

The Standard Bearer

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We Ought also to Love One Another

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

1 John 4:11-12

Beloved! What an appropriate way to address the saints of the church. This is especially true in light of what the apostle John has just emphasized. "In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him" (v. 9). And then the next verse, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Yes, indeed. In Christ we are the beloved of God!

But now, consider this.

If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

And by loving one another we may know that God, who cannot be seen, dwells in us.

Rev. Slopsema is a minister emeritus in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Even more, by loving one another God's love for us is made perfect or complete.

Important truths for meditation!



"If God so loved us...."

Here John calls our attention to God's love for us that he has just mentioned.

Let us consider this love.

"Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us."

This emphasizes, first of all, the unconditional character of God's love. God's love for us is not dependent on our love for Him. He loved us, even when we did not love Him. By nature we hate God and are His enemies. This is how Adam's fall left every one of us. Still, God loved us in Christ with an eternal, electing love. And He loves us even now after He has adopted us with all our many faults. His love for us is unconditional, not dependent on our love for Him!

But the emphasis of God loving us first is also the sovereign character of God's love. Our love to God is only a response to His love for us. Of ourselves we are incapable

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of loving God. But we do love God *because* His love for us creates our love for Him.

But the apostle John has more to say about God's love.

"In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." It is God's eternal good pleasure to live with us in eternal fellowship. However, being dead in sin, we are incapable of such a life. That we might live with Him in eternal bliss, God sent none less than His only begotten Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sin. This means that God appeased His horrible wrath against our sins by punishing His own Son in our place. This secures our freedom from the sentence of death and our right to be made alive in Christ, to love God, to serve Him, and to enjoy Him forever.

"If God so loved us, we ought also to love one another."

Notice that we *ought* to love one another. This word "ought" has the basic idea of owing someone something. Often it was used of one who owed another money. Here we are told that we owe one another our love. We must see ourselves to be debtors to one another. And that debt is a debt of love. Neither is that debt ever paid up. No matter how much love we have shown to someone, we can never say that we no longer owe that person our love. This is a lifelong obligation we have to each other. And it is rooted in God's love to us. Certainly we must love those whom God loves!

Yet, beyond the obligation to love one another, we may add that this love is to reflect the character of God's love to us.

God loves us unconditionally. His love is not dependent on our love to Him. He loved us even when we were His enemies. He loves us now also in our weaknesses and failures. Certainly, then, we must love those who do not love us and who are perhaps even our enemies. This is true of every neighbor we encounter, but especially those in the church. We must love those whose weaknesses annoy us and limit us. We must even love those who hate us and seek our hurt. If God's love for us is unconditional, then our love for each other must be unconditional.

And we must love one another sacrificially. God demonstrated His love by sacrificing His only begotten Son so that we might live. The love that we are to have for each other must be a love that promotes the life we have together with God and each other. In some instances this

requires a great deal of time, energy, money, and sacrifice. It may even require our life. If God in love for us was willing to make the supreme sacrifice of His Son so that we might live, we must also show a love that is willing to sacrifice for others.



By loving one another we are assured that God dwells in us.

God dwells in us by the Holy Spirit. And through the indwelling Spirit we become the temple or dwellingplace of God. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (I Cor. 3:16).

In the Old Testament the dwellingplace of God was the temple in Jerusalem. There God symbolically dwelt with His people. And so, the people of God went to the temple to enjoy the blessings of salvation. There they found the forgiveness of sins in the sacrifices they brought by faith. There they were renewed spiritually by the ceremonies of the temple. There they enjoyed sweet fellowship with the God of their salvation. All this was God's gift of love for His people.

In the New Testament era *we* have become the dwellingplace of God. The Old Testament temple in Jerusalem was only a shadow of what we now are in Christ by the indwelling Spirit of God. God dwells in us in a way that the Old Testament saints never enjoyed. Being the very house of God, we through the Spirit enjoy the blessings of salvation as never before. Through the indwelling Spirit of God we know the glad forgiveness of sins in the perfect sacrifice of Christ. We are also wonderfully renewed to live the Christian life and enjoy sweet fellowship with God.

But how can we be sure of all this?

How can we be sure that our experience of forgiveness, of the new life and fellowship, comes from the indwelling Spirit of God? As John points out, "No man has seen God at any time" (v. 12). God is infinitely exalted above all His creation so that He remains the invisible God. No one, not even the angels in heaven, can see God in His essential being. How do we know, then, that this great God has taken up His dwelling in us to bless us in His great love? How do we know that what we experience is real and not imaginary? Does not John also speak earlier in this chapter of the spirit of antichrist? Are we not warned

repeatedly about deceiving ourselves? Is not the heart deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked? (Jer. 17:9).

We know that God truly dwells in us, if we love one another.

The true test of the indwelling Spirit of God is that we love one another. This is to be explained by the fact that the inevitable fruit of God's abiding in us in His love is that we love one another. When God takes up His abode in us to shower the blessings of His love upon us, He above all blesses us with love for one another.

And so it is that you may attend church regularly, give generously of your time and money to the cause of the kingdom of God, be a great defender of the truth, and much more. And yet, as important as these things are, if you do not love the brother in the church, the Spirit of God does not dwell in you. All your experiences of salvation are false. You have deceived yourself.

It would be good in this connection to read Paul's explanation in I Corinthians 13 of the importance and character of love.



By our love for one another, God's love for us is perfected. This means God's love for us finds its completion in our love to one another. It reaches its goal in our loving one another.

To illustrate this, consider a family that loves one

other. The parents in love for their children live and dwell with them, bestowing upon them their love in the form of nurture and protection. Their goal is that their children not only return this love to their parents, but also love one another. When this happens, the love that they showered upon their children is completed. What joy there is for these parents! And how grieved they are when they see the love that they bestowed on their children fall short if their family is disrupted by jealousy, hatred, and infighting.

The same is true with God.


God showers His love upon us by His indwelling Spirit with the purpose not only that we each return love to Him but that we also dwell with one another in love as the family of God. God will not merely live with each of us individually, but with all of us together as His family. God's love for us reaches its goal and completion only when we in the power of His love to us love one another. What joy this brings to God!

And so let us strive to love one another.

God has shown His love to us in that He sent His only begotten Son into the world to be the propitiation for our sins.

In His love He even makes us His dwellingplace.

In His love He also transforms us to love one another.

Let us then respond by loving God and one another, that God's love may be perfected in us. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

Training for Protestant Reformed Teachers: Additional History

The concept of an institution for training Protestant Reformed teachers

Previous article in this series: February 1, 2017, p. 197.

was proposed in the late 1940s when the Protestant Reformed school movement was picking up steam. The congregation in Redlands, CA established the first Protestant Reformed school in 1934.

Hope Protestant Reformed Christian School (Walker, MI) started in 1947, and three years later Adams St. Christian School (Grand Rapids, MI) and the Free Christian School of Edgerton, MN opened

their doors. In other congregations, societies for Protestant Reformed education were being formed.

Recall from the last editorial that the Synod of 1949 faced two requests having to do with training of teachers. The Society for Protestant Reformed Education (in Grand Rapids) came via the PRC Theological School Committee, requesting that the Seminary provide some such instruction. In addition, Synod received an overture from the consistory of Randolph “to consider ways and means of establishing our own Normal Training School to train prospective teachers to teach in our own Christian Schools.” In response, Synod placed “this matter before the faculty and the Theological School Committee for study and possible execution.”

What happened next? The PRC *Acts of Synod, 1950* gives the report of the Theological School’s report on this mandate (Art. 26).

The material concerning the normal course for teachers is read.

4. Relative a normal course for teachers in our own schools, in connection with the decision of the 1949 Synod, your committee can give you the following information:

a. That we have tried to execute the wishes of the Synod. After consulting the faculty, we were advised to make arrangements for a course in the Principles of Education. Rev. H. Hoeksema drew up an outline of such principles, which can serve as a guide in teaching this subject.

b. It was further decided to have a six weeks summer course and to contact the School Boards who requested a course of this

nature (five in number) for cooperation with the teachers to take this course. It was also decided to make announcements regarding this course in our periodicals, which was done. Rev. G.M. Ophoff was requested to teach this course.

c. That we received no response from any of the School Boards. We did receive requests from three other prospective teachers for more information. However, they could give us no assurance that they would take this course if it would be given, due to other plans of studying, work, etc.

d. That two years ago a Teachers’ Club was organized in Grand Rapids which has been meeting once per week ever since, with Rev. Ophoff giving them instruction. According to him this instruction was very much like the proposed outline given by Rev. H. Hoeksema. Consequently, the members of this club do not see the need of a summer course of this nature at this time.

e. The committee took no further action regarding this matter. Since the information under d. reached us shortly before the time of Synod, we are submitting the whole matter to your body.

f. Rev. Ophoff consented to teach this course if it be given during the regular school term.

