

The Standard Bearer

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Abraham's Sojourn by Faith

"By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."

Hebrews 11:9, 10

Abraham is a prominent figure in the list of heroes of faith in Hebrews 11. Abraham could be considered from many points of view, but here in Hebrews 11 the emphasis falls upon the faith of Abraham. In verse 8 we are told that this faith was manifest in his obedience to the call of God. That call consisted of a two-fold command: "Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." And, positively, get thee "unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1). That call to Abraham included a promise. We read in Genesis 12:2: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee...." Included in that promise was God's Word to Abraham upon his arrival in Canaan, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (v. 7).

Abraham obeyed this call. He did not question God's call to him or contrive excuses not to go. He took Sarah and Lot and all "the souls that they had gotten in Haran" and all their substance, and he went out (v. 5). He did

so not even knowing where he was going. But by faith Abraham simply followed, step by step, the direction of the Lord.

But Abraham's faith and obedience must not be understood as a single act that was fulfilled when he reached Canaan. Upon arriving in the land of promise he was called to persevere in his faith. For he was called to sojourn there. And his faith manifested in his life of sojourning is meant to strengthen our faith. It is meant to encourage us as we continue our pilgrimage here below.

The Meaning

When Abraham came to the land that God showed him, he did not find a country all prepared for himself and his family. He did not find a land that he could take immediately as his possession. He did not find a place filled with people with whom he could have a genuinely spiritual relationship. Quite the contrary, he found a country inhabited by the heathen Canaanites.

Abraham had only the promise of God. God had promised to make of him a great nation, but as yet he had no child and his wife was barren. The Lord had promised to make his name great. But here he was, a stranger in a land inhabited by heathen tribes. Jehovah had promised to give the land to Abraham and his seed. But he did not own any of the land, "... not so much as to set his foot on" (Acts 7:5).

So what was Abraham to do? Was Abraham to return to that land from which he had come? Hebrews 11:15 sug-

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gests that that would have been possible. But Abraham did not and could not go back. Was he to take possession of the land of Canaan by force? After all, God had promised that the land was to be his! But Abraham was not to raise his own arm of flesh against the inhabitants of the land. Well, was he then to become a citizen of that land? Perhaps he could have moved in with some of the wicked inhabitants, or he could have built his own city there in Canaan. But Abraham, believing God's promise, could not do that.

Abraham was called to exercise his faith! He simply had to believe the promise of God. He had to wait for God Himself to realize His promise. In a word, Abraham was required to sojourn in the land of promise. Literally, this word "sojourn" means "to dwell beside or in one's neighborhood." It means to dwell in a place as a stranger; to dwell as a visitor in a place that is not one's home.

This Abraham did by faith. He dwelled as a stranger in the land of promise. He did not mingle with the Canaanites; he did not conform to their idolatrous ways. He remained separate from the wicked inhabitants of the land. He was an outsider, a foreigner in the land that would one day be his. He sojourned there "as in a strange country." Literally, we read, "as in a land belonging to another." Abraham lived in the land conscious of the fact that not a square foot of the land belonged to him. He never made himself at home there.

Abraham's sojourn was manifest by his "dwelling in tabernacles." The word "tabernacles" refers here to tents. A tent is always a temporary dwelling place. A tent may be easily taken down and carried away; it is a very weak and frail abode. A tent has no permanence and stability; it is without a strong foundation. A tent is always a moveable abode; it can be pitched today in one place and tomorrow in another. A tent is the proper dwelling place for a nomad, a wanderer in a land not his own. So a tent is the symbol of what is temporary. Abraham's tent-life pointed to the fact that he sojourned in the land. By his dwelling in tents Abraham manifested himself as a sojourner, a stranger in the land of promise.

That Abraham sojourned by dwelling in tabernacles meant that he stood in stark contrast to the inhabitants of the land. He was a stranger there, a foreigner, and that was obvious to all. Abraham took no part in the political or social affairs there. He had very little social interaction with the Canaanites. Abraham built different altars

and worshiped a different God. Abraham wore different clothes, spoke a different language, and sang different songs. Abraham had different purposes and goals. In all his life Abraham conducted himself as a foreigner, a sojourner in a land not his own.

The scriptural account of Abraham's life testifies to the truth of all this. At the time of Lot's separating from him, it was very clear that Abraham was willing to remain a pilgrim and a stranger in the land. At the time when Abraham fought and gained the victory over Chadorlaomer and his allies, he was known by the Canaanites as "the Hebrew." The name means "from the other side," referring either to the other side of the Jordan or of the Euphrates river. That name pointed to the fact that he was known as a stranger. To point to but one more example, at the time of his purchase of a burial place for Sarah, his words to the sons of Heth were: "I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying place with you..." (Gen. 23:4).

Our text states that Isaac and Jacob also sojourned in tents as heirs with him of the same promise. That they possessed the same promise of God is evident from the fact that God, in speaking of the promise to Abraham, includes Abraham's seed. After Abraham had arrived in Canaan, the Lord appeared to him and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Gen. 12:4). And that promise of God was repeated to Isaac and Jacob personally—to Isaac in Genesis 26:3, and to Jacob in Genesis 28:13. Because they possessed that same promise, we read that they were "heirs with him." They too believed the promise of God. They too sojourned in the land of promise. They also dwelled in tents as strangers and pilgrims in the land.

All this emphasizes that these patriarchs had to live their whole life by faith, as sojourners in the land of promise.

The Motivation

Abraham's sojourn was possible only by faith. By nature he might have been inclined to return to Haran. Or he might have attempted to conquer the land. Or he might have built a city there and joined himself with the Canaanites. Humanly speaking, the life of sojourning was impossible. But Abraham did all of this by faith. He believed the promise of God. Believing, he was content to sojourn in the land.

But we might be inclined to ask then, Did not Abraham die sorely disappointed, without any hope of the real-

ization of the promise? God had told him that he would receive the land, but he never did. All his life he merely sojourned in the land of promise. Abraham hardly saw a glimmering of fulfillment. Was not his faith in vain?

Not at all, for he looked for the heavenly, “for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.” Abraham knew that God’s promise did not refer ultimately to that earthly land of Canaan. He realized that the promise of God went far beyond that earthly land. In that earthly Canaan Abraham saw only a shadow of the much more glorious, heavenly inheritance. Because of that, he could sojourn in the land of his inheritance. He could persevere in his faith.

This city for which Abraham looked was a city with foundations. This implies that this city is not something temporary or frail. It is the incorruptible inheritance of which Peter speaks in I Peter 1:4. This is a city whose Builder and Maker is God! God is its sovereign Architect. God is also its Builder, the one who actually framed the city. This is, of course, the deepest reason for its abiding character.

This city, therefore, is the New Jerusalem, the heavenly city. And the New Jerusalem is the church, according to Scripture. In Galatians 4:26 we read: “Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all.” Hebrews 12:22, 23 speaks of the heavenly Jerusalem as “the general assembly and church of the firstborn....” This is also plain from the beautiful description of the New Jerusalem given in Revelation 21. There John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride. The point is that the city is not a number of houses and buildings, but it is the living citizens, the people, who constitute the city. The church depicted as a city emphasizes the idea of communion and fellowship, something quite different from Abraham’s life of sojourning.

That this city has foundations means, therefore, that it is a city founded in God’s eternal decree. God’s decree is the foundation of this city! Election makes this a firm and abiding city. God as the Architect designs it in His eternal decree. God as the Builder builds that city through Jesus Christ. Christ, after all, is the heart of the promise, the chief Cornerstone in that city. And the working of the Spirit of Christ in our hearts makes us citizens of the city, living stones from which that city is built. This was the motivation for Abraham’s sojourn by

faith. He looked for the everlasting glory of the church in the new heavens and the new earth. With that faith Abraham was content, perfectly content, to sojourn all his life in the promised land.

The Significance


We may be inclined to ask, Why? Why did God require Abraham to sojourn his entire life? Why did not God immediately give him the land? Why did not God immediately fulfill His promise to Abraham? And why does God require us to sojourn here below? Could He not immediately give us our inheritance? Could He not immediately bring us to our heavenly home?

The answer is that God wanted Abraham and wants us to live by faith! God has determined every step of the way to our inheritance. Of course, Christ had to come! And now we wait for His return upon the clouds of heaven. God will not bring about the final fulfillment of His promise until all the elect are saved.

But what does it mean that we are called to sojourn? Sojourning here below does not mean that we become isolationists. We are not to separate ourselves physically from the inhabitants of this earth in some remote colony. Abraham did not do that. Neither are we to separate ourselves from the things of the world as such. Abraham did not do that.

For us to sojourn means that we live here not as citizens, spiritually, of this world, but as citizens of the kingdom of heaven. We live in the midst of the world, but we are not of the world. This means that we strive to live antithetically here below, seeking all that is good and rejecting all that is evil.

More specifically, that we sojourn here below as strangers in the land means that we are different just as Abraham was different. We speak a different language, spiritually speaking. We sing different songs, the songs of Zion. We worship a different God, the God of Scripture. We have different goals than does the world. And this must be seen by all! In our day camping, tenting is extremely popular. But are we spiritual tent-dwellers? Do we live in tents spiritually, or in houses with foundations?

Only by faith can we sojourn here below. By God’s grace we too look for the city which hath foundations. In the faith of Abraham we will receive our glorious inheritance. 

Training for Excellence in Teachers

Believing parents understand the weighty responsibility before God to train up their children in the fear of the Lord. When possible, Reformed parents band together to establish and maintain Christian schools to assist them in this high calling. The teachers are the heart of these Christian schools. This being the case, the importance of qualified—highly qualified—teachers cannot be overstated.

