

Rev. Martyn McGeown

10:00AM The Reformation's Response to the 'Radical Reformation'

Prof. Russell Dykstra

11:15AM The Reformation's Progress in the Lowlands

Rev. Steven Key

Join us at Faith Protestant Reformed Church

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of the PRCA.

Reformed Witness Hour

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Oct. 1 "Thanks for the Church" I Thess. 1:1-4

Oct. 8 "Followers of the Lord" I Thess. 1:6-8

Oct. 15 "Entrusted with the Gospel" I Thess. 2:3, 4

Oct. 22 "Receiving the Word of God" I Thess. 2:13

Oct. 29 "God's Saints: The Crown of Rejoicing"

I Thess. 2:19, 20