Notice that the Theological School Committee worked with the two seminary professors to make arrangements for a course in the “Principles of Education.” Rev. Hoeksema drew up the principles, and Rev. Ophoff was willing to teach the course. We notice also that teachers felt the need for training, and had

formed a Teachers’ Club for this purpose (meeting once a week), at which Rev. Ophoff had been giving instruction. Five schools or school societies desired some course for their teachers.

Synod responded by approving the work done by the TSC and receiving their report for information. And that was the end of it. Nothing more came of these efforts.

From that time to the present, only one more relevant decision is found in the *Acts of Synod*. In 1969, the Theological School Committee reported that the TSC had received a letter written “on behalf of teachers and other interested individuals that certain seminary courses which would relate directly to their work be made available to them by having them taught in the evening” (Suppl. VI, p. 57). The synod declined to grant this request on the ground that “it would take up more time for our professors who are already busy” (Arts. 29-31).

Where does this leave us today? It is clear that the synods were in favor of some teacher training, and in favor of seminary involvement in this training. Synods recognized the need for teachers in Protestant Reformed schools to have training to fit them for this work. On the other hand, school boards and teachers have recognized the need for training beyond what teachers receive in college, and have sought help from the seminary to provide some instruction. Synods never opposed the seminary professors assisting on grounds of principle.

But we have not faced the question of whether the responsibility

for providing this institution and instruction is *ecclesiastical* or *parental*.

A Different History

Before going forward in Protestant Reformed history, we might at least take notice of what the church has done in the past. In Calvin's Geneva, the education system was a cooperative effort between the church and the magistrates. The ecclesiastical ordinances drawn up by John Calvin included provision for schools from the young children to the seminary (academy). The teachers were to be supervised by the church. On the other hand, the money was supplied by the magistrates. The magistrates in Calvin's day were supporters of the Reformation in Geneva—quite a different age. Therefore, this model is hardly helpful for us today.

Here in America, the majority of colleges established in America's early history had religious support and control. They were established as schools to train ministers of the Word. They included just enough language, history, and other necessary subjects to prepare the men for theological studies for the ministry. In most cases, the next interest to arise was training teachers. From there, the colleges broadened their instruction to give a liberal arts educational training for many vocations.

The same is true closer to home, in the Christian Reformed Church. Calvin College was originally established for the purpose of training ministers. Eventually, Calvin developed a complete course for teacher

training, and from there continued to expand the academic offerings. In time, Calvin College separated from Calvin Theological Seminary.

In addition, it is worth noting that the Reformed churches in the Netherlands were very much involved in the Christian schools, and particularly in the approval of the teachers. The national Synod of Dordrecht (1618-'19) had much to say about Christian schools. First, Dordt mandated that

(s)chools, in which the young shall be properly instructed in the principles of Christian doctrine, shall be instituted not only in cities, but also in towns and country places where heretofore none have existed. The Christian magistracy shall be requested that well-qualified persons may be employed and enabled to devote themselves to the service.

Concerning the teachers, the fathers decided that

(i)n this office none shall be employed but such as are members of the Reformed Church, having certificates of an upright faith and pious life, and of being well versed in the truths of the Catechism.

And they added,

They are to sign a document, professing their belief in the Confession of Faith and the Heidelberg Catechism, and promising that they will give catechetical instruction to the youth in the principles of Christian truth according to the same.

And who must see to it that the instruction in these schools is proper, Reformed instruction? The consistory, said Dordt:

In order that due knowledge may be obtained of the diligence of the schoolmasters, and the improvement of the youth, it shall be the duty of the ministers, with an elder, and, if necessary, with a magistrate, to visit all the schools, private as well as public, frequently, in order to excite the teachers to earnest diligence, to encourage and counsel them in the duty of catechising, and to furnish an example by questioning them, addressing them in a friendly and affectionate manner, and exciting them to early piety and diligence.

All this is very much in harmony with the original Article 21 of the Church Order:

The consistories everywhere shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters, not only to teach the children reading, writing, languages, and the liberal arts, but also to instruct them in godliness and in the Catechism.

This educational tradition moved to America with the Secession immigrants led by Albertus Van Raalte who settled in Holland, particularly the churches that eventually formed the Christian Reformed Church. The consistories helped establish the schools, supervised them, and hired the teachers. Over the years, however, especially the good influence of Abraham Kuyper led the Reformed churches to recognize that the responsibility

for Christian schools was not ecclesiastical, but *parental*. Control of the schools gradually shifted from the consistories to societies.


This is entirely proper, and the main reason why also the responsibility for establishing a teacher training institution lies not with the churches, but with the *parents*.

That it is not the responsibility of the churches is plain from the fact that the work of the church is *ecclesiastical*, not educational. Consider the three marks of the church of Christ—the preaching of the pure gospel, the proper administration of the sacraments, and Christian discipline. That also defines the work of the church. One can add

to that the work of the deacons, caring for the poor. In all of the work, the preaching of the gospel is the central calling of the church. That cannot be squared with the effort to establish an institution for training teachers for the Christian schools.

On the other hand, such a responsibility fits with the calling of the parents to train up their children in the fear of the Lord. God lays the responsibility for instructing covenant children squarely upon the parents. And if, in this time in history, parents wisely band together to form a school to assist them in their covenant calling, yet the parents remain fully responsible for the instruction of their children. Parents are responsible before God for every

word of instruction in their schools. They are responsible for the method of instruction, for the world-and-life view that is conveyed, and for the discipline exercised.

Since that is the case, clearly, parents need to supply the teachers for their school who will teach—properly teach—their children. And the parents need to provide the training in order to equip teachers to give instruction that is truly Protestant Reformed. What kind of institution ought to be established will be the subject of a future editorial. Before turning to that, however, we will examine some serious efforts to equip teachers for service in Protestant Reformed schools. 

ALL AROUND US

REV. ERIK GUICHELAAR

■ Ontario's Bill 28: "All Families Are Equal Act"

Ontario's Bill 28, otherwise known as the "All Families Are Equal Act," was a bill that the Ontario (Canada) government adopted at the end of this past November. According to an article from the Ministry of the Attorney General,

Today [November 29], Ontario passed legislation that will ensure equal treatment for all parents and children in the province. Bill 28, the All Families Are Equal Act, 2016, recognizes the legal status of all parents, whether they are LGBTQ2+ or straight, and whether their children were conceived with or without assistance.¹

¹ Ministry of the Attorney General, "Ontario Passes Law Ensuring Equal Recognition for All Parents and Children," *Ontario Newsroom*, © Queen's Printer for Ontario, 2016. accessed December 30, 2016, <https://news.ontario.ca/mag/en/2016/11/ontario-passes-law-ensuring-equal-rights-for-all-parents-and-children.html>.

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

The article goes on to say that the adoption of the bill is "another way Ontario is supporting families across the province."² In reality, Bill 28 is a disturbing attack on the family, and an attempt radically to redefine what a family is.

On its website, the *Association for Reformed Political Action (ARPA Canada)* gives some details as to what the adopted piece of legislation is all about:

Bill 28, the Orwellian "All Families Are Equal Act," removes the terms "mother" and "father" from all Ontario law, to be replaced with "parent." The bill also eliminates the basic assumption of Ontario law that a child has no more than two parents. It eradicates the traditional categories of natural or adoptive parents and removes all references to persons being the "natural parents" of a child and to persons being related "by blood"....

Under the bill, a child can have up to four "parents" at birth where two, three, or four parties agree in writing to be parents to a child yet to be conceived [this is referred to as a "Pre-Conception Parentage Agreement," or, "PCPA"].

² Attorney General, "Ontario Passes Law."

The bill requires the “birth parent” (the “person who gives birth to the child,” not necessarily the biological mother) to be a party to a PCPA and therefore a legal parent.... If the child is to be conceived “without the use of assisted reproduction” (i.e., naturally), the law also requires “the person who intends to be the biological father of the child” to be party to the PCPA. If assisted reproduction is used, the biological father need not be a party to the PCPA. In a PCPA, the spouse of the “birth parent” also need not be a party to the agreement (and thus not a parent to the child) if he or she provides written confirmation before the child is conceived that he or she does not consent to be a parent of the child.³

In other words, a child could conceivably be born, and have four “parents,” without any of the four “parents” actually being the child’s biological parent. None of these “parents” are referred to as “father” or “mother”—they are simply a “parent.” Conceivably, a child could be born under Ontario law to four “parents” who are all women (or even all men, in the case of a surrogacy), and who have no other relationship/connection to each other than simply that they have signed an agreement to be co-parents to the child. This is how the Ontario government would like to define a “family,” and make all families “equal.”