The past couple of editorials have focused on some of the essential qualifications for Protestant Reformed teachers—natural, spiritual, and theological qualifications. The theme has been that Protestant Reformed schools need excellent teachers.

In this connection, I have received some correspondence from Protestant Reformed teachers, and this is appreciated and helpful. One comment I share. The teacher wrote,

Having been a teacher yourself, you understand, I am confident, that no Protestant Reformed teacher will read your articles and conclude that he or she is counted among the “excellent” teachers. We all know our weaknesses, and our students and their parents know them even more. Yet teachers have a certain assurance that when we labor in love and out of a conviction of calling, that the Lord will establish the work of our hands. Any excellence is the Lord’s doing.

A hearty “Amen!” to that well-put

reminder. At the same time, excellence is the teacher’s goal because the work is so important. As is true of parents, God equips teachers and uses their hard work, lifting them to a level of excellence that is often beyond themselves. Teachers, day in and day out, deal with the minds, emotions, bodies, and hearts of covenant children—God’s children. God uses these dedicated teachers to help mold these young hearts and minds with the goal of perfecting these young saints—bringing them to spiritual maturity, to the goal that God has in mind for each individual believer. The teacher seeks to furnish each child unto all good works, that is, a life of serving God (II Tim. 3:17). Teachers are preparing future fathers and future mothers in Israel, future confessing members, office-bearers, and, more teachers. And ultimately, they are preparing these young believers for their place in heaven. What a thrill to be so used by God!

Believing parents, desiring to equip their children for service to God, want to develop as many of their children’s gifts as possible. Accordingly, they demand of the school a broad education—not only mathematics, but music. Not merely reading, but literature. Not only psychology, but physical education. Each child must be equipped to serve God with his heart, mind, soul, and strength (bodily strength). Christian school teachers have the calling to give an education that is broad in scope.

In pursuit of a solid and broad education, teachers impart knowledge and teach skills. Yet we all recognize that the same teaching activity is performed in the public school as well as in the private academy. In the Christian school, however, the teachers not only give facts and information; they also interpret and evaluate the material from a biblical perspective. They answer such questions as: Why is this (information or skill) valuable for the child to be able to serve God? Why is this important for the church of Christ? How does it impact (in history or today) the world of men? How does it fit into God’s counsel, and into the work of the kingdom? And what does it reveal about God Himself?

At the center of the Christian school teacher’s instruction is, and must be, Christ. For Christ is the Word, the One who reveals God in all His glory and majesty (John 1:17, 18). For this reason, God made Christ to be the center of His plan, and Christ has the pre-eminence in all things (Col. 1:18). Christ is also the powerful, creating Word of God—indeed, all things were created not only *by* Him but *for* Him (Col. 1:16). In addition, Christ powerfully preserves the creation (Heb. 1:3) and sovereignly directs all of history (Rev. 6). If the covenant children, then, will be reared in the fear of the Lord and for His service, all the instruction in the Christian school must in some way be leading them to know God

Previous article in this series: January 1, 2017, p. 148.

in Christ—as their Creator, Pre-server, Savior, and Lord.

Christ-centered instruction will be (it is my conviction) Protestant Reformed instruction. But the Protestant Reformed teacher, day after day, lesson after lesson, wants to give instruction that is distinctively and unambiguously Protestant Reformed. He seeks to impress on his students the Reformed “world and life view” that is in harmony with the theology and practice of the Protestant Reformed Churches. He is shaping how the child views himself, how he views the world around him, and what is his relation to Jehovah God. This Reformed world and life view will equip the covenant youth for a lifetime of service to Christ.

It should be obvious, then, that a Christian school is more than an institution of learning *plus* the Bible. A Christian school is more than an academy *plus* Psalm singing, chapels, Scripture reading, and prayer. Rather, a Christian school gives instruction that is consistently permeated with Scripture. The instruction breathes Christ crucified, exalted, and ruling from God’s right hand.

When you consider this, is it becoming clear that the young men and women who aspire to be teachers in a Protestant Reformed school need training to accomplish this monumental task? Do understand clearly, that question is not intended to highlight teacher deficiencies. Not at all! The purpose is rather to draw attention to the fact that their calling is so *high* that it *demand*s special training. Everyone recognizes that any job requires some training. Even after a

college graduate has been trained in a particular field, for example, accounting, computer programing, or business administration, the company that hires him will usually give some training of its own. “This is how you learned it in college. This is how we do it here in this company.”

Allow me to give another example about the importance of special training. A father who knows that his daughter needs heart surgery looks for a man with the necessary qualifications. The beginning qualifications may include that the future surgeon is highly intelligent, enjoyed biology and physiology in college, and has good, steady hands. But no one in his right mind would allow a man to operate on his daughter just because the man was very intelligent, good at science, and had steady hands. Nor would this father be satisfied to find a graduate of a medical school as a general practitioner. Rather, he must know whether this man is *trained* to perform this surgery on his daughter.

So with a teacher. Yes, she must be a Christian who possesses a goodly amount of intelligence, loves covenant children, and has the ability to maintain order in the classroom and convey information effectively. But before the believing father submits his son or daughter to the instruction of this teacher, that father wants to know—is she trained to give Christ-centered instruction and a Protestant Reformed world and life view?

And my answer is: The graduates of Grand Valley State University, Calvin, Hope, Dordt, and Trinity (and other universities and colleges)

are not. I speak from my experience as a teacher. I was not competently trained to teach in a Protestant Reformed school, and my discussions with teachers indicate that others had the same experience. We taught, and struggled along to give Christ-centered, Reformed instruction. But whatever ability we had to do so came from the upbringing of godly parents and years of instruction in Protestant Reformed schools. Those two influences are not insignificant, to be sure. But we needed more. Too often we had to be satisfied simply to get through the material. One may legitimately differentiate between colleges—public universities vs. Christian colleges, and we may hope that the Christian colleges will focus on teaching in a Christian school, whereas the public institutions do not. But it should be apparent that none of these colleges will give the specialized training needed for teaching in a *Protestant Reformed school*.

I point out that my personal experience is limited to only four years of teaching in a Protestant Reformed school. One would hope that there was development in those four years, and I know that teachers who work at this do develop significantly in their ability to have Scripture permeate their instruction. It is a pity that teachers work forty or more years in Protestant Reformed schools, developing in these abilities, and when they retire, their knowledge and experience retire with them. It should be further developed and passed on to college students—equipping them for excellent teaching.

We need to be more specific in

facing the question, “Why do aspiring teachers need training beyond what they are receiving at public or private colleges?” For clarity’s sake, it will help to state the negative, that is, what is not the goal. Further training is *not* needed in order to make prospective teachers Protestant Reformed. That is assumed; that is an essential requirement. The training may well sharpen their understanding of the Reformed faith, but it will not make the individual Protestant Reformed. Secondly, the training is *not* to enable them to teach, though it should sharpen their skills. Third, the training will *not* give them the requisite love for children, though it should set forth *why* they must love these children. Fourth, this training is *not* needed to equip them for classroom discipline, though it should demonstrate that discipline is biblical.

Again, why more training for those who have already received training from a college or university? Consider this. There ought to be a concern generally that college students pick up unbiblical ideas which influence them, without their even being conscious of the influence or

the principles behind it. For starters, education majors are usually taught a wrong view of the child. Without going into detail, there is the view of the unbelieving psychologist, the view of common grace, and the Reformed view. In addition, education majors are taught certain methods of discipline and instruction—methods guided by unbelieving psychology and worldly pedagogy. Further training can focus on these and other erroneous ideas and correct them.


But let us be more practical, and more positive, for I have hopes that further training will discuss or enable the Protestant Reformed teacher to face such questions as these:

- How will “spelling” be taught in a Christian school that will be different from the way it is taught in a public school?
- How does one teach how to find the area of a triangle in a Christ-centered way?
- How does one (in the time allowed) do justice to the ancient Greeks, so that students know what they should but also have the proper Reformed perspective?
- What makes the Spanish class

in a Christian school different from its counterpart in the non-Christian academy?

- Can one teach plant cells with Christ-centered lessons?
- How can we understand $E=mc^2$ biblically?
- How will teachers answer the oft-repeated question from students: “Why do we have to learn this stuff?” (this stuff being trigonometry, English literature, the quadratic equation, and so much more). The world’s universities will have an answer. Colleges governed by common grace will have another answer. What is the Reformed/biblical answer?

This and so much more can be explored in instruction given by experienced Protestant Reformed teachers to those who desire to teach in Protestant Reformed schools. Such instruction would be invaluable, and in my judgment, exciting. It would give confidence to beginning teachers. It would equip them for Protestant Reformed teaching in Protestant Reformed schools. And, therefore, it would be an inestimable blessing to the schools, and to the covenant youth.

So, how do we begin? More, next time. 

ALL AROUND US

REV. CLAY SPRONK

■ Peeking Through Hubble

David L. DeBruyn reports that images from the Hubble Space Telescope show galaxies that man has never seen before.¹ The discoveries are “unlikely to explain burning scientific questions about the origins of dark matter or why the universe appears to be accelerating.” But the discoveries do demonstrate how enormous the universe is. DeBruyn writes,

¹ “Research shows universe had more galaxies in the past,” *Grand Rapids Press*, October 30, 2016.

Rev. Spronk is pastor of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

A widely used analogy is that there are more stars within the Milky Way than there are grains of sand on all the beaches of Earth. That is a mind-boggling concept to be sure, but now consider this: The announcement earlier this month that there once might have been 2 trillion galaxies in the universe means there once were far more galaxies than there are stars in a typical galaxy!