ARPA Canada goes on to mention a few of the ways this legislation is dangerous:

Bill 28 commodifies children—objects to be produced and possessed.... The bill also denies the reality of sexual difference. It removes the terms “mother” and “father” from Ontario law completely, reflecting the government’s view that there is *no difference* between a mother and a father and that a child does not need both. The bill also completely discounts the important link between marriage, or even a long-term committed rela-

tionship between two people, and the healthy upbringing of children.⁴

In reality, Bill 28 renders marriage, common-law relationships, and blood relationships entirely insignificant when it comes to family law.

In another article, *ARPA Canada* goes on to explain,

The bill gives the illusion of greater freedom. It gives people more “options” to choose from as they determine what a family is for them. But if the state can redefine the family and offer more “options” or “rights” by knocking family law off its foundations of marriage and blood relations, it can also take rights away. What will become of parental rights if a “family” is whatever the state says it is and a “parent” is whoever the state says is a parent. It’s hard to know, but it’s deeply disconcerting. ...Make no mistake, education policy and curriculum (among other government policies and programs) will fall in line with Bill 28’s radical changes to Ontario law. This is about more than immediate practical consequences to my parental rights or yours—it is about embedding a false understanding of who we are as human beings into the law.⁵

The *ARPA Canada* article goes on to point out how Bill 28 might even make it more difficult for some couples to adopt children:

If a couple holds the view that children do best when raised by a married mother and father..., or even that children are better off with a married couple as parents than a group of four co-signers of a contract, their views would be plainly contrary to the “All Families Are Equal Act.” Consequently, it may be considered contrary to public policy to place adoptive children with people who hold such beliefs.⁶

Sad to say, the legislation passed unanimously. Romans 1:22 comes to mind: “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”

³ “What’s A Family, Anyway? Ontario Government to Radically Change Family Law,” *Association for Reformed Political Action Canada*, October 21, 2016, accessed December 30, 2016, <https://arpacanada.ca/news/2016/10/21/whats-family-anyway-ontario-government-radically-change-family-law>. (Interestingly [or, sadly], because the Ontario government wanted to remove completely the term “father” from the bill, it had to change the term “biological father” [as used in the quotation above] to “the person whose sperm resulted in the conception of a child.” It seems that terms such as “father” and “mother” are not politically correct anymore.)

⁴ ARPAC, “What’s a Family, Anyway?”

⁵ “FAQ on Ontario’s Bill 28, The ‘All Families Are Equal Act,’” *Association for Reformed Political Action Canada*, Nov 10, 2016, accessed December 31, 2016, <https://arpacanada.ca/news/2016/11/10/faq-ontarios-bill-28-families-equal-act>.

⁶ ARPAC, “All Families Are Equal Act.”

■ Disney's *Moana*:

Disney has come out with another animated movie, *Moana*. “Moana” is the name of the main character of the movie, a teenaged girl from a Hawaiian island. The main plot of the story goes as follows: Moana sets out on the ocean to find Maui, a demigod, so that she might right an ancient wrong, and save her people. You might say that the story is just another new spin on the typical Disney princess story—Moana being the princess.

I have not watched the movie. However, I draw attention to the movie because I want to share a few excerpts from a review I came across online that I thought were very insightful. What follows are a few thoughts that Nathanael Smith gave on the online blog, *THINK*:

Disney are back once again with *Moana* and the extent to which you already appreciate the studio will determine how much you get out of their latest. I’m an unabashed fan of Disney and I loved it.... Yet there is still a nagging feeling, when watching *Moana*, that Disney are stuck in a thematic rut.... Moana herself is actually a great heroine and displays many admirable qualities; part of her self-discovery comes through learning new skills and finding bravery in the face of terrifying sights. Yet my thematic beef with the film boils down to one conversation she has with Maui when they are sailing at night. She discovers that everything Maui has done was to earn the approval of others, to gain affirmation from people cheering his name. It looks like there’s going to be a genuinely powerful message behind it, then Moana literally says that perhaps Maui “was worthy of being saved.” Both characters then go on to prove their ‘worthiness,’ proving that you should be yourself as long as yourself is a hero who can defeat lava monsters. Then you’ll find true satisfaction.

It would be easy for Christians to react against surface details in *Moana*, such as the existence of reincarnation and an arrogant demi-god who makes a lot of similar claims to Yahweh in the book of Job. Yet such details are far less likely to affect audiences than its central message. Kids are more likely to try and find salvation within themselves than convert to Polynesian polytheism. It’s frustrating because after almost two decades of being told to “be yourself” and “look inside,” western culture still hasn’t found the magic bullet for happiness. Surely by now we’ve worked out that unrestrained independence isn’t the key to the deep dissatisfaction that troubles hu-

man hearts? We’ve tried that. To hear a message about self-actualisation once more from Disney makes it harder than ever to just dismiss the ideologies being perpetuated by the studio when they are so persistent with it.⁷

I thought that was insightful. It is very important for parents to be aware of the ideologies that are being promoted by the animated movies their children are watching. Because the reality is, we live in a culture that emphasizes to the extreme this idea of “self-actualization,” and the “pursuit of happiness.” This is why the Ontario government is changing its definition of the family—so that everyone can choose the kind of family he wants for himself, fulfill his own deepest desires, and be satisfied in life. In this respect, many Disney movies are no different in the message they convey. It’s the culture we live in. In the end, it’s idolatry. And in truth, it’s the culture that Disney has helped shape.

And the reality is: it’s affecting the children. More and more, children are growing up being trained to believe that a fulfilling life is found in “discovering oneself” and “realizing one’s inner person.” They have been raised to believe in a lie when it comes to where they will find their happiness. And the lie always disappoints in the end. Such a worldview is only setting up children for struggles with discontentment. Even in Christian circles, more and more we are seeing children growing up who are falling into the habit of believing that *God* exists to affirm *their* deepest desires, whether those be material, emotional, sexual, or otherwise.

The question we need to ask ourselves is this: have *we* also, perhaps unawares, been contributing to this way of thinking amongst our own children? Have we *ourselves* in certain respects bought into this kind of a worldview? Are we even sensitive to it? Jesus makes it clear: “... Blessed [happy!] are they that hear the word of God, and keep it” (Luke 11:28). But Satan comes along and says, “Yea, hath God said?” The false gospel comes in many different shapes and sizes. And our sinful natures always agree with Satan. ☞

⁷ Nathanael Smith, “Film Review: *Moana*,” *THINK*, December 8, 2016, accessed December 31, 2016, http://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/film_review_moana.

No Other Gods

Lord's Day 34

Q. 92. What is the law of God?

A. God spake all these words, Exodus 20, Deuteronomy 5, saying: I am the LORD thy God, which hath brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

- 1. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*
- 2. Thou shalt not....*

Q. 93. How are these commandments divided?

A. Into two tables: the first of which teaches us how we must behave towards God; the second, what duties we owe to our neighbor.

Q. 94. What doth God enjoin in the first commandment?

A. That I, as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul, avoid and flee from all idolatry, sorcery, soothsaying, superstition, invocation of saints, or any other creatures; and learn rightly to know the only true God; trust in Him alone, with humility and patience submit to Him; expect all good things from Him only; love, fear, and glorify Him with my whole heart; so that I renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit even the least thing contrary to His will.

Q. 95. What is idolatry?

A. Idolatry is, instead of, or besides that one true God who has manifested Himself in His Word, to contrive or have any other object in which men place their trust.

Why the Law

“...For ye are not under the law, but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

If this is true, then why, in Reformed churches, do we insist on regularly reading and preaching through the Ten Commandments, which is God's law?

One reason is that the law is intended by God as a restraint against wickedness in society. When the law is upheld, evil doers are punished (Rom. 13:3, 4). The alternative is lawlessness. Another reason, already treated by the Catechism in Lord's Day 2, is to show us our de-

pravity and our need of Jesus Christ. But, besides these, there is a “third use” of the law, which is to show us what is pleasing to God.

When Paul says in Romans that we are “not under the law, but under grace” and that we have been “delivered from the law” (Rom. 6:14; 7:6), he means that Christ has taken the curse and penalty of the law in our place, and obtained for us the favor of God. This, however, does not mean that we are no longer under the requirements of the law. The very idea of abolishing the law was repugnant to Jesus (Matt. 5:17). Rather than abolishing the requirements of the law, Jesus teaches that God requires much more than outward obedience, that what is required is “heart obedience” that arises out of love and gratitude to God. In His teaching Jesus upholds all the

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requirements of the law (Mark 10:19), as does Paul in his epistles (Rom. 13:8-10; I Tim. 1:8-11), where he also calls the law “righteous and good” (Rom. 7:12).

Every true believer says with David, “O how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day” (Ps. 119:97). The law is not a list of pleasures that God keeps from us, but the law itself is our greatest delight. The reasons for our love are, first, that the law shows us something of the perfection of God Himself; it is a reflection of His righteous character. Because we love God, we love to be like God, and so we love His law. Another reason that we love the law is that God has written it on our hearts. In our natural, sinful state we hate God and His law and so delight in disobedience (Rom. 1:32); but as a result of the new life of Christ in us, we “delight in the law of God after the inward man” (Rom. 7:22).