The universe is so vast that researchers know there is much that they are incapable of seeing through Hubble. They hope that the James Webb Space Telescope, set to launch in 2018, will help them see even more galaxies, “increasing the census of known galaxies even more.”

Because the light of the far-distant galaxies observed by Hubble takes so long to reach the earth, researchers who study the incoming images speak of looking into the past. DeBruyn speaks of the light taking “almost 13 billion years to reach us.” The implication is that the universe must be at least that old. But the age of the universe is another of those burning unanswered questions. The reason why there are burning unanswered questions is that Hubble and other telescopes, though they enable researchers to see distant galaxies, will never be able to see the creation of the world by God in the beginning. All that man can do is observe the result of God’s wonderful creative work. God made and still sees all the stars! For Him there is no “increasing...census of known galaxies.”

Peeking through Hubble shows those who have faith the greatness of God. We sing of this, “Our Lord is great, He calls by name and counts the stars of night.” We can never sing enough of His greatness, “O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder, Thy power throughout, the universe displayed; then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee: How great thou art!” At the same time we humbly confess, “When thy wondrous heav’n I scan, Then I know how weak is man. What is man that he should be Loved and visited by Thee, Raised to an exalted height, Crowned with honor in Thy sight?”

■ Dr. N. Wolterstorff: “Homosexual orientation is no more culpable or disordered than a heterosexual orientation.”²

Dr. Nicholas Wolterstorff spoke approvingly of homosexual marriage in a speech delivered at the Neland Avenue CRC in Grand Rapids, MI on October 13, 2016. Homosexuality is a “creational variance” according to Wolterstorff. Homosexuality is not “a disorder, a mark of the fallenness of creation.” Homosexuality was part of God’s good creation in the beginning and is as normal, orderly, and pleasing to God as heterosexuality.

Wolterstorff does not lack for boldness. Rather than simply pretend that the Scriptures are silent on

homosexuality, he actually addresses passages that explicitly condemn homosexuality. The record of Genesis 19, which condemns the attempt of the men of Sodom to rape the two angels who visited Lot, and of Judges 19, which condemns the attempt of the Benjamites of Gibeah to rape a Levite, are dismissed by Wolterstorff because they only condemn gang rape not sodomy. Leviticus 18:22 (“Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.”) and Leviticus 20:13 (“If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.”) are dismissed because it would be “unfair to universalize that condemnation while ignoring everything else that’s forbidden.” On the surface this seems to be a plausible argument. If not all of the commands in Leviticus continue to have binding force (such as the prohibition on gleaning the corners of fields, Lev. 19:9, or the prohibition on mixing seed or kinds of cloth, Lev. 19:19), then it is wrong to claim that the prohibition on homosexuality is still of binding force. I Corinthians 6:9 and I Timothy 1:10 have “translational disagreements” that make them “too ambiguous for an authoritative claim about same-sex relationships.” And Romans 1:24-31 has to do with an “appallingly wicked group” of people who are different from the committed and monogamous homosexuals that Wolterstorff knows personally. To apply this passage in Romans to the homosexuals in the church today is wrong.

Despite these attempts to dismiss the biblical condemnation of homosexuality, even Wolterstorff has to admit that Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 record clear condemnations of the sin. And his argument that that these passages only temporarily condemn homosexuality is invalid. Wolterstorff’s argument is too general and leads to a dismissal of all the laws in Leviticus. No longer applicable, if we follow his logic, are the laws that prohibit the uncovering the nakedness of one’s relatives (Lev. 18:6ff.), offering sacrifices to Molech (Lev. 20:2, 3), and committing acts of bestiality (Lev. 20:16). It is not sufficient to compare one law to another in Leviticus to determine which laws continue to be of binding force. Other criteria need to be used. One way we know that certain Old Testament laws are meant for all time is if they are carried over into the New Testament.

² This quotation along with all that follow is from this article: <http://www.calvin.edu/chimes/2016/10/22/wolterstorff-says-yes-to-same-sex-marriage>.

Since, as Wolterstorff admits, the New Testament also includes prohibitions against homosexuality, the conclusion must be that the prohibitions against this sin in Leviticus are still in force today. Also, by admitting that God prohibited homosexuality even temporarily is fatal to Wolterstorff's argument that homosexuality is a creational norm. Creational norms are not temporary. If homosexuality is part of God's good creation, God would not ever, not even briefly, condemn it as a sin.

Wolterstorff's attempt to justify homosexuality in the face of the clear condemnation of Scripture makes him guilty of the willing ignorance that the apostle Peter speaks of in II Peter 3:5. The false teachers of Peter's day intentionally blinded themselves from the teaching of Scripture regarding the second coming of Christ. Wolterstorff has intentionally blinded himself from the biblical condemnation of homosexuality. He knows that homosexuality was not part of God's good creation. He knows that in the beginning God created Adam and Eve, and that He joined them together as a *male* and *female*. He knows that Genesis 2:24 is an expression of God's will for marriage for all time that a *man* shall cleave unto his *wife* (a *woman*). He knows that this passage along with many other passages prohibits the marriage of a man to a man or a woman to a woman. He knows that Scripture does not support his acceptance of homosexual orientation and behavior as normal.

Why does Wolterstorff accept homosexuality, if it

is so clearly condemned in Scripture? It seems that the weightiest reason stems from the relationships he has with homosexuals. *The Chimes* report quotes him as saying,

It was through relatives, students and former students who were gay, as well as people in committed, same-sex relationships, that Wolterstorff was drawn to more closely consider the traditional views he'd grown up believing. He said, "I've listened to these people. To their agony. To their feelings of exclusion and oppression. To their longings. To their expressions of love. To their commitments. To their faith. So listening has changed me."

This is an admission on Wolterstorff's part that he has determined to accept homosexuality on the basis of his life experience. This explains his approach to Scripture. He is not willing to listen to Scripture and submit to what God says about homosexuality. Rather, he is trying to twist Scripture to fit what he experiences. Therefore, he epitomizes a false teacher *in the church*!

It is one thing that the world wants to "normalize" homosexuality. It is far more serious a threat to us and our children that false teachers in the church have joined in this cause. We need to hear the warning of II Peter 3:17, 18a concerning such false teachers, "Ye therefore, beloved,...beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own steadfastness. But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ." ☞

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Upon This Rock (27)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (19)

(Note: Because it has been almost a year since the last article in this series appeared in print, a quick reminder of where we were at might be helpful. We were considering the types and shadows of the old dispensation. We noted that David, in Psalm 51:16, though reflecting first of all on the place of sacrifices in his own day, was also saying something about their *end* in the dispensa-

tion to come. A remarkable prophecy, we said, especially in light of how difficult it was for the saints of the new to let go of the shadows of the old when the time for them was past. Witness the Council of Jerusalem, Acts 15. But just how far *was* David ahead of his time? That's where we pick it up in what follows.)

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Previous article in this series: February 15, 2016, p. 227.

Through the preaching of Paul and Barnabas, Gentiles were being brought, in droves, into the church of Christ. As *Gentiles*.

Lots of baptisms, surely. But not a single circumci-

sion. Paul was preaching to the *Gentiles*—without a word about *proselytizing*. Never could that have happened, had there not been first the breaking down of a centuries-old *wall*.

Paul calls it, in Ephesians 2, “the middle wall of partition.” And what was that wall? Concretely, the ceremonies of the law. The sacrifices. The washings. The distinction between clean and unclean animals. Circumcision. Ah, yes, especially circumcision. Remember the challenge to Peter when he returned to Jerusalem after having gone to the house of Cornelius the centurion? “Thou wentest in to men *uncircumcised*, and didst [even] *eat* with them!” An impenetrable wall indeed. One that had stood for 2,000 years, *by appointment of God*. And to circumcision were added, some 600 years later, the ceremonies, which, writes Calvin, “like walls, enclosed the inheritance of God, lest it should be open to all or confused with other possessions; and thus the Gentiles were excluded from the Kingdom of God.”

Christ broke it down. By His cross (cf. Eph. 2:16). He (Christ) “hath made both [Jew and Gentile] *one*, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (v. 14). How? By abolishing “the law of commandments contained in ordinances” (v. 15). Again, Calvin: “Paul means not only that the Gentiles are equally admitted to the fellowship of grace, so that they no longer differ from the Jews, but that the *mark of difference* has been taken away; for *ceremonies have been abolished*” (emphasis added).

Ceremonies...*abolished*! That was the hard part. We quoted, last time, Herman Hoeksema, who wrote concerning the “period of transition from the old dispensation to the new” that “it was not easy completely to break away from the ordinances of the Old Testament, the law of Moses.” We can refer also to Calvin, who, having noted that prophecies had indeed foretold this new state of affairs, said that “men could not heed these prophecies without being startled by the newness of the thing that met their eyes.” And: “For it seemed completely unreasonable that the Lord, who for so many ages had singled out Israel from all other nations, should suddenly change his purpose and abandon that choice.”

And it was *this* that David was anticipating in Psalms 40 and 51! In them, Calvin says, David was looking beyond what was for him the here and the now, beyond

his own life experiences, to “the *kingdom of Christ*.” And what particular aspect of that kingdom? This: “when not even the lowest place is left for the sacrifices which God strictly requires under the Law.” David, then, foresaw the abrogation of the ceremonial law—through Christ.

Or is that, just maybe, saying too much?