The law should never be separated from the gospel but is essential for understanding the gospel, for it shows us 1) God and His holiness; 2) our sin and need of Christ; 3) how to live in thankfulness for the gospel; and 4) what the Spirit makes us to be as new creatures. We should never think that we obey the law in order to merit God’s favor. Rather, we obey the commandments out of gratitude to God for our salvation. Remember, God gave the law to Israel on Mt. Sinai after He had redeemed them from the bondage of Egypt. Their obedience was the *response* to redemption, not the *reason* for redemption.

First Things First

The first commandment is foundational to the rest of the commandments and is the most important of them all. Four things show this. First, this commandment teaches us about God, which is where everything begins. God is the origin of all things in creation, and the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom (Ps. 111:10). Second, in identifying Jehovah as the only God, this commandment also gives Him the right to be the only Lawgiver, the One who ultimately determines what is right and wrong. Third, in its requirement, this commandment is really a summary of all that God requires in the law, to worship and love Him exclusively and wholeheartedly. Fourth, the sin which this commandment forbids, idolatry, is, essentially, the root of all other sin. Adam and Eve sinned because they wanted to be like God. The Bible says that “covetousness is idolatry” (Col. 3:5), because as soon as

we desire what God forbids, we are already, in effect, denouncing the true God.

We must, therefore, understand this commandment correctly and always keep it before our minds.

Idolatry

Idolatry is the substitution of something or someone in the place of the true God. Idolatry takes many forms, and the human heart is an “idol-factory,” always busy devising a variety of idols as objects of affection or trust.

In Old Testament times, and still in many parts of the world today, idolatry came to expression in the invention of a deity, (or a number of deities), and the representation of it with a statue before which one would worship. Such a god is created and, therefore, limited by the mind of man. Often, he is crafted to suit the moral and material desires of man. Scripture points to the folly, indeed lunacy, of such idolatry, when it points out that from one tree a god is crafted who is worshiped, while the rest of the tree is then used for firewood and food preparation (Is. 44:10-17). How can such a god really be a deity?

A false god, though, can be created in other ways than by constructing a statue. Idolatry is the invention of a god in the mind, and so there is also mental idolatry. Atheism and materialism, which say that there is no personal god, and that the only reality is this material world, are such mental idols. The Bible says that this is the epitome of folly: “The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God” (Ps. 14:1). Folly is to ignore reality to one’s own harm. Other mental idols include all forms of human philosophy which attempt to explain this world apart from the God of Scripture (for example, pantheism and humanism).

Two other prevalent forms of idolatry in our day are worldliness and modernism. Worldliness sets earthly pleasure, gain, fame, education, or anything else related to this life as the goal and purpose of one’s existence. Modernism sets man and his knowledge and discovery above Scripture, and judges that the Bible is full of primitive ideas that we have now outgrown.

All heretical teaching, which formulates a doctrine that is contrary to the teaching of the Bible, is also idolatry. An example of this is the teaching that God loves everyone so much that there is no such thing as hell. Such teaching denies the reality of the justice of God as well as much of the Bible’s teaching, and in the end makes the

gospel and the death of Christ unnecessary. This is just a small example, but it shows that man today is no different from the ancient Egyptians or Greeks who invented gods after their imagination. A god who is always and only loving suits the lifestyle and desires of the modern man.

Idolatry is not only to have a god “instead of” the one true God, but is also to have an object or idea “alongside of” the true God. Even when a man attempts to serve both God and someone or something else, he is guilty of idolatry. This commandment teaches us that Christianity and the worship of Jehovah is an “either-or,” not a “both-and,” religion. Jesus makes this clear when He says, “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Matt. 6:24). Jehovah God, because He is the only God, demands exclusive devotion. He has made us, we are His creatures, and by virtue of this He has the right to demand all rights to worship. For believers, this is doubly true, for not only has He made us, but He has also redeemed us and made us His own.

The most common form of idolatry is trust in something created, rather than in the Creator. Money, medicine, insurance, education, alcohol, entertainment, sports, or even my own wits, may all be gods in which I put my trust, when I ought to be depending on Jehovah. Though these are not true deities, each of them has the power to enslave our hearts, and steal our allegiance from God.

Is not every one of us guilty of idolatry?

Worship

The requirement of this commandment is the exclusive worship of the true God, and the Catechism uses eight different verbs to help us understand this activity of worship. Worship is not limited to what you do in a church

service but involves your whole life, and so each of these verbs is worthy of our consideration and meditation.

First, to worship God is to *know* him, to have a right and proper knowledge of him. This knowledge must come from the Bible. Only from the Scriptures can we know God. God is not what we feel or think He might be. He is not some abstract unknown idea. He is not to be discovered by science or reason. To know God is to know Him as He has revealed Himself in the Word and by His Son (John 17:3).

Second, to worship God is to *trust* in Him. Perhaps this is the real test of whether one worships the true God. From day to day, are we trusting in the Lord, or leaning on our own understanding (Prov. 3:5-6)? What gives us security as we go through life? Is it ourselves, our friends, our money, our job, our family, our education, our

insurance policies, and so many other things? God is almighty, faithful, true, and trustworthy. He keeps His promises. He will never fail His people.

Third, to worship God is to *submit* to Him with humility and patience. This means not only that we must obey Him, but especially that we submit to the providence of God in our lives. Life can be very difficult, and God’s people can be put through some very severe trials—persecution, grief, sickness, poverty, anxiety, and more. These are real experiences. But God sends them. With humility, we recognize we do not

deserve better. With patience, we trust that God knows what is best for us.

Fourth, to worship God is to *expect all good things* from God only. On what do you pin your hopes? In what do you find joy and solace in life? “Rejoice in the Lord, alway: and again I say rejoice” (Phil. 4:4). Our God is the God of goodness and blessing, the fountain of life. We must look to Him, and not to any creature, for true happiness both for this life and the next.

Fifth, to worship God is to *love* Him. Our love for

*Our God
is the God of goodness
and blessing,
the fountain of life.
We must look to Him,
and not to any creature,
for true happiness both
for this life and the next.*

God should be total—"with all your heart, mind, soul and strength." Every ounce of your strength, and every part of your being, must be used to love God. This love should be willing, sacrificial, dedicated, and single. We must be consumed, intoxicated, with God.

Sixth, to worship God is to *fear* Him. To fear the Lord is to have a constant consciousness of who He is, in all His heavenly majesty, and to know who you are before Him. John Calvin said that this is all we really need to know: God and ourselves. The one who fears the Lord is directed in every action, thought, and word by the awareness of God. He lives before the Lord.

Seventh, to worship God is to *glorify* Him. To glorify God is to put Him first, and to see that He gets the recognition, in everything we do. We are not here for ourselves, but God made us for Himself. How easily we forget this and live for our own reputation or pleasure. But, "Of him, and through him, and to him are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11:36).

And eighth, to worship God is to *obey* Him, "to renounce and forsake all creatures, rather than commit the least thing contrary to his will." The least thing—if we truly worship God, we will be concerned to obey Him meticulously.

One Savior

That there is only one God also means that there is only one Savior. This commandment brings us to Jesus Christ, and demands that we put our faith and trust in Him alone for salvation.

Scripture tells us that God is jealous of His worship: "I am the LORD: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images" (Is. 42:8). And yet, at the same time, the Bible says of Jesus in Hebrews 1:6, "Let all the angels of God worship him." If we follow simple logic, our conclusion must be, "Christ is worthy of worship because He is God."


And, it is in that light that we must read this first commandment. To worship God is to believe in Him. Jesus says, "Ye believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). Thomas says to Jesus, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28). Believing in Jesus Christ, we worship the true God. We believe in Jesus for salvation from sin. We trust in Him alone, and none else for our forgiveness and righteousness. As we do this, we worship God alone, and we put aside all idolatry.

The Catechism makes this connection when it says that in keeping the first commandment we "renounce and forsake all creatures" and that each of us does this "as sincerely as I desire the salvation of my own soul." Believing on Jesus Christ means fleeing all idolatry, not trusting any other creature, and placing all our confidence in Jehovah God as He has revealed Himself in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Do you do that? Do you believe in Jesus Christ alone for salvation? Are you trusting yourself or something else other than Christ for your acceptance with God? God says, "Worship me alone!" Jesus says, "Believe on me, as the only way to the Father."

May the Lord give us this true faith!

Questions for Discussion

1. What does Scripture mean when it says that we are "not under law" but "under grace?"
2. What are the three main uses of the law?
3. Is the "law/gospel" distinction biblical? How could it be wrongly applied? How does the law fit with, and not contradict, the gospel?
4. What are the two main parts/divisions of the Ten Commandments? How are they related? Is one part more important than the other?
5. Does the law of the Ten Commandments cover all human behavior? Where do traffic laws and eating habits fit into the law? How about patience and forgiveness?
6. What is idolatry? Is having a statue that one worships the only form of idolatry?
7. What does it mean to serve both God and mammon? Why is this impossible?
8. How is idolatry connected to the rest of the commandments? Choose two other commandments and show that their forbidden sins have roots in idolatry.
9. What is the most common form of idolatry? Are you guilty of this sin?
10. The Catechism uses eight verbs to describe worship. How have these helped you to examine your heart for idolatry?
11. What is the connection between the first commandment and Jesus' words in John 14:6? Jews and Muslims are monotheists—do they keep this commandment, or is their god an idol? 

Foundational Principles (8)

Man Separating from His Life

The story of man's creation and fall teaches us that the central thing we need is communion with God. Although Adam needed food for his body, what he needed chiefly was fellowship with the God who had created him. Should he lose that communion, he would be dead.

The same is true today. There is one thing that is important, one thing that we need, and that is fellowship with our heavenly Father. To be apart from Him is death. To walk with Him is to have life—true life and abiding joy.

Man's twofold life

God describes for us how He created man: "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen. 2:7). We are earthly creatures who are literally of the earth. But we also have a spiritual, invisible soul that is united with our body, yet distinct from it.

People often use the word "soul" to refer merely to man's emotions. Something that expresses feeling or emotion is said to be "soulful," and someone who is viewed as having no feeling is said to be "soulless." Yet the Scriptures tell us that man's soul is a distinct, spiritual part of his nature. In distinction from man's bodily life, he has a spiritual life that requires spiritual food.

God taught Adam this by the instruction He gave to him soon after he was created. God placed man in a garden with many fruit trees, and in the midst of that garden He set two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God would use

this garden—and these two trees specifically—not only to provide man with what he needed, but also to teach him about his need.

God's command taught Adam what he needed both materially and spiritually: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:16-17). At first glance God's instruction here may appear to refer only to the food for the body. But the warning Adam received taught him also about the need of his soul.

God was telling Adam that he lived not by material food alone, but by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. Adam needed to receive the word that God spoke to him. Only in that way would he commune with God. If he disobeyed, he would separate himself from his God. And as soon as he did that, he would die.

Why death is the punishment for sin

God tells us why it was that Adam would die if he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It was not that the tree was poisonous. After Adam and his wife partook of it, their bodily life continued for many years. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was good (as were all the creatures that God had made), and the good earth had not yet been cursed. So if it was not a poisonous tree, why would Adam die if he ate of it?

The reason is that death is the punishment that God inflicts upon those who disobey Him. Death is not only a consequence of sin, it is a punishment that God Himself inflicts on the sinner. "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," says the Lord (Ezek. 18:4).

We can look even deeper to consider why it is that God punishes the sinner with death. The Creator is the holy God, who will not and cannot fellowship with

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sinners. If a man disobeys, God cuts him off, so that the unholy sinner is separated from the holy God.

This act of cutting the sinner off amounts to putting him to death, since apart from God man cannot live. Man was created to fellowship with the God who created him, and he needed this communion to survive.

Adam needed to be with God because God was his life. If Adam sinned, he would be departing from God, which means he would actually be separating himself from his life. This is what we confess in Article 14 of the Belgic Confession: “For the commandment of life which he had received he transgressed; and by sin separated himself from God, who was his true life.” Adam could not live apart from the one who was his true life. He was dependent upon God for everything—for his very life.

Abiding in Christ, our True Life

Communion with God is still today our essential need. Christ is life, and it is those who by God’s grace believe in Him that have life within them.

Unlike Adam, God has given Christ to have life in Himself: “For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself” (John 5:26). Christ, who is true life, is also said to be our life: “When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory” (Col. 3:4). Christ lives by the Father, and we live by Christ: “As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me” (John 6:57).

We believers have been brought into Christ by God’s efficacious grace, and we will remain in Him forever. Our life in Christ is higher than that which Adam had before the Fall. In Christ we are immortal, and our life is everlasting. Nothing can separate us from the God, from the Christ, who is our life.

Throughout this life our Lord teaches us to abide in Him willingly. He tells us that we are in Him and that we shall forever remain in Him. There is no condition that we had to fulfill to get into Christ, and there is no condition that we have to keep on fulfilling to remain in Him. Yet He exhorts us not to separate ourselves from Him. Christ speaks to those who are already in Him and exhorts them to abide in Him: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide


in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me” (John 15:4).

Although we cannot fall out of Christ, it is possible for us temporarily to lose the conscious experience of communion with Him. Consider, for example, what a child of God would experience if he (for a time) failed to heed this commandment of our Lord: “And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that your Father also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses” (Mark 11:25-26). Sometimes true believers lose temporarily the conscious sense of God’s favor (cf. Canons of Dordt, V:5) when they fail to receive what Christ says here and continue down a road that gets progressively darker. Our Lord chastens us in this way, so that we might learn what Adam and Eve learned so many years ago: when we reject what God says, we are departing from our true life.

In the new man we never do this. We delight in the law of God after the inward man (Rom. 7:22). Yet we must be on guard against complying with the lusts of our sinful nature.

Although the weakness of the flesh cannot prevail against the power of God, who confirms and preserves true believers in a state of grace, yet converts are not always so influenced and actuated by the Spirit of God, as not in some particular instances sinfully to deviate from the guidance of divine grace, so as to be seduced by and comply with the lusts of the flesh (Canons V, Art. 4).

Even if an elect believer falls into a grievous sin, the Lord will not leave him in darkness forever. Christ is the Good Shepherd, who always goes after His wayward sheep and brings them back.

But it is important to receive what Christ is telling us here. He is our life, and we enjoy this life only when we are receiving what Christ says. Indeed, we often hear it, and gradually we come more to embrace that what Jesus said is true: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). Walking with God, as did our fathers Enoch and Abraham, we have joy and gladness in our heart. We enjoy true life and have perfect peace, knowing that our Father is with us. 

“To Teach Them War” (14)

Knowing Our Enemies: The World

Who are your friends? If you didn't stop to ponder and answer that question you, ought to.

Who are your friends? Name them. These are the people with whom you voluntarily spend time and whose company is sweet to you. We do not choose our siblings, next-door neighbors, classmates, or coworkers. But, especially as we grow older, we do choose friends. Who are yours?

We may not be friends with the world. If we become friends with the world, then our friends, no matter how friendly they are or how good they make us feel, are actually our enemies. Is there an act more certain to bring self-destruction to a soldier than the befriending of the enemy? Too many youth reared in the church choose to walk a sinful path of self-destruction that brings heaviness and shame to their father and mother. The beginning of their path? Friends. Ungodly friends. And probably the worst enemy-friend of all is a boyfriend (then husband) or girlfriend (then wife) who does not love the Lord. Solomon comes to mind. God graciously spared Solomon as a brand plucked out of the fire, but how quickly and violently the king's life spiraled downward when he foolishly made idolatrous women his friends in marriage.

Who are your friends? Your answer is important.

In our series on spiritual warfare, we are presently identifying and describing that well known triumvirate of enemies: Satan, the world, and our own sinful flesh. Last time we created a kind of profile card describing our enemy “Satan.” Now we examine “the world.” By “the world” we do not mean the physical universe of dry

land, seas, and the skies above. Rather, we mean wicked men and women living out of the inner principle of corruption and producing unfruitful works of darkness, as a race alienated from God and hostile to Christ (see Rom. 12:2; Eph. 2:2; James 1:27; 4:4; I John 2:15-17).

There are many things we could say about the world, speaking in terms of: lust, pride of life, drinking, drugs, movies, unholy music, raunchy television programs, profanity, laziness, gluttony, adultery, sexting, fornication, pornography, love of money, rebellion, revolution, identity-theft, lies, deceit, cheating, carnal ambition, Sabbath desecration, idolatry in countless forms, pleasure in iniquity, hatred for the church and Christ and the Ten Commandments, vain philosophy, murder, verbal and physical abuse, and a whole arsenal of “isms” such as humanism, secularism, evolutionism, transgenderism, and terrorism. However, instead of producing a list of descriptors of this enemy “the world” as we did with “Satan,” we want to focus upon a singular concept: *friendship*.

Friendship with the world is a means—a most effective means, maybe *the* most effective means—whereby many of the aforementioned detestable realities of the world come to the believer. Friendship with the world is an ever-present danger about which there cannot be too many careful warnings for covenant youth. Warnings can be issued heartlessly as the unfruitful berating of covenant youth, or inaccurately by making sweeping generalizations. Sometimes even the most spiritually mature and sincere among the youth can be agitated and adversely affected by the poor manner in which a warning is delivered. But sincere and urgent warnings wisely and compassionately issued in the interest of fellowship with God cannot come too often—even hard-hitting ones as the faithful wounds of a friend. “Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever therefore will be

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Previous article in this series: February 1, 2017, p. 208.

a friend of the world is an enemy of God" (James 4:4).