Truth is, of course, there is always a tension between two extremes in a study like this, between giving, on the one hand, too *much* credit to the saints of old and, on the other, giving them too *little*. The hypothetical perspective of David on the debate in the Council of Jerusalem is a case in point. David’s insights, we said last time, put him “ahead of his time.” But by how far? Were they at the level of Barnabas and Paul’s, and of James and Peter’s—all four of whom gave good direction to the Jerusalem Council? One might be inclined to think so, in light of how Calvin described the words of David in Psalms 40 and 51.

Suppose that David, in the context of the last article in this series, were present as an unseen observer at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15), which had been called for the very purpose of deciding the place of the Levitical rites in the calling of the Gentiles. We would expect, would we not, in light of what we have just concluded, that David would have been baffled by the goings-on. “Circumcision—necessary for *salvation*!?” What is *this* all about? Why call a church *council* to debate something so *elementary*!?”

Or, again, is that, maybe, saying too much?

The question is not what *we*, 2,000 years post-Pentecost, can ‘see’ in David’s psalms. It’s what *David* could see. Or, better, with *what kind of clarity* did he see it?

For that matter, what about *Moses*, and *Isaiah*? The *types* are clear to *us*. How clear were they to *Moses*? Isaiah 53 is clear to *us*. How clear was it to *Isaiah*?

The 53rd chapter of Isaiah is an amazing prophecy: “With his stripes we are healed.” “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “He is brought as a lamb to the slaughter.” Now think of Peter’s response to Jesus’ forewarning the disciples of His imminent *death*: “Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee!” If Isaiah were at that moment to have stepped into the circle of disciples, would he have *rebuked* Peter? Or would he have, right along with the rest of the disciples, seconded the sentiment?

Or Moses. Jesus reminded Nicodemus of Moses' lifting up of the serpent in the wilderness, and He said, in effect, "That was *Me!*" Did Moses 'get' that?

To the multitudes who followed Him after His feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves of bread and a couple of fishes, Jesus said concerning the manna in the wilderness, "*I am the bread of life.*" Did Moses get *that*?

And here, in Psalms 40 and 51, David speaks concerning the kingdom of Christ, when the ceremonies of the law would be terminated. If he were present at the Council of Jerusalem, would he have put an end to the debate at its beginning?

Think, here, of Jesus' words in Luke 10:24: "For I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them...."

Prophets and kings? Yes, men of God like... Moses. And David. And Isaiah. They desired to see and, according to this testimony of Jesus, did not see.

Seems pretty clear-cut, doesn't it? The object of their hope was hid from them. They strained, as it were, to behold it, but found it always to be just over the horizon. Or on the other side of a veil.

Paul says as much in Romans 16:25 when he writes that the gospel of Jesus Christ, which he designates a *mystery*, was "kept secret since the world began."

And, writes Calvin in his *Institutes* regarding the verse from Luke 10 quoted above, "*No one* then [that is, in the dispensation of shadows] possessed discernment so clear as to be unaffected by the obscurity of the time" (emphasis added).

However, Jesus also said *this*: "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). What is *this*? Is Jesus declaring that, whereas David and Isaiah could *not* see that for which they yearned, Abraham *could*?

Interestingly, Calvin in one of his commentaries speaks to the relationship of those very statements of Christ. He writes:

But the question now arises, How, even with the eyes of faith, did Abraham see the revelation of Christ? It does not seem to fit in with another of Christ's statements: 'Many prophets and kings desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not' (Luke 10:24). I reply, faith has its degrees of seeing Christ. The ancient prophets beheld Christ afar off, as He had been promised to them....

More of course can, and perhaps should, be said about that 'seeing,' but let me just say this for now, that it's those "degrees" that give point to Rev. G.M. Ophoff's observation, referred to before, that determining the level of the Old Testament saints' comprehension of the 'mystery' necessarily involves *conjecture*. Which means that a good deal of caution is in order in our trying to grasp it. Plus a carefulness to limit ourselves to what the Word of God actually *reveals*.

What will that mean with respect to the matter at hand—that is, the matter of David's perspective on the debate in the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15?

Let me suggest an approach something like this:

Psalm 51 is one of the *penitential* psalms of David. He is here reflecting on his grievous sin with Bathsheba and Uriah. Without any doubt, God used that fall into sin to bring David to a point where the words of the psalm would come from the very depths of his soul. *Empty-handed* he came to God (v. 16). And it would be inconceivable to suppose that David could have been saying, "I come to thee, O Lord, with nothing in my *hand*; but please note that I'm circumcised." Absolute destitution of merit—that's what his words convey. Which means this, as far as the Council of Jerusalem is concerned, that David would have had no sympathy whatever for the thinking of the Judaizers that "except ye [Gentile converts] be *circumcised* after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be *saved*" (Acts 15:1).

Then there's that all-important question of where *Christ* fits into the picture. David, in Psalm 51:16, makes no mention of Christ. But we can be sure that He *is* in there. For, what were the sacrifices if they were not schoolmasters all, to lead the saints of old to *Christ*. And there can be no question that they accomplished that purpose in the heart of the man after God's own. "Thou desirest not sacrifice"? Surely there *are* implications there for the *future*. But David was thinking first of all about the *present*. *Then* and *there*, a sheep with a slit throat on an altar meant to God... nothing. But what it *symbolizes did*. And *that* was *Christ*. David knew it. That is, though the *when* and the *how* remained a mystery, David was sure of the *that*. Even, therefore, from his 1000 B.C. perspective, David would have been in full agreement with Peter's testimony to the Jerusalem Council that "through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved" (Acts

15:11). That is, *only* by that grace—since Peter had disavowed works in the previous verse. To that, David would have given his hearty “Amen.”

But would David have been able to anticipate, with equal certainty, the judgment of the Council on the broader question of how the Levitical system figures into the proclamation of the gospel to the Gentiles, and, for that matter, on what, if any, significance of the Mosaic law remained for the church of the new age? I can well imagine David thinking, “Hmm, I had never really thought of *that* before.”

David, in other words, could not have written Hebrews chapter 10, or co-authored, with Guido deBrès, Article 25 of the Belgic Confession. That’s because he could not have known the termination of all the shadows, in one fell swoop, at the cross. Yes, the *cross*. He would have had to learn *that* reality, right along with Jesus’ disciples, *by the event*—or, more precisely, by Jesus’ opening their understanding, “so that they might understand the scriptures” (Luke 24:46) in light of the event.

... to be continued. 

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

REV. RONALD CAMMENGA

Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (18)

“What Saith the Scripture:” The Bible’s Necessity

Necessity

“I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food.” So writes Job in Job 23:12. Food is necessary, absolutely necessary for us. Without food we die. So it is and even more so, teaches Job, spiritually. What corresponds in the spiritual realm to food in the natural realm is the Word of God, our meat and drink to life eternal. As necessary as food is for the body, so necessary is the Word of God for our souls.

We are at present considering Scripture’s perfections. Since Scripture is the Word of God, Scripture partakes of the perfections of God. Among those perfections that Reformed theology has identified is Scripture’s necessity. If God has given us Scripture, has seen to the infallible inspiration of Scripture, and throughout the ages has preserved Scripture so that until Christ comes again the church has Scripture, plainly Scripture is necessary.

That which is necessary is indispensable. Something that is necessary is something without which we cannot do. We simply must have it. If something is necessary, it cannot be replaced by anything else. There is no sub-

stitute for that which is necessary. It is essential and it is imperative that we have it. The Scriptures speak of the necessity of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the absolute necessity of the saving work of Christ. Apart from the saving work of Christ, there is no possibility of salvation. Similarly, the apostle Paul says about his calling to preach the gospel that “necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (I Cor. 9:16). It was absolutely necessary that the apostle preach the gospel. God laid that necessity upon him. He could do nothing else than preach, because this was God’s will for the apostle. In a similar way, we can speak of the necessity of Scripture.

We can distinguish three kinds of necessity. There is, first of all, *intrinsic* or *essential* necessity. In this sense, food and water are necessary for the life of every human being. They are intrinsically and essentially necessary. Without them we languish and die. God has created us with a dependency upon these things.

Second, there is *moral*, *ethical* necessity. This is the compulsion of conscience. It is the necessity of conformity to the revealed will of God. Sticking with the example of food and water, we say it is necessary to give these to the hungry and thirsty whom God places across our path of life. For them, food and water are intrinsi-

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cally necessary, while our help of them by providing them with these necessities is the calling that we have as the children of God.

And, third, there is that which is *necessary according to the counsel and will of God*. Something is necessary simply because God wills it and has from eternity determined that it shall come to pass. We have an example of this sort of necessity in John 4:4: “And he [Jesus] must needs go through Samaria.” It was necessary that Jesus go through Samaria. This was not an essential necessity. We know that there was a different road between Jerusalem and Galilee, the way that the Jews customarily took because they despised and avoided all contact with the Samaritans. This alternative route skirted the eastern banks of the Jordan River. It was the way that Jesus had taken when going to Jerusalem from Galilee some days before this. Neither was this the right way for Jesus to take from a moral, ethical point of view. Jesus did not have a moral obligation to go through Samaria on His return to Galilee, as though it would have been wrong to take some other way. Rather, the necessity on account of which Jesus “must needs go through Samaria” was the necessity of the eternal will and counsel of God, which Jesus knew because He is the Son of God. According to His counsel, God had determined the salvation of the Samaritan woman, and others in Samaria as well. Having elected her unto salvation, God had also determined the means unto her salvation, which means was the hearing of the gospel from the mouth of Jesus. For that reason, in submission to what He knew to be the will of God, Jesus “must needs go through Samaria.”