Who could word a warning stronger than that? Friendship with the world is enmity with God.

Friendly

You may and ought to be *friendly* to the men and women of the world as you live among them and have loose, formal associations with them. Because we are not and may not be ascetics who flee modern society for little enclaves in the wilderness, we will work alongside worldly men and women day after day in our place of occupation. We will be their classmates in college. We will bump into them at the gas station, the grocery store, the gym, the local library, the park, or while on vacation. Be friendly.

Friendliness and friendship are not the same. While there can be no friendship without friendliness, there can be friendliness without friendship. Friendliness is a characteristic; friendship is a relationship. Be friends with God's friends, and none other. But be friendly to all. Christians living in that fountainhead of heathendom called Rome were exhorted in the first century, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men" (Rom. 12:18). "Peaceably" is a positive word that means more than "without belligerence." The Christian soldier should be cordial, civil, courteous, and approachable to those around him in the world. If exhibiting friendliness is mistakenly confirming your approval of some individual's God-dishonoring action, lifestyle, or religion, or is encouraging him in it, then some measure of friendliness must be sacrificed. If friendliness toward an unbeliever at work is leading unstoppably to the establishment of a bond of friendship with that unbeliever so that the two of you do much more than work together, then friendliness has crossed the boundary of what is acceptable to God. If friendliness is leading to flirting, and flirting to a dating relationship with one who does not love the Lord as you do, the friendliness must be curtailed. But, if it be possible, as much as lies in you, be friendly and cordial to all.

Do not be frigid, surly, or rude; and certainly do not be cruel. To say it another way, do not be churlish as beautiful Abigail's husband Nabal was churlish. Spirit-filled Christians are not churlish. The antithesis—militancy in our spiritual warfare—does not require churlishness

toward the men and women of the world whose lives intersect with ours. The antithesis does not require of you icy cold treatment of your partner in the engineering project in college or the coworker in the cubicle next to you at work because that particular individual does not confess the essentials of the Reformed faith or even because that individual is, let's say, a devout Roman Catholic or a professing agnostic. Even when you must ask an ungodly coworker (even "Christian" co-worker) to refrain from using profanities (read Lord's Day 36), don't make your request churlishly but politely. And if your nearest coworker is a nauseatingly bold, in-your-face, taunting, transgender God-denier, then pray for much wisdom to walk worthy of the Lord and consider whether giving up your position for a new one might be best for you. But do not be churlish.

Being of ill repute in the world for unfriendliness is not good for a Christian. It is true that the charge of unfriendliness is often leveled against the faithful for sticking uncompromisingly to their principles—to their Christ. Many good theologians have been unfairly branded "unfriendly." However, let it not be true that we really are unfriendly to worldly people in our path. Unfriendliness could potentially disqualify a young man from serving in church office. I Timothy 3:7 gives that less familiar qualification for an office bearer: "Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without...." He must have a good reputation in the world. One way a man might fail to have a good reputation in the world is that by his conduct, demeanor, and words at work and in the neighborhood he reveals himself to be a boorish fool. Perhaps he even acts so churlishly because he mistakenly supposes that putting on the whole armor of God means he must carry an unpeaceable disposition toward any non-Christian in his path. He is governed by an extreme misapplication of the antithesis and will prove he is not fit for special office in God's church. Even the world will say so.

Additionally, how will you ever have an opportunity to make known to an unbeliever or ignorant professing Christian in your path the wonderful deeds of God and share the gospel of the Christ you claim to love if you are so churlish no one wants to walk on the same side of the road as you? Be friendly.

Not Friends

But unfriendliness is hardly the danger. Friendship is the danger—the real and great danger. We may not be friends with the world. Friends live in a relationship in which they voluntarily spend time together, walk together in communion, and find sweet companionship together. Their hearts are yoked together. Although many in our path do not overtly display the depravity of their hearts because they are friendly and outwardly ethical, they still belong to the world. Obviously, the thief and murderer belong to the world. But so do plenty of nominal Christians who go to church every Sunday and a Christian high school or college during the week. Their unholy walk of life is proof. They may not be our friends.

There is something worse than having no friends. Having no friends is misery. But there is something more miserable, and that is having *worldly* friends. Better to have no friend than a friend who is the enemy of God. Better to be single and lonely in a tent than to be married to a gorgeous Philistine or a handsome Canaanite in a palace. Not all young people will agree, but time will prove it to be so. I trust you agree, dear reader.

Worldly friends will influence us. In a relationship with them we will invariably pick up habits, develop ways of thinking and speaking, and find new interests that are corrupt according to the Word of God. Worldly friends will never make us want to love God more, make us want to serve Christ more, give us a deeper appreciation for the church, and make us want to read Reformed literature and study our Bibles more. They do not make us want to hate our sins more. It is one thing to have a loose, formal association with an ungodly college classmate with whom we collaborate in a lab project. It is another thing to say, “Want to hang out Friday night?”

One of the most powerful and effective means Satan has employed throughout the ages for drawing the children of believers out of the instituted church and into the world and off the path of sanctified living into the path of spiritual indifference and gross immorality is the influence of ungodly friends. The reason the heathen inhabitants of Canaan had to be driven out before Israel (Ex. 34:11) was so that Israel not make a covenant of friendship with them (v. 12) and then go awhoring after their gods (v. 15). In fact, in that dispensation of covenantal history those unholy Canaanites had to be *killed*. Some

of our baptized children grow up and go awhoring after the gods of the twenty-first century Canaanites. Worldly friends led them there. Sometimes these worldly friends exert their influence from thousands of miles away. Though they are not on our path, they can still sing their profane music to us through our head-phones, or from Hollywood they can amuse us with their half-naked (or naked) bodies or murderous hands through a screen. May God save us from worldly friendships and the idolatry that follows!

When God incorporates us into His everlasting covenant of friendship, filling our hearts with love for Him, we cannot and will not walk as friends with the world that hates our God. The cross of Jesus Christ, which is the basis for the covenant, proves that the holy cannot be friends with the unholy. The friends of God cannot be the friends of the world. If God Himself could be friends with us naturally worldly, unholy sinners, there would be no cross. But there was a cross. The cross proves the necessity of righteousness and holiness in covenantal friendship. We *may not* be a friend of the world. May God put that conviction in our souls.

The difference between godly friends and worldly friends is marked. Let's conclude with a few of those differences, drawing some of our direction from the inspired Solomon in the book of Proverbs.

- Godly friends are kind; worldly friends, and even their tender mercies, are cruel.
- Godly friends are loyal; worldly friends betray or will betray.
- Godly friends love truth and sincerity; worldly friends are misleading and deceitful.
- Godly friends will give good advice; worldly friends pour foolishness out of their mouths.
- Godly friends, when they sin—and they will sin, for there is no such thing as a sinless friend, Christ excepted—confess and repent; worldly friends are too proud to acknowledge wrong.
- Godly friends understand the importance of discipline for themselves and others, and will admonish you if you go astray; worldly friends hate correction and will laugh with you if they see you going astray.
- Godly friends strive to avoid sin and steer clear of every appearance of evil; worldly friends walk toward sin and entertain temptations.


- Godly friends take delight in doing what is right; worldly friends delight in mischief.
- Godly friends are teachable; worldly friends refuse instruction.
- Godly friends are hungry for Christ, the preaching of Him, His church, and growth in knowledge of Him through the Scriptures; foolish friends are hungry for the vanities of the world and have little or no time for church and the gospel of the Reformed faith.
- Godly friends walk like they have been with Jesus—because they have and are; foolish friends walk like they have been with the devil—because they have and are.

What kind of friend am I? What kind of friend are you? Stating these differences is convicting. May God forgive and sanctify us, making us better friends.

But now, who are your friends?

Who are you *dating* right now? You are in the heat of battle, so will you sincerely consider whether the goal of this dating relationship is the satisfaction of your flesh or the honor of God?

And if your dating is pleasing to God, may He assure you of that in your heart.

“I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts” (Ps. 119:63). 

CHURCH AND STATE

MR. BRIAN VAN ENGEN

The Supreme Court— Will the Balance of Justice Tip?

In the recent presidential election in the United States, many Christian voters were reluctant to vote for Republican candidate Donald Trump. Although the values of Christian voters on issues such as abortion and homosexual rights tend to align more with those of Republican candidates, many had concerns about Trump’s personal life, his incendiary comments, and his past positions on values issues. Despite these reservations, many conservative voters cast their ballots for Trump, not necessarily because of support for him personally, but because of the appointments he had indicated he will make to the Supreme Court as well as to other appointed positions.

Appointments to the Supreme Court are lifelong and, therefore, the effects of a president’s judicial appointments are felt by the country for years to come. Some presidential administrations come and go without the

President ever appointing a single Justice to the high court. However, the role of the President in making appointments to the Supreme Court was especially highlighted in the last election cycle because of the vacancy left by the sudden death of Justice Antonin Scalia. We will examine the current situation in the Supreme Court, its effect on matters of church and state jurisprudence, and the possibilities for the future of the Court.

The Supreme Court has been divided for many years, with many decisions on controversial issues being decided by a 5 to 4 majority vote. The Court has had four Justices who usually took a more conservative position, including Justices Scalia, Clarence Thomas, Samuel Alito, and Chief Justice John Roberts. The Court also has four Justices who usually come down on the liberal side of issues, including Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan, and Stephen Breyer. The ninth Justice, and often the deciding vote on the court, is Justice Anthony Kennedy, who sometimes votes with the conservative Justices, and other times with the liberal

Mr. VanEngen, a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney.

Justices. The balance of power on the Court has been very delicate.

Despite the ideological divide on the Court, under Chief Justice Roberts, and Chief Justice William Rehnquist before him, the Court has often taken positions which preserve religious freedoms. From allowing religious groups to use sacramental tea containing controlled substances,¹ to allowing religious groups to decide their own employment issues independent of federal employment discrimination laws,² the Court has tended to give churches, religious institutions, and religious individuals substantial freedom to exercise their religion. In some cases, the Court has protected religious freedom at the expense of the rights that individuals have under other laws, such as the protection individuals normally have from discrimination under federal employment law.

Some of the more recent cases the Court has decided have involved questions of conscience for businesses and institutions operated by Christians. In the case of *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, the issue was whether a corporation could refuse to provide employees with contraceptives required by the Affordable Care Act due to religious objections to those contraceptives.³ In a landmark decision, the divided court held that a corporation could exercise religious freedom and avoid the requirement on religious grounds.

The federal government's implementation of vast new programs such as the Affordable Care Act are sure to increase the number of cases in which the mandates of government programs collide with the religious beliefs of Christians. At the same time, the Court's recent ruling on homosexual marriage in the *Obergefell* case guarantees that those exercising religious freedoms will also come into increased conflict with claims of discrimination by homosexuals. Over the next several years, the Supreme Court's decisions will have an enormous impact as the law on these issues is developed.

The tenuous balance on the court was upset in February of 2016, when Justice Scalia passed away suddenly. Scalia was a textualist and construed the U.S.

Constitution and other laws very strictly according to the original intent. Scalia was also an intellectual force to be reckoned with, and often made well-reasoned legal arguments that swayed his fellow Justices towards his conservative position.

After Scalia's death, even if Justice Anthony Kennedy sides with the conservative Justices, the court has been deadlocked with four Justices on each side of many issues. If another liberal leaning Justice were appointed to fill the vacancy created by Scalia's death, the Court would have an established 5-4 liberal majority. President Obama nominated a replacement for Justice Scalia, but such nominations are subject to Senate confirmation, and Senate Republicans refused to hold confirmation hearings. With no confirmation, the choice for a replacement would fall to the winner of the November election.

While operating with only eight Justices, the Court has not continued to guard religious liberties in the same manner. For instance, the Court declined to hear an appeal in a case involving a family-owned pharmacy in Washington in a right-of-conscience case. The state of Washington issued regulations requiring pharmacies to dispense birth control that the family considered abortive. The Stormans family challenged the regulations as a violation of their religious liberty and right of conscience. They offered to refer customers who wanted such medications to other pharmacies, but did not want to distribute the drugs themselves. The Court declined to hear the case, which meant that the ruling of the lower court upholding the regulations was left standing as the final ruling in the case.⁴

The three remaining conservative Justices dissented from the decision to deny the pharmacy's appeal. Conservative Justice Samuel Alito commented on the implications of the Court's refusal to hear the appeal, calling it "an ominous sign." Alito wrote, "If this is a sign of how religious liberty claims will be treated in the years ahead, those who value religious freedom have cause for great concern." The Court's act in declining to hear the Stormans' appeal means that Christians who are pharmacists in Washington are left with the dilemma of either violating their consciences or finding other employment.

As a side note, the Supreme Court's declining to hear the Stormans' appeal may not have made a difference.

¹ *Gonzales v. O Centro Espirita Beneficente Uniao do Vegetal*, 126 S. Ct. 1211; 546 U.S. 418 (2006).

² *Hosanna-Tabor Evangelical Lutheran Church and School v. EEOC*, 132 S. Ct. 694; 565 U.S. (2012).

³ *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, 134 S. Ct. 2751; 573 U.S. (2014).


⁴ *Stormans v. Wiesman*, 136 S.Ct. 2433 (2016).

Given the vacancy on the Court, even if Justice Anthony Kennedy sided with the conservative Justices, the decision could be split four to four if the Justices divided along the usual lines. In cases of an even split, the Court issues what is called a *per curiam* decision, which does not have precedential value and therefore does not settle the law on an issue. If Justice Kennedy sided with the liberal wing of the Court, the decision could have been five to three against the Stormans.

President Trump has indicated that he will nominate a Justice to fill the vacancy left by Scalia from a list that he released while still a candidate. Many are hopeful that the individuals listed will be on the conservative side of the Court if confirmed as the next Supreme Court Justice. This would move the Court more towards the balance that existed when Justice Scalia was on the bench.

Additionally, the age of a number of the Justices would suggest that whoever holds the office of President over the next few years could make additional nominations. Two of the Justices from the Court's liberal wing, Justice

Ginsburg and Justice Breyer, are 83 and 78 years old, respectively. Justice Kennedy is 80 years old.

Our comfort is knowing that whatever direction is taken by the Supreme Court and its jurisprudence, it is in the Lord's hand. His will determines the decisions that will be made, whether He chooses the means of the Court to protect the religious freedom of His people, or to use it so that the church is oppressed. We trust in God rather than man. History has shown that Justices appointed by conservative-leaning Presidents do not always prove to be conservative Justices. Justice Anthony Kennedy was appointed by Ronald Reagan, but often sides with the liberal Justices. Retired Justice Sandra Day O'Connor was also appointed by Reagan, but was not consistently conservative. Retired Justice David Souter was appointed by President George H. W. Bush, but sided with the liberal Justices. We must wait patiently on the Lord, to see whether He will use the means of the Supreme Court to allow His church religious freedoms for a time yet. 

CLASSIS EAST REPORT

MR. JON HUISKEN

January 11, 2017

Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church
Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 11, 2017, at the Georgetown PRC. Each church was represented by two delegates. Present also were the synodical deputies from Classis West: Revs. S. Key, D. Kuiper, and N. Langerak. Rev. K. Koole was the chairman for this session.

The Classis dealt first with the request from Faith PRC to organize a new congregation in the Jenison area, which congregation will be known as Zion PRC. With thanks to God, the Classis approved this request and instructed Faith PRC to proceed with the organization of this congregation. The synodical deputies expressed concurrence with the decision of Classis.

Classis considered an appeal from a brother who protested a decision of his consistory to admit non-Protestant Reformed believers to its communion table. At issue was whether the consistory followed the principles adopted by Classis East in 1945 to admit such people to the communion table. (For future reference: The case was brought to Classis East in October 1945 and was

put in the hands of a study committee that reported to the April 1946 Classis, which adjudicated the case and adopted the principles.) Classis East in 1945 decided that indeed non-Protestant Reformed believers could be admitted after the consistory was satisfied that those who requested admission reveal themselves as believers in their walk and conversation and are in good standing in their home churches. Further, it should be demonstrated that those asking permission do not have ready access to the table in their home churches. The brother contended that his consistory did not follow the principles adopted by Classis East in 1945; his consistory believed that they indeed had done so. Classis East decided not to sustain the appeal of this brother.

The report of the church visitors was received. The report indicated that the visitors found peace and unity in our churches.

Classis spent time, as is usual at the January meeting, in voting. The following delegates to Synod 2017 were elected: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* W. Bruinsma, G. Eriks, C. Haak, C. Spronk, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* N. Decker, K. Koole, W. Langerak, R. Smit, A. Spriensma.

ELDERS: *Primi*: Pete Adams, Gary Boverhof, Jim Lanting, Sid Miedema, John VanBaren; *Secundi*: Mike Bosveld, Dave Bouwkamp, Bruce Jabaay, Wes Koops, Joel Minderhoud.

In other voting, Revs. R. VanOverloop and R. Smit were elected to three-year terms as *primus* and *secundus* delegates *ad examina* respectively. Rev. H. Bleyenbergh was appointed to another three-year term on the Classical Committee. Revs. J. Slopsema and C. Haak were elected as church visitors with Revs. G. Eriks and R. VanOverloop as alternates.


Classis also needed to replace its Stated Clerk and Assistant Stated Clerk. After forty-plus years serving as Stated Clerk, Jon Huiskens notified Classis in September, 2016 that he would not be seeking another term. Gary Boverhof was elected to serve as his successor. Rev. H.

Bleyenbergh was appointed as Assistant State Clerk. Classis expressed its thanks to J. Huiskens for his service to Classis over these years and wished him Godspeed in the years ahead.