It is in this latter sense that Scripture is necessary. The necessity of Scripture rests in the free and sovereign will of God. God has determined to reveal Himself through Scripture. God has determined to make Himself known to human beings through the written word. He has determined to save His people, both initially and continually, by means of Holy Scripture. He has decreed the place that Scripture shall have in the life and worship of His people. He has determined that the preaching of these Scriptures will be the means for the working and the preserving of faith. He has determined that all their life, from the beginning to the end of their pilgrim’s journey, God’s people will be guided on their journey by the standard of His Word. For this reason mainly, that

it is the will and good pleasure of God, the Word of God must be put into the words of men. Scripture is necessary because it has been decreed by God.

The Necessity for the Writing of Scripture

Scripture is the Word of God in written form. It is the Word of God *in the words of men*. This, in fact, is what “Scripture” means. What our King James Bible translates as “scripture” is literally “the writing.” Both in II Timothy 3:16 and II Peter 1:20 “scripture” is “the writing.” That is also the significance of the word “Bible.” Our word “Bible” is derived from a word that refers to the material (papyrus) on which writing was done in ancient times. The writing material on which much of Scripture was written has become the name by which we today refer to the sacred writings themselves: the Bible.

This, then, has been God’s will for His people throughout much of history, that they have His Word in written form. This was His will for His people from the time of Moses, the first instrument of divine revelation and human writer of the first five books of the Bible. Prior to that, through the time of the patriarchs, God was content to speak His word directly. But with the growth of His people into a nation, the nation of Israel, God determined that His Word should not only be spoken, but also written.

Dr. Abraham Kuyper, in his book *Principles of Sacred Theology*, gives four characteristics of the written word over the spoken word. At the same time, these are the reasons for the divine preference for the written word. Writes Kuyper: “[I]n comparison with the spoken word the *written* word is entitled to claim the four characteristics of *durability, catholicity, fixedness* and *purity*...”¹

With regard to the first characteristic, *durability*, Kuyper has in mind the fact that the written word endures or is lasting, in comparison with the spoken word that is gone as soon as it is uttered. “Writing,” says Kuyper, “relieves the spoken word of its transitoriness. ‘The word that is heard passes away, the letter that is written remains.’” A bit later, he observes that “[o]ur voice creates words, but lacks the ability to hold them fast.... ‘But by writing, ‘the word or thought spoken is lifted above transitoriness. It is taken out of the stream of time

¹ Abraham Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, trans. J. Henrik De Vries (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 405.

and cast upon the shore, there to take on a stable form, and after many ages to do the same service still which it performed immediately upon its first appearing.”²

The written word also exhibits a *catholicity* that the spoken word lacks. At times, the spoken word is heard only by one other individual. At other times, the spoken word is heard by a group. But always those who hear the spoken word are relatively few in number in comparison to the multitudes who over time are able to read the written word. And then if that written word is translated into different languages and published throughout the world, it is read by even more people. Clearly, the written word has the advantage of a catholicity that the spoken word lacks.

And the written word is characterized by *fixedness*. There is a permanence about that which is written. Any who have experimented with this are easily convinced of its truth. In a group of twenty or thirty people, begin by whispering a sentence into the ear of the first person, who in turn whispers what was whispered into his ear into the ear of the next person. By the time the sentence is whispered into the ear of the last person and he is asked what the original sentence was, invariably it is different—usually drastically different—from that which was spoken into the ear of the first person. By committing the word to written form, it is permanently fixed and preserved from one age to the next. Fallen human beings are simply incapable of preserving oral tradition without corrupting it. Putting the word into written form assures its preservation. Says Kuyper:

Since Divine revelation directs itself against the mind and inclination of the sinner, sinful tendency could not be wanting, to represent that revelation differently from what it was given. Not merely did forgetfulness and individualism threaten the purity of tradition, but the direct effort also willfully to modify what was revealed according to one's own idea and need; which psychologically is done the sooner, if one knows the revelation only from tradition, and thus thinks himself entitled to mistrust its certainty. One begins by asking whether the revelation might not have been different, and ends in the belief that it *was* different ... thus, in order to come down to us in the least possibly falsified form, the Divine revelation had to be *written*.³

² Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 405.

³ Kuyper, *Principles of Sacred Theology*, 411-12.

For all these reasons, God saw fit to cause His Word to be committed to writing. And He saw fit to connect to the written Word a saving necessity.

Two factors underscore the necessity of Scripture. First, there is the inadequacy of general revelation, or God's revelation in the creation. From that revelation of God there cannot be derived a saving knowledge of God. For that purpose it is altogether inadequate. Although it is sufficient to leave men without excuse, it is insufficient to be the means of God unto salvation. Something more is needed, and that something more is Holy Scripture. Second, the cessation of special revelation must also be factored in. With the passing of the apostles and with the completion of the canon of Scripture, God does not any longer reveal Himself directly. Instead, God reveals Himself in Holy Scripture. For these reasons, the Westminster Confession of Faith is right when it affirms that “those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation ... are clearly propounded and opened in some place of scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them” (WCF, 1.7).

In a beautiful passage in the *Institutes*, Calvin reflects on the necessity of Scripture:

Just as old or bleary-eyed men and those with weak vision, if you thrust before them a most beautiful volume, even if they recognize it to be some sort of writing, yet can scarcely construe two words, but with the aid of spectacles will begin to read distinctly; so Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God. This, therefore, is a special gift, where God, to instruct the church, not merely uses mute teachers but also opens his own most hallowed lips.⁴

Because God has ordained that by means of Scripture we receive the saving knowledge of Him and of His Son, Jesus Christ, the Scriptures are necessary. Because God has ordained that the Scriptures contain His will for how we shall live and what kind of a people we shall be, the Scriptures are necessary. Because, according to the will of God, the Scriptures contain fully what is necessary for

⁴ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960), 1.6.1; 1:70.

us to know for the right worship of God, both privately and publicly, the Scriptures are necessary. Because they are necessary for all these things, we ought diligently to read and continually to study the Scriptures.

We conclude with another quote from Abraham Kuyper, taken from his book *The Work of the Holy Spirit*:

With the dawn of the Day of days the Sacred Volume will undoubtedly disappear. As the New Jerusalem will need no sun, moon, or temple, but the Lord God will be its light, so will there be no need of Scripture, for the revelation of God shall reach His elect directly through the unveiled Word. But so long as the Church is on earth, face-to-face communion withheld, and our hearts accessible only by the avenues of this imperfect existence,

Scripture must remain the indispensable instrument by which the Triune God prepares men's souls for higher glory.⁵

This is Scripture's necessity. For the present, seeing now through a glass darkly before we see face-to-face, the Scriptures are necessary. He is a fool who ignores them, rejects them, abandons them, or replaces them. For the time-being they are necessary, absolutely necessary "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:16b, 17). ∞

⁵ Abraham Kuyper, *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Henri De Vries (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, repr. 1975), 70.

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. JONATHAN MAHTANI

Redeeming the Time

"Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."
Ephesians 5:16

Picture this: a gavel coming down. Not the gavel of a judge, but that of an auctioneer. "Going once! Going twice...." If you are a buyer with the lower bid, you feel an urgency. If you do not name your price now, you will lose your chance!

What is up for sale? What does God urgently call you to purchase? Time. "Redeeming the time, because the days are evil."

The word "redeem" is easy for us who live in this consumer society to relate to. The businessman buys equipment, real estate, and other products, to make more money. The mother buys groceries, décor, and supplies to care for the family. The young person drives to the department store to buy clothing and other accessories. Or he simply browses his options on the Internet, clicks, buys, and has it shipped to his home. To redeem is to buy.

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Notice three different activities involved in buying or redeeming. First, there is an internal skill of *shrewdly sensing* what is most valuable. A wise buyer does not jump at the first thing that catches his eye. Rather, he discerns what has more worth and what has less. When he is looking for a vehicle to purchase, for example, he thinks carefully about his needs and preferences. He thinks about what is most valuable to him at this time in his life. He thinks about the quality of a car's make, model, and year. Only after such careful prioritizing of values does he buy.

Second, redeeming involves *sacrifice*. It involves paying with money that you treasure. If you are buying expensive jewelry, you will need to sacrifice hundreds and sometimes thousands to procure it. Because we cherish the dollar, we often feel the pain of giving it up.

Third, purchasing includes *seizing* what you have purchased. After you check out at a store, you take the merchandise. Sometimes it is as easy as grabbing a bag from the counter and driving home. But if the product is something like a heavy appliance, there is work to lift,

load, transport, assemble, and position it for use. Although this step is often the exciting part of buying, it may take work.



In Ephesians 5:16, God does not call us to buy cars, clothing, jewelry, appliances, or homes, but *time*. The word for “time” here, however, does not refer primarily to the duration of time—the seconds, minutes, and hours going by on our clocks. Rather, “time” refers to “opportunities” in our life. For example, we speak of harvest *time*, meaning the opportunity in our life to bring in crops and enjoy them with thanksgiving. Or we speak of Christmastime—the opportunity to celebrate Christ’s birth. God’s Word calls us to buy the good opportunities in our life.

But wait! Stop! Before you go off to buy every opportunity that comes your way, remember what a good buyer does. First, he *senses* or discerns the more valuable from the less valuable. Just as not every product on the market is of equal worth, so not every opportunity is equally worthwhile. Just as you cannot purchase everything online, so you cannot buy every opportunity that presents itself!