In other business, Classis approved the 2018 subsidy requests for Wingham PRC (\$41,000—CDN) and Pittsburgh PRC (\$99,000). Classical appointments were given to Holland PRC, Southwest PRC, and to the new congregation, Zion PRC.

In closed session, Classis considered the request of a consistory for the erasure of a baptized member.

The expenses of Classis amounted to \$1,698.65. Classis will meet next on May 10, 2017 at the Byron Center PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Trivia Question

There are three Protestant Reformed Churches in the great land of Canada. They are First PRC of Edmonton, Alberta; Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta; and Wingham, Ontario PRC. Do you know which was organized into a Protestant Reformed congregation first? Answer later in this column.

Young Adult Activities

The Lynden, WA PRC welcomes young adults to their planned Protestant Reformed Young Adults Retreat to be held at Warm Beach Camp and Convention Center, 40 miles to the south of Lynden, on July 3-7, 2017. Registration opened in January and more information can be found by e-mailing Kyle Hanko at kyhanko@gmail.com

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

Mission Activities

The Maranatha PRC of Valenzuela City, Philippines held a "Thanksgiving Fellowship" after their services on January 8 to remember the goodness and faithfulness of our God and Father through the Lord Jesus Christ for the past year of 2016.

Pastor Daniel and Leah Holstege and family, along with Leah's parents Lou and Cheryl Regnerus, departed from Chicago for their mission home in the Republic of the Philippines on January 11. They arrived safely in Manila and moved into the former Smit residence. On January 15 they attended the services at Provident Christian Church in Marikina where a special lunch was held in their honor to welcome them. Rev. Holstege preached in Marikina the next Sunday. May God bless our new missionary family in their new home!

There will be a young people's

camp in the Philippines. This is scheduled for April 12-14 at Pae-na-an Campground, Antipolo City. The theme will be "Love Not the World" from I John 2: 15. Three speeches are planned: "Youth and Money" by Rev. John Flores, "Youth and Technology" by Rev. Leovy Trinidad, and "Youth and Society" by Rev. Vernon Ibe. All area young people are being encouraged to attend this exciting spiritual opportunity!

Rev. Vernon Ibe, pastor of the Berean PRC located in Antipolo City, Rizal, Philippines, still makes the long trip to Gabaldon twice a month to teach an Essentials of Reformed doctrine class there. The group of about eight families meets about two miles north of the former church building, next to Brother Lando's home. There is a hope to once again start up worship services there, possibly in the next year. We pray for God's continued care and

spiritual nourishment for the people there!

Pastor A. Spriensma spent a few days in January in Franklin, PA to do investigative work for the DMC and to preach to the saints in that area.

Minister Activities

The Council of Doon, IA PRC announced a new trio for the purpose of calling a third missionary to the Philippines. The trio included Revs. G. Eriks, J. Mahtani, and C. Spronk. On January 15 the call was extended to Rev. Mahtani. May God grant guidance and a clear answer to this call.

On January 8 Rev. Gary Eriks, pastor at Hudsonville, MI PRC, announced his decision concerning the call extended to him from Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI. God led Rev. Eriks to decline this call. We are thankful for a clear indication of God's will. A new trio was then formed, consisting of Revs. S. Key, R. Kleyn, and C. Spronk. On January 22 Rev. R. Kleyn received this call.

The Council of First PRC of Holland, MI announced a new trio: Revs. A. Lanning, C. Haak, and R. Kleyn. The congregation voted to call Rev. A. Lanning on January 22.

Congregational Activities

From the bulletin of Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD:

On Sunday evening, January 29, during our 4:00 p.m. service we will commemorate 10 years of worship services in Sioux Falls. After the evening worship service we will have a congregational

luncheon. Under the auspices of the Domestic Mission Committee and oversight of Edgerton PRC, worship services began on January 28, 2007 in the Ambassador Room at the Holiday Inn downtown with Rev. Rodney Kleyn preaching for the morning service and Rev. David Overway preaching in the afternoon. Rev. Brummel will preach an appropriate sermon and we urge you to invite family and friends to join us in celebration of God's faithfulness. A group photo will be taken after the evening service, so we encourage everyone to be present.

In these 10 years God has made it possible for Heritage PRC to become a congregation and to purchase their own church building. We give thanks with them for His goodness to their congregation!

Sister-Church Activities

On January 8 the congregation of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore witnessed the installation of Rev. Emmanuel Singh as missionary-pastor to Kolkata, India. This marked the beginning of Rev. Singh's official ministry in the CERC. He is now authorized by Christ to perform the labors of missionary in Kolkata. A solemn event, but also a very joyful one! We thank God for leading the CERC and Rev. Singh to this point and continue to pray for God's grace to send forth the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ wherever He opens a door.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society at Loveland, CO PRC scheduled a Mexican-themed dinner and silent

auction on Friday, February 3. They served burrito bowls, quesadillas, drinks, and desserts, with a silent auction after the meal. All the donations will help the twenty-five members in the society attend the Western Retreat and Young People's Convention.

School Activities

The current sophomores and juniors in Loveland, CO Protestant Reformed School are beginning their fundraising for their class trip to Washington DC, planned for the spring of 2018, D.V. On Monday, January 16 they sponsored a night at Pizza Ranch with a portion of all sales going toward their trip expenses. Now that sounds like a trip worth eating for!

Denominational Activities

Classis East of the PRCA met in regular session on January 11 at Georgetown, MI PRC. Classis approved the request of the group desiring to be organized as Zion PRC in the Hudsonville/Jenison area. The Council of Faith PRC was appointed to oversee this organization, which was held on February 8.

Trivia Answer

First PRC of Edmonton was organized in 1975. Immanuel, Lacombe was organized in 1987. Wingham PRC was organized in 1979 as a member of the Orthodox Christian Reformed Church and joined the PRC in 2004.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanksgiving and praise to our God we rejoice with our parents,

REV. GISE and CLARA VAN BAREN

on the occasion of their recent 60th wedding anniversary. We are thankful for the many years God has given them together; we praise God for His amazing grace and mercy shown to them, and we are blessed by their godly example. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless and sustain them in His love and faithfulness. "I have set the LORD always before me: because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (Psalm 16:8).

- * John and Valerie VanBaren
- * Carolyn and Robert Prins
- * Gerald and Heidi VanBaren
- * Marilyn and Mike VanOverloop
- * Denise Haan
- * Daniel and Sheryl VanBaren
- * Philip and Patricia VanBaren
- * Rachel and Aric Bleyenbergh
- 33 Grandchildren
- 13 Great Grandchildren

Hudsonville, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness and praise to our God we rejoice with our parents,

DAVID and KARLA KAMPS,

who will celebrate their 40th wedding anniversary on February 18, 2017. We are thankful for the years God has given them together and we praise God for the blessings He has bestowed on them in their generations. It is our prayer that their example and witness will continue to glorify our heavenly Father.

"For the LORD is good: his mercy is everlasting: and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Chris and Laura Dykstra
- Carter, Riley, Spencer, Avery
- * Jeff and Sara Van Til
- Amelia, Bennett, Roman
- * Tim and Betsy Kleyn
- Julia, Evan, Libby, Bridget, Ryan
- * Brent and Kara Kregel
- Nelle, Tessa, Clara

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed School of Wingham is in need of a multi-grade teacher for the 2017-2018 school year. There is grade flexibility with grade assignments, etc. and the board is willing to work with an interested individual's preference. Please contact Jim Siertsema at jimsiertsema@gmail.com or cell 519-955-5665 or Preston Crich at prstncrch@gmail.com for more information and to apply.

Notice

■ The Building Expansion Finance Committee of the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, MI is soliciting for private, unsecured 5-year loans to fund the proposed construction of their new sanctuary addition. These notes will bear interest at a rate of 3% per annum with interest paid annually and with principle due in full at maturity. Interested parties should contact either Tom Holstege (616-802-7751/ Tom@miedemaconcrete.com) or Marc Velthouse (616-890-6332/marc.velthouse@yahoo.com) for further details.

Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Hope, Redlands PRC on Wednesday, March 1 2017, at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Hope's consistory.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (Phone: 616-821-0369). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 7, 2017, 3:30 P.M., D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

Call to Aspirants to the Ministry

■ All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2017-2018 academic year should make application at the March 16, 2017 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

A testimonial from the prospective student's consistory that he is a member in full communion, sound in faith, and upright in walk, and exhibits the qualities and personality necessary for a gospel minister; a certificate of health from a reputable physician; and a college transcript must accompany the application. Before entering the seminary, all students must have earned a bachelor's degree and met all of the course requirements for entrance to the seminary. These entrance requirements are listed in the seminary catalog available from the school or on the Seminary's website.

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 16 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,

4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

* * * * *

The Protestant Reformed Seminary admits students of any race, color, and national or ethnic origin.