How do you determine which opportunities are most valuable? As a child of God, with the wisdom of His Holy Spirit and His Word, you should know that the most valuable opportunities are measured by *spiritual profit*! No, we do not discern valuable opportunities by asking, “What is most fun? What is most entertaining? What feels the best? What is good for my reputation, my career, my bank account?” Instead, the golden opportunities are determined by prayerfully asking, “What is best for my soul?”

Prioritize your life. What is more valuable? Devotion time or sleep time? Bible society time or sporting event time? Church fellowship or what I already put on my schedule? Overtime at work or quality time with the family? Homework time or your primetime TV show? Time to pray or time to play? We may be able to see some value in all of these opportunities, but a good buyer of time first senses and chooses what is most valuable.

Second, a wise buyer *sacrifices*. He pays not with money, but he sacrifices his less worthwhile opportunities. You buy time with time. You give up basketball

time to get more *Beacon Lights* reading time. You give up practice time to gain time for exercise in godliness. You give up “hangout” time for time visiting your grandparents. You give up phone time for actual face-to-face time in conversation. You pay up “me-time” to purchase serving time. Yes, it hurts a little, but that is part of redeeming.

“I’m too busy, I don’t have time for that!” we often say. More often than not, that is simply not true. It is not that we do not have time for the good opportunities. We are simply unwilling to sacrifice anything in our busy, self-absorbed schedules to take advantage of activities we know to be more worthwhile. You cannot buy anything truly valuable without sacrifice. As the saying goes, “You get what you pay for.”

Third, a wise buyer *seizes* what he pays for. This is the most enjoyable part of buying, but this takes work. Just as seizing a heavy appliance is work, so adequately preparing for catechism or a society meetings takes work. The good opportunities of witnessing, getting involved in mission work, and serving older saints in church are some of the most rewarding opportunities to seize; but they do take work.

Redeeming the time involves sensing the most valuable times, sacrificing the less worthwhile, and joyfully seizing the opportunities of gold. Anyone want to go shopping?



The purpose of redeeming time is emphatically not so that you might redeem yourself! We have a Redeemer who has finished that work and paid that price in full, for our salvation. We do not redeem time to redeem ourselves. We redeem time out of a *heartly thanks* for Christ’s redemption of us. And we are able to redeem this time because the Redeemer works in us to do so.

Yet, the same Redeemer who works in us calls us with great urgency to redeem the time more effectively than we have before. The urgency comes in the reason He gives: “Redeeming the time, *because the days are evil*.” That means two things.


First, time is running out! The evil days are the days of the end times. About two thousand years ago, Paul told the church that she was living in the last days. That means the church today lives in the latter part of the last days. The end draws nigh. Jesus comes quickly. And

before Jesus arrives, death brings the end for you and me, sooner than we expect.

"Tomorrow," you say, "Tomorrow I will redeem the time. Later I will take the opportunity to be more serious about my faith, to read my Bible, to pray, to get my priorities right, to give up that addiction, to seize valuable opportunities." But God's Word says, "The days are evil!" We live in the last days! Time is running out. Time ends with death or Christ's return. And there is a lesson the young person learns whether he takes heed to God's Word or not: *time flies*. After pursuing the world, many today look back with regret on the missed opportunities they cannot go back to. Procrastinate in the redeeming of opportunities, and it will not seem long before it is too late. "Time like an ever-rolling stream bears all its sons away."

The second urgent call is this: There are fewer and

fewer good opportunities. "The days are evil." Not only does that indicate that the end is soon to come, but it also means there is an increase of evil, apostasy, and antichristian sentiment. In these last days, evil opportunities increase while good opportunities decrease. There are fewer good opportunities on TV. There are fewer good opportunities to witness. Do you not experience this? With affluence comes more responsibilities, and thus more busyness. We feel as though there are fewer times to sit down, read, pray, and communicate with one another meaningfully. And we know that persecution on the horizon will make good opportunities sparser.

Do you see that auctioneer's gavel coming down? Priceless opportunities are up for sale, but not for long. Going once! Going twice! Redeem them, before they are sold. 

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

Psalter Revision: Governing Principles (1)

Format

With this article I begin to explain the principles that the interdenominational Psalter Revision Committee is using to evaluate the musical selections in our Psalter, and on the basis of which it decides whether to recommend changes. The committee reported these principles to the respective synods, and each synod expressly approved them.¹

¹ Although this article was written primarily for the *Standard Bearer*, it is being shared with the Free Reformed Churches in North America and the Heritage Reformed Congregations for use as they see fit. Because of this, I quote the relevant decision of each denomination's synod. The 2016 Synod of the FRCNA decided: "1. To adopt the principles for revision that have been developed by the committee and outlined in the report" (Article 32). The Synod of the HRC "granted...approval of the principles as laid out in the

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2016, p. 87.

The Importance of These Governing Principles

My purpose in this and following articles is to demonstrate that the revision committee is consciously asking the right questions and striving to find good answers. Evaluating music and poetry is inherently subjective; one likes this better, and another likes that. It follows that deciding whether any tune or set of lyrics should be revised is also at least partly subjective. I will not pretend that the nine men on the interdenominational committee do not come to the table with nine different minds and wills.

However, the minds and wills of these nine are not the

report" (Article XI.4, motion 160607-12). The PRCA Synod's approval of these guidelines is implied in its instruction to its committee to continue participating in this project. Synod's third ground for taking this decision was "Acceptable guidelines presented to Synod 2015; *the principles presented in the Psalter Revision Committee report* [italics mine, DJK]; and the committee's preliminary report" (Article 49 B. 3, ground c).

ultimate explanation for the proposed revisions. The nine are focusing and directing their minds and wills to ask good questions, and to find good answers. The objective standard on the basis of which nine different men approach our work is set forth in these governing principles.

I hope every reader can appreciate this. Why can the members of our denominations be confident that the proposed revision will improve our Psalter in certain areas? Because the committee is being governed by certain principles, and because our respective synods have approved or adopted these principles.

So what are these principles? And how is the committee actually being governed by them? I will explain the principles, and give examples of how the committee is applying them in particular instances. Our “particular instance” at present is Psalter 203.

Three Categories of Principles

These principles fall into three categories: text, music, and format. By “format” we mean the appearance, presentation, or layout of the songs and music in the book.

The committee placed “format” last in the list, recognizing that it is the least weighty of the three. Scripture itself regulates the *text* of our songbook—we sing the Psalms, and certain other Scripture passages that are appropriate for song. So important is this point, that Reformed churches have expressed it in our Church Order, Article 69. The *music* of our songbook is not regulated as closely by Scripture (there are no inspired tunes), but this principle of worship is still relevant: “Let all things be done decently and in order” (I Cor. 14:40). The music of our songbook must be conducive to orderly, God-glorifying worship. But to the *format* of a songbook, neither Scripture nor any principle of worship speaks explicitly or implicitly.

Why begin with format, the least weighty of the three? First, because this matter can be treated rather briefly, in the rest of this article. Second, because a concern that some raise is: “What will the revision look like? Psalter #203 will still be Psalter #203, will it not? If not, how will we know how to find our beloved ‘In Sweet Communion’?”

The interdenominational Psalter revision committee informed the Synods of the FRCNA, HRC, and PRCA

that it would consider six matters regarding format. I quote:

- 1) The Psalters must be numbered in such a way that the selection is determined by the Psalm number; have 1A and 1B for Psalm 1; 10A, 10B, 10C for Psalm 10, etc.
- 2) The Genevan Psalms are to be placed under the appropriate Psalm.
- 3) Each Psalter should have its own page when possible.
- 4) Unhelpful musical notations and editorial comments should be eliminated.
- 5) Tune and authorial information should be placed on the page.
- 6) Biblical Psalm titles could be adapted for inclusion.²

The third point speaks for itself. I’ll comment on the other five.

The First Two: Organized according to Psalms

The committee desires that the revised Psalter be familiar. It also desires that we know which portion of God’s Word we are singing in any given song. In our singing, God’s people must show that the word of Christ dwells in us richly (Col. 3:16). Let me repeat, to underscore, what it is that must dwell in us richly and be manifest in our singing: not first of all a favorite *tune*, nor familiar *words* set to English poetry, but the *word of our Savior* to us.

The Psalter’s current format helps us do this by identifying the psalm on which the Psalter number is based. For example, under Psalter 203 we find the words “Psalm 73.”

The proposed format of the revision will make this connection between psalm and song even more explicit by directly identifying the selection with the psalm on which it is based. Psalter 201 will become Psalm 73A, Psalter 202 will become Psalm 73B, and Psalter 203 will become Psalm 73C. We will grow not only in knowing our Psalter, but also in knowing God’s Psalms.

Another result of numbering our Psalter this way will be that all of the selections from any one psalm will be grouped together. On this point, our current Psalter could use improvement. Glancing through our current Psalter, you notice that to find all of the selections from

² Report of the Interdenominational Psalter Revision Committee, point 4. c., found on page 169 of the PRCA *Acts of Synod* 2016.

a particular psalm, you must look in several different places—*three* places, if you use the PRCA Psalter (which ends with 434), and four, if you use the FRCNA and HRC version (which ends with 450). Numbers 1-413 cover the 150 Psalms in order. Next, numbers 414-430 are based on 17 different psalms. Then comes 431 (Psalm 81) and 432 (Psalm 99). Then, in the version of the Psalter used by the FRCNA and HRC, you find a selection from Psalm 134, then 12 more selections based on as many psalms. Interspersed in these are the Lord's Prayer (433, 434), the Ten Commandments (435), a version of the Song of Zacharias (448) and a version of the Song of Simeon (450).

God providentially governed the compilation of the 150 Psalms so that they appeared in the order in which we find them in Scripture. It is reasonable to organize our Psalter in the same order, grouping all the selections from one psalm together in one place.

Back to the concern: how will you know how to find what we now know as Psalter 203? In one of several ways. First, when you know that Psalter 203 is based on Psalm 73, you simply turn to the selections from Psalm 73. They are all in one place. Second, the committee proposes a number be placed in the lower right hand corner of each page, corresponding to the current Psalter number (in this case, look for "203").³ Finally, an index will be included so that at a glance one can know where to find the old "203."

The Fourth: Fewer Musical Notations

The committee is reviewing every Psalter number with the goal of having fewer musical notations and editorial comments in the Psalter. These include instructions on how to sing the song, like "slowly" (Psalter 216), "rit[ard]" (Psalter 202, 220), and "organ, voices in unison, voices in harmony" (Psalter 219, 226). This also includes fermatas—those marks over a note that tell us to lengthen the note by some undetermined length, such as you find twice in Psalter 202, once in the main part of the song and once in the chorus.

Most of these will be removed. Our accompanists can study the music and words to determine how to play the

³ Whether this will always be in the lower right hand corner, or whether it will alternate from left to right, so that it is always on the outside corner, the committee has not yet determined.

music in a way appropriate for their own congregation.

A few fermatas might still be found in the revision, in cases in which the committee agrees they are necessary. It is very likely that the fermata in the chorus (but not in the main section) of 202 would remain.

The Last Two: More Helpful Information

The last two matters regard what information, in addition to the music and lyrics, is found on the page.

Copyright notices will not usually be necessary. They were necessary in 1912 when our Psalter was first made, but now the music of our Psalter is in the public domain. When we include tunes or selections not currently found in our Psalter, we will provide notice of copyright when necessary, as required by law.

Above the music and lyrics of every Psalter number, but below the number and title, one finds the meter of the tune, the name of the tune, and the author of the tune. These will still appear, but will be moved to the lower left hand corner of the page, in this order: author name, tune name, meter.

Currently, below Psalter 203 one finds the words "[Selected Stanzas]." Possibly these words refer to a previous versification of the psalm, but that is not certain. In the revision, we propose informing the singer which verses of the psalm are covered; so under "73C" you find "vv. 23-28." Also, the small subscripted numbers at the beginning of various lines will indicate that the Psalter lyrics correspond with that particular verse.

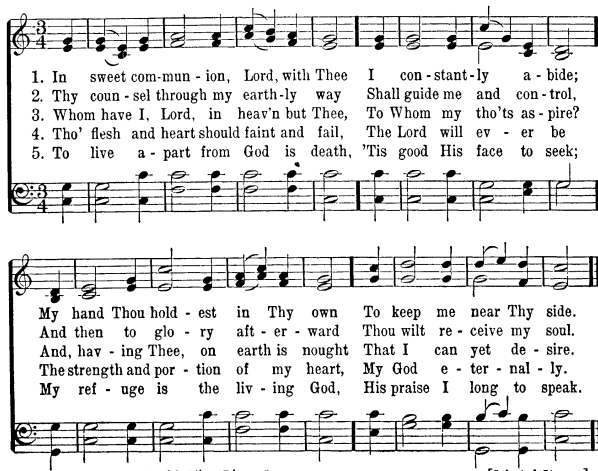
The committee began to implement the sixth matter mentioned above, "Biblical Psalm titles could be adapted for inclusion." The current song titles are general; they do not clearly capture the essence of the Psalter, in distinction from other Psalter numbers. For example, Psalter 203 speaks of "Life With God." But that title could be used also for Psalter 204 (also from Psalm 73), or even for a selection from Psalters 31 or 32. Our initial plan was to replace the current titles with the title of the Psalm. In the case of Psalm 73, that would be "A Psalm of Asaph." But then Psalters 73A, B, C, and D (201-204) would have the same title. And does knowing that Asaph wrote the Psalm help us understand the song as we sing it? Perhaps one could argue that there is some benefit to that. But then one comes to Psalm 75, the heading of which is: "To the chief musician. Al-taschith. A Psalm or Song of Asaph."

Does all that help? And if “Al-taschith” is correctly translated to mean, “to the tune of ‘Do Not Destroy,’” is that any more helpful?

In the end, the committee decided to use the first words of the song as the heading for that song. For Psalm 203, that would be “In Sweet Communion.” Do not our children often refer to the Psalters by the first words anyway? One of my children once asked to sing the “Hallelujah” number. We had to ask if he meant 409 or 413, but at least we narrowed it down quickly to those two.

If in the matter of *format*, a matter less weighty than


203 **Life With God**
PSALM 73 C. M. PRAYER William U. Butcher



1. In sweet com-mun - ion, Lord, with Thee I con-stant-ly a - bide;
2. Thy coun - sel through my earth-ly way Shall guide me and con-trol,
3. Whom have I, Lord, in heav'n but Thee, To Whom my tho'ts as - pire?
4. Tho' flesh and heart should faint and fail, The Lord will ev - er be
5. To live a - part from God is death, 'Tis good His face to seek;

My hand Thou hold - est in Thy own To keep me near Thy side.
And then to glo - ry aft - er - ward Thou wilt re - ceive my soul.
And, hav - ing Thee, on earth is nought That I can yet de - sire.
The strength and por - tion of my heart, My God e - ter - nal - ly.
My ref - uge is the liv - ing God, His praise I long to speak.

Used by arrangement with Oliver Ditson Co. 171 [Selected Stanzas]

those of text and music, the committee is being governed by principles, the reader may be sure that in the weightier matters the same is true. God willing, I will address the principles regarding text in the next article. 

73C In Sweet Communion

vs. 23-28



1. ²³In sweet com-mun - ion, Lord, with Thee I
2. ²⁴Thy coun - sel through my earth - ly way Shall
3. ²⁵Whom have I, Lord, in heav'n but Thee, To
4. ²⁶Tho' flesh and heart should faint and fail, The
5. ²⁷To live a - part from God is death, ²⁸'Tis

con - stant - ly a - bide; My hand Thou hold - est
guide me and con - trol, ²⁵And then to glo - ry
Whom my tho'ts as - pire? And hav - ing Thee, on
Lord will ev - er be The strength and por - tion
good His face to seek; My re - fuge is the

in Thy own To keep me near Thy side.
aft - er - ward Thou wilt re - ceive my soul.
earth is nought That I can yet de - sire.
of my heart, My God e - ter - nal - ly.
liv - ing God, His praise I long to speak.

RFPA ANNUAL MEETING

REV. JOSH ENGELSMA

Lord, Grant Boldness: The RFPA's Witness in the Sexual Revolution (2)

The Fact of Our Witness

Earlier we examined where we are, where we have been, and where we are going with the sexual revolution. Now, what is our calling in light of these developments?

There is a calling that comes first and foremost to the

Rev. Engelsma is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Doon, Iowa. This is the second part of the text of the speech that Rev. Engelsma delivered at the RFPA Annual Meeting on September 29, 2016. Previous article can be found in the January 1, 2017 issue, p. 158.

instituted church, and that is to continue to preach and teach the Word of God with all boldness. No witness by the RFPA can replace the witness of the church if that goes lacking.

Understanding the role of the RFPA in support of the church and her witness, there is a calling also for the RFPA to continue to speak the truth in love.

In reading recently about the labors of Winston Churchill prior to World War II, I was struck by how this illustrates the calling we have. During the years

between the two world wars, Hitler rose to power in Germany and started preparing his war machine. He soon began annexing countries around Germany, supposedly to provide more living space for the German people. While this was going on, world leaders, including those in England, were essentially silent. They ignored the armies he was amassing. They downplayed his power-hungry land-grabs. They overlooked the atrocities he was committing. They were so opposed to another war that they convinced themselves that Hitler was not a threat. Any suggestion that Britain re-arm for another war was laughed off. In the midst of this frightened silence, there was one, lonely voice that was willing to speak out, and that voice belonged to Churchill. He saw the threat of Hitler and a re-armed Germany. Although he was exiled politically, ostracized as a radical warmonger, he never ceased to warn the nation of this growing threat and call her to prepare for the inevitable conflict.

This is not an endorsement of Churchill; it serves simply to illustrate our calling in the face of the spiritual threat of the sexual revolution. We must be willing to speak the truth boldly, even when it becomes more and more unpopular. There is this growing threat today of the sexual revolution, a threat to the spiritual lives of our generations. There are many both in the world and in the church who either give their whole-hearted support to this revolution or are silent on the matter. But that must not be the case with us. Even if it means that we have to stand virtually alone, the one voice of opposition to this revolution, we must speak the truth boldly. We must continue to use our freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and religious liberty to speak against the sexual revolution and promote the truth of God's Word concerning sex and marriage. There will be a day, perhaps soon, when these things will be taken away from us and the attempt will be made to muzzle us. But while it is day, we are called to work, for the night cometh when no man can labor.

The Content of Our Witness

What does this involve specifically?

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding sex. Specifically, our witness must continue to be that sex is a good gift of God to be enjoyed within the bounds of marriage. It is not something ugly, dirty, and shameful,

but an important and beautiful aspect of marriage.

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding the sin of fornication by the unmarried. For the young people and older singles, all sexual activity—including “sexting” via Snapchat and the like—is off-limits. They must be chaste and pure in single life.

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding the sin of adultery by those who are married.

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding the wickedness of unbiblical divorce and of remarriage. Recognizing the part that the divorce culture has played in the sexual revolution, we ought to be motivated even further not to open that door even a crack.

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding pornography, whether it be by the married or unmarried, by men or women.

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding the sin of homosexuality. Part of being “unashamed of the gospel of Christ” is being willing to call homosexual actions and desires “against nature” and “unseemly” (Rom. 1). To those who struggle with this sin there must be the continued call to repentance and daily conversion.

The church must continue to preach and the RFPA must continue to print the truth of God's Word regarding the sin of transgenderism. Gender is not a social construction, but is ordained by God in His creation of humankind as male and female with their unique physical makeup. There may be no altering or mutilating of the body based on feeling, but rather an altering of our feelings so that they are in line with our anatomy.

The Manner of Our Witness

This requires boldness, the spiritual strength that enables and impels us to proclaim the Word of God faithfully in the face of threats and opposition. When we witness boldly, we speak without shame, without concealment, and without compromise. We have a fearless courage and confidence, so that we are able to speak with freedom the Word of God in order that the gospel is not compromised in the slightest.

Boldness demands openness. Because of the nature of these sexual issues, there has to be a certain degree of carefulness and sensitivity. But we must also be open to speak about these issues. The world is so bold and “in our face” trying to teach the lie; we must be just as bold to teach the truth. In generations past it may have been legitimate never to mention the word “sex” or to hide the fact that one was pregnant. But in the day and age in which we now live this is unacceptable. We must not shy away from hard topics like sex, birth control, homosexuality, and transgenderism.

Boldness requires that we are diligent in using the means which God has provided: through our beloved *Standard Bearer*, our books, and even the blog and social media.

Boldness is not at odds with wisdom and discretion. Boldness does not mean being inflammatory or abrasive and unnecessarily bringing upon ourselves scrutiny and persecution. Wisdom and love must guide our bold witness.

The Importance of Our Witness

The boldness with which the RFPA publishes the truth of God’s Word is a significant way in which we witness to the world and church world around us. Perhaps that witness will bring some to repentance and create in others a spiritual backbone to stand for the truth where before they were unwilling.

But the RFPA’s witness is also important as a means of encouraging and exhorting those within our own Protestant Reformed circles.

It is necessary to address these issues in order to help maintain strong marriages in the church and to encourage faithfulness in single life.

It is necessary to address these issues so that each one of us has a correct, biblically-informed understanding of them. We need to be equipped to speak knowledgeably

to others about homosexuality and transgenderism. Ignorance in these areas is inexcusable.

It is necessary to address these issues for the sake of our children and young people. They need to be taught these things, and parents need to be equipped to give that instruction. Our covenant youth are growing up in a much different world than their parents and grandparents did. They are facing difficult issues and need to know how to respond.

It is necessary to address these issues in order to help those in our own circles who are struggling in these areas. We must not assume that these are things only those outside our circles face. God’s people are struggling and will struggle with homosexual lusts and sinful natures that are prone to sins of that nature just as others are prone to heterosexual sin. Some may be struggling with transgenderism, perhaps because they were born with ambiguous body parts.¹ We need to help them, and we need to equip others to help them in a biblical way.

We live in evil times. Wickedness abounds on every side. The love of many waxes cold. Rejoice in hope because this means that the Lord Jesus will return soon! As the church at the end of the New Testament, pray as the church at the dawn of the New Testament: “Lord, grant boldness! And, come quickly!” ☞

¹ R. Albert Mohler, Jr., *We Cannot Be Silent: Speaking Truth to a Culture Redefining Sex, Marriage, & the Very Meaning of Right & Wrong* (Nashville: Nelson Books, 2015), 79. Mohler says that in about 1 out of 1500 births the birth gender is indeterminate (pp. 173-4). Owen Strachan says something similar: “Although rare, some people suffer from chromosomal issues, ambiguous body parts, etc., that do create legitimate confusion. In these cases, their efforts are not so much a ‘choice’ of ‘gender identity’ as an effort to identify what they truly are, or were meant to be. In such rare instances, the instruction of biblical counselors, church elders and leaders, and medical professionals will prove helpful” (<https://answersingenesis.org/family/gender/transgender-identity-wishing-away-gods-design/> [accessed November 17, 2016]).

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Geography Facts

Alas, in the November 15, 2016 issue, this column incorrectly placed the Limerick Reformed Fellowship in Northern Ireland. Shame on us! Did our readers notice? Those in

Limerick certainly did! With a smile, some questioned our knowledge of the geography of their region. And rightfully so. You see, the Limerick Reformed Fellowship, a mission congregation of the Covenant Protestant

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

Reformed Church of *Northern* Ireland is in the Republic of *Ireland*, a different country. Not Northern at all! Due apologies rendered and a pledge to visit them some day to see their beautiful country!

Trivia Question

While we are discussing geography, here is a trivia question for our readers: Can you name the northernmost PRC located in the USA? And the southernmost? (Answers later in this column.)

Mission Activities

Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn recently experienced the effects of an earthquake in the Antipolo area of the Philippines. For about 10 seconds the floor was shaking and items on the table were rattling. No significant damage occurred. Those in our church in Redlands, CA can relate. It is possible that none of our other PRC locations experience such quakes. So you need to visit Redlands or metro Manila to make such an experience a reality.

At the request of the Domestic Mission Committee of our churches Rev. Heath Bleyenbergh spent about a week in Franklin, PA for the exploration of a potential mission work there. A small group of families desires the true preaching of the Word, and there may be other interested families in the area. Rev. Bleyenbergh visited with many of the families and preached for them on December 11. Other ministers are scheduled to travel to Franklin in the coming months. How exciting that God may be opening a door of opportunity in this part of the country!

Minister Activities

On December 11 Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor at Heritage PRC

in Sioux Falls, SD announced his decline of the call extended to him by First PRC of Holland, indicating God's will to have him remain at Heritage. We pray that God may also supply the congregation at Holland with their own pastor soon.

Southwest PRC in Wyoming, MI called Rev. Garrett Eriks, pastor at Hudsonville, MI PRC to be their next pastor.

Rev. Rodney Kleyn, pastor at Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, announced his decline of the call extended to him by the congregation at Doon, IA to be the third missionary to the Republic of the Philippines. We give thanks for God's guidance and ask His blessing on Rev. Kleyn's continued work in Spokane.

Congregational Activities

Supporters of Hope Christian School in Redlands, CA recently sponsored a doubles ping-pong tournament accompanied by a delicious lunch, with proceeds to the school.

Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI installed soundboards in their narthex, repaired ceiling drywall, and provided their janitors with a new vacuum recently.

The annual Christmas singspiration hosted by Edgerton, MN PRC young people for the five Siouxland churches was postponed due to extreme cold on December 18. That morning the air temperature registered -23F, while our brothers and sisters in the Philippines experienced an air temperature in the mid 80's with the normal humidity, so that Prof. R. Dykstra and Rev. G. Eriks (the delegation sent by the Contact Committee) became "sticky" from their ten-minute walk to the Kleyn residence in Antipolo.

School Activities

Covenant Christian High School invited everyone in the area to enjoy the annual Christmas Band and Choir Concert on Saturday, December 17 at Jenison Center for the Arts. Two performances were held as the band and four choirs celebrated the birth of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

Sister-Church Activities

On December 11, our sister church in Singapore, Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, voted to call Emmanuel Singh as missionary to Kolkata, India. Emmanuel planned to answer this call on or before January 1. His installation was scheduled for Sunday, January 8, pending the acceptance of the call, according to the Lord's will. This call represents another door the Lord has opened to CERC to preach the gospel in Kolkata. Pray for Emmanuel and for CERC as they labor in these corners of Christ's kingdom.

From Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland: "Now with the installation of a hearing loop in our sanctuary any physical impediment to hearing the Word of God has been lessened!"

Young People's Activities

The dates have been announced for the 2017 annual PRC Young People's Convention. The event will take place at the Michindoh Conference Center in Hillsdale, MI. The host church is First PRC of Holland, MI and the dates are August 7-11, 2017.


God's Assurance

Eight-year-old MJ from Provident Christian Church in Marikina, Philippines told Sharon Kleyn that she used to get scared, but now she

doesn't anymore because she learned God is omnipresent. A beautiful confession from a young daughter! And the assurance of all of God's people in any situation in life.

Trivia Answers

The northernmost PRC congregation located in the USA is the one in Lynden, WA while the southernmost congregation is Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. More trivia next time.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Don and Rose Poortvliet and their family in the death of their father,

JACOB POORTVLIET.

It is our prayer that they and their extended family may receive comfort from the Holy Spirit in Revelation 14:13, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
David S. Miedema, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Steve and Pam Flikkema and their family in the death of their father and grandfather,

MR. JOHN C. FLIKKEMA, SR.

We pray that they may receive comfort and assurance from the word of God in Psalm 121:1 and 2, "I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth."

Rev. Carl Haak, President
David S. Miedema, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ It is with joy and thankfulness to our heavenly Father that we are able to celebrate the 65th wedding anniversary of our parents,

HENK and KORIE NIEUWENKAMP,

who were united as one in marriage on the 30th of January 1952. We, as children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, are thankful to our almighty Father for the love, care, and instruction towards us throughout their years of marriage together. They continue to touch the hearts of many fellow saints in our churches and our prayers are for God's continued blessing and care upon them in all the remaining days of their lives together. "For the LORD is good, his mercy is everlasting; and his truth endureth to all generations" (Psalm 100:5).

- * Henry & Karen Nieuwenkamp
- * Albert & Maryse Nieuwenkamp
- * Korien Sampson

numerous grandchildren
and great-grandchildren

Edmonton, AB, Canada

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

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 PRC, Redlands, CA on Wednesday, March 1, 2017, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by January 30 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Hope's consistory.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk