

The Standard Bearer

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Comfort in the Valley

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.”

Psalm 23:4

What a familiar, beloved psalm is the twenty-third, the “Shepherd Psalm”! It uses such beautiful imagery, such rich, accurate figures to bring peace and comfort to our souls. It is so obvious that David speaks out of the deep, personal experiences that God had given him as a shepherd caring for his father’s flock. As inspired by the Spirit, this is a soul-strengthening Word of God that we cherish in our hearts.

Especially is that true of this fourth verse. With the previous verses all seems well—peace, joy, and contentment. But now the psalmist begins, “Yea, though....” Now he is emphasizing the fact that we may rejoice in Jehovah’s guidance and protection even though our

pilgrim journey takes us through the darkest and most threatening experiences of life. Notice, too, that now the sheep begins to speak intimately to his shepherd. The personal pronouns “I” and “thou” enter the conversation. “...I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.” What comfort is ours, even through the valley!

Our Need of Protection

Both in the land of Palestine and on many larger sheep ranches in North America, as well as in other parts of the world, most of the efficient sheepmen take their flocks up to the rich mountain pastures during the summer. But this often entails a difficult and dangerous journey. The hill country of Judah is broken up by narrow and precipitous valleys or ravines through which one must pass in order to get to the good pasture. These valleys abound with dens and caves that provide hiding places for both wild beasts and robbers. In these valleys there are dangers of flash floods, avalanches, poisonous plants, and fierce storms. This all makes plain what the psalmist means when he speaks of walking through “the valley of the shadow of death.”

We must understand that the psalmist is not speaking

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only about the day of our death. Sometimes this verse is limited to that. But it is not so that in the previous verses we see that the needs of this present life are taken care of, and that now this verse concerns our death—that even then our Shepherd will take care of us. That is true, of course. But this Word of God means much more than that. Not only is Jehovah with us when we make that final journey, when we are upon our deathbed, but He is with us throughout our life here on earth. And this latter idea is even on the foreground. The point is that all through our life we are walking through the valley of the shadow of death. All of Scripture teaches that we lie in the midst of death; that we die every day; that we carry about with us the body of this death. David is not merely referring to our physical death, but to all the dark and bitter experiences of our lives. We *walk* through the valley of the shadow of death. He does not say that we stop there or that we die there, but rather that we walk through. And our walk is our life, our whole pilgrim journey in the midst of this world.

There are those who have made light of these dark, frightening experiences. They emphasize that David speaks only of the “shadow” of death. It has been said that only fools and young children are afraid of shadows. After all, the shadow of a sword cannot cut, and the shadow of a dog will not bite. But one who has actually walked through the valley would not utter such foolishness. For where there is a shadow, there is a reality casting the shadow. From this point of view, it is very dangerous to make light of the dangers and adversities that we encounter in life. Spiritually, the dangers are very real: Satan, the wicked world, and our own sinful flesh. And the adversities of our lives are very real: afflictions, sorrows, hardships, and death itself.

We are inclined to ask, “Why do we have to walk *this* path, this dangerous, frightening way through the valley of the shadow of death? Of course, we cannot fully comprehend the reasons while we are yet on this side of the grave. But we are assured in God’s Word that it is for our own good. It is to prepare us for our place in glory. It is to strengthen our faith in our Shepherd and to draw us nearer to Him. It is to make us realize our dependence upon Him.

But it all comes down to the fact that our all-wise, all-knowing Shepherd knows that this is the best way. So it

is with the earthly shepherd too; he knows that the best route to the lush mountain grass is through the valleys. The valleys have the gentlest grades, springs and pools of water to drink, and the best forage for the sheep. Yes, the shepherd is aware of the dangers there. But in spite of the hazards, the shepherd also knows that this is still the best way to take his flock.

In this connection, we must remember the nature and characteristics of sheep. In addition to being very weak, helpless, and defenseless animals, they have very little persistence. They give up very easily. When they face adversity, affliction, or danger, they often simply give up and die! And that is our nature too! How easily we become anxious, upset, frightened by the adversities and dangers of life. When the dark shadows sweep over us and the path we tread grows gloomy, we can easily slip into despair, into a spiritual pessimism. Sometimes we just feel like giving up.

We must understand that David did not speak of the valley of the shadow of death to strike fear into our hearts or to discourage us. Rather, he would impress upon us that our safety and security are found in our Shepherd. Thus, the question is not whether the valley is dark or merely dim with the shadow of death. The question is, How do we get through it?

Our Comfort in Jehovah

The grand testimony of David in the light of potential danger was: “I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.” Notice carefully that he did not say that he would encounter no evil. Such a statement would have been contrary to his own experience as well as to the teaching of God’s Word. David did not derive comfort from the weakness of the enemy. He did not find comfort from his own inherent strength. But he was comforted by the fact that Jehovah, his Shepherd, was with him.

So we need not fear because Jehovah is with us! The presence of the Lord has provided encouragement for His people throughout the ages. When Jacob was at Bethel the Lord promised, “And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest...” (Gen. 28:15a). As Joshua stood on the east bank of the Jordan River, ready to lead that great throng of Israelites into Canaan, the Lord strengthened him with the word, “There shall not any man be able to stand before thee all the days

of thy life: as I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Josh. 1:5). When Jesus commissioned His disciples, He encouraged them with the words, "...lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20b). Yes, it is in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son, that God is with us to save us and deliver us. He is Emmanuel, "God with us"! He is our "good shepherd"! (John 10).

That makes all the difference as we walk through the valley! The presence of our Shepherd is a source of strength and courage for us. Look back over your own life and see how the Shepherd's hand has upheld you and sustained you even in the darkest hours. Reflect on Father's faithfulness in every crisis, in every frightening circumstance of life. Has not His grace always been sufficient?

And as a further explanation to bolster our confidence David adds, "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me." The rod and staff refer to two distinct implements that were the common equipment of the ancient shepherd. A shepherd boy would take great pride in the selection of a rod and a staff suited to his own size and strength.

The rod was a short stick or club that was the main weapon of defense for the shepherd and his sheep. A shepherd who had become skilled in the use of the rod could swing it and throw it with great accuracy. With the rod the shepherd had a means of protection and kept the flock safe. The rod could also be used in the shepherd's hand to examine and count the sheep. The Lord speaks of this in Ezekiel 20:37 as passing under the rod. This means not only coming under the shepherd's control and authority, but also to be subject to his most careful and intimate examination.

The staff, more than any other item of his personal equipment, identified the shepherd as a shepherd. No one in any other profession carried a shepherd's staff. It is uniquely an instrument used for the care and management of sheep, and only sheep. Normally, the shepherd's staff was a long slender stick with a crook or hook on one end. It was carefully selected, and shaped and cut to best suit the shepherd's own personal use. In addition to leaning upon his staff for support, the shepherd used the staff in the care of his flock. Skilled shepherds of old could use their staff to gently lift a newborn lamb and bring it to its mother if they became separated. In the same way,


the shepherd could use the staff to reach out and catch individual sheep to draw them close to examine them. The staff was also used for guiding the sheep. With his staff the shepherd could gently prod the sheep into a new path or through a gate. With his staff the shepherd could often reach a sheep that had fallen into a hole or off the edge of a small cliff.

The staff is essentially a symbol of the concern and the compassion that a shepherd has for his sheep. Whereas the rod conveys the concept of authority and power, of discipline and defense against danger, the staff speaks of all that is longsuffering and kind. So we see that the rod and staff are the symbols of a well-prepared shepherd, and provide him with clear identity. Together they clearly represent the Word of God. The tools God uses to shepherd us are the Holy Scriptures. The Word of God is wielded to defend us from our spiritual foes. That Word is used to discipline when we stray from the flock. The faithful preaching of the Word guides us in the straight and narrow way. What comfort and encouragement that Word provides for us! "Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me!" Even as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, we have comfort knowing our Shepherd is with us, yea, that we belong unto Him!

Do you know this comfort? Do you have that blessed assurance that your Savior is with you? Do you have the calm, quiet confidence that He is there, moment by moment, day by day, to direct every detail of our lives? That He is there to guide, to sustain, to protect, to preserve as we walk through the valley of the shadow of death? That is comfort!

Then our way in the midst of this world is not so bad. Even peering ahead as the valley grows darker in these last days, we are able to sing with the psalmist,

"Thy way was in the sea, O God,
Through mighty waters, deep and broad;
None understood but God alone,
To man Thy footsteps were unknown;
But safe Thy people Thou didst keep,
Almighty Shepherd of Thy sheep."

Psalter #211, stanza 3 

Editor's Notes for Volume 93

With this *Standard Bearer*, October 1, 2016, in your hand (or on your screen), you are in possession of the first issue of volume 93. For ninety-two years, since October 1, 1924, the Lord has enabled our fathers and us to produce a magazine that has propagated, defended, and even developed the Reformed faith. By the power of God's uncommon grace, until the Lord returns we will continue to produce the magazine with the same purpose and goal, so that you readers are equipped to witness to the faith of our fathers, and grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The *Standard Bearer* staff, which determines the writers and content of the magazine, met in August to lay out plans for the twenty-one issues of volume year 93. There are a few changes in store worth mentioning. We have some new writers. Rev. Dennis Lee has been added to the staff to write meditations, and Rev. Erik Guichelaar to write for "All Around Us," replacing Rev. Daniel Holstege. We hope that, when Rev. Holstege gets his feet on the ground in the Philippines, he can resume writing, but then on the subject of missions. In the "science" rubric, "All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee," Dr. Nathan Lanning and Dr. Brendan Looyenga have joined brother Joel Minderhoud. Both of the brothers have written before; now they have accepted the invitation of the staff to join as regular contributors. Rev. Garrett Eriks will move from "The Strength of Youth" to "When Thou Sittest in Thine

House." Rev. Jon Mahtani will join the staff and take his place under "The Strength of Youth." Rev. Cory Griess returns to the rubric "O Come, Let Us Worship." And Rev. Douglas Kuiper will write about Psalter revision in his rubric "Ministering to the Saints."

God willing, the SB will produce two special issues this year. First, coming next issue already will be our annual Reformation issue, this time on Martin Luther. With the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in 2017, we thought this a fitting theme. In the Spring we will have another special issue focusing on missions and evangelism. Send us your suggestions!

Finally, with the new volume year comes a small subscription increase—from \$23 to \$24 for domestic subscription. The RFPA, which publishes the *Standard Bearer*, explains that this will help cover printing costs increases, and will help finance a new and improved look to the magazine that we hope to implement in one year. The costs for better paper and perhaps four color are more than one dollar, so all of us who pay are still getting a good magazine for a very low price. The staff is thankful that you subscribe, read, and promote the *Standard Bearer*. Pass it on. Give a gift subscription to a friend. Are any of our children not subscribers? College students still get the SB for free.

Good reading!

BLG 

Book Analysis: *Ten Myths About Calvinism*

An intriguing title

The book caught my eye. For a Calvinist the question is, "Is the author for or against Calvinism? A defender or a critic?"

Summer is a time for extra reading and vacation time, especially, at least for ministers. Some for personal enjoyment and relaxation,

others for information and instruction.

Kenneth J. Stewart's book with the above title (IVP Academic, 2011) falls into the latter category.

We bring this book to the attention of our readers for a couple of reasons. First, because the marking of Reformation Day comes the end

of this month (its 499th anniversary), and this book has everything to do with a Reformer and his doctrines. And second, because Stewart's perspective, we fear, represents an increasingly popular perspective of too many 'Calvinists' of our day.

That increasingly popular perspective is, as is becoming plain, a

modification of Calvin's 'Calvinism,' which is to say, that which is woven into the confessional Reformed faith, and hence, of the gospel truth concerning God and the grace of salvation that is to be preached.

Before we demonstrate Stewart's desired modification of historic Calvinism, we give a few words about Stewart and the book itself.

According to his introductory section, Stewart came to Calvinism from the 'outside,' from what he calls the "revivalist stream of evangelism" (12). But, looking back, though he still considers himself to be committed to the Calvinistic perspective of faith and life, Stewart regrets that "[t]his new loyalty also involved my taking what I now recognize to be some wrong turns" (12).

As he further states, "For a considerable time I became a true zealot for the new cause" (12). It's that past 'zealotry' that now evidently troubles Stewart. It is, in large part, what prompted him to write this book.

Stewart is well aware that over the past few decades there has been, as even *Time* magazine (March 25, 2009) recognized, a resurgence of interest among young theologians and their followers for Calvinism, for its truth of an omnipotent God and its systematic way of theologizing. The long-standing liberalism of the churches in which so many had been raised, which held to nothing for certain, proved to be a limp form of religion, its members drifting away from Christianity altogether in the end. It held no attraction to these young people. The newly discovered Calvinism, on the

other hand, with its convictions and consistency has drawn them back to Scripture and truth, a biblical Christianity worth taking a stand for.

Well aware of this, Stewart is concerned that these new converts to Calvinism not make the same mistakes he made, mistakes that he would attribute to his initial over-zealousness for Calvin and his opinion on all matters, and too much certainty of being right and all others wrong. Such zeal, found in too many, must be tempered and modified.

And so the book.

Based on his own experience and journey into what he would call a better-balanced and more mature biblical, Reformed perspective, Stewart would like to counsel and caution the new generation of Calvinists, lest they be numbered with the extremists, because Calvinism, he warns, "has a tendency to generate its share."

To this critical perspective of Stewart, treated particularly in the opening chapters of the book, we will return.

Why we are critical of Stewart we will make clear.

And it is not because Calvinism in the hands of zealots has not generated men of radical and extreme doctrinal positions. History has proved otherwise. There is, after all, a species of Calvinists that have deserved the label 'hyper.' The Deceiver knows how to push men of all persuasions to extremism when given the opportunity.

The important question is, what are the doctrinal emphases that

Stewart puts in the category as extremism and tending to radicalism? What are the positions that Stewart cautions against as not 'necessarily' being required for one to consider himself Calvinistic and Reformed?

This is what is telling, as we shall see.

This is not to say that we take exception with everything that Stewart writes.

The book is divided into two main sections, two groups of what Stewart labels as 'myths' (mistaken notions) about Calvinism that are common, either because they are generally accepted (but should not be), or maliciously circulated by Calvinism's enemies.

The first section is labeled "Four Myths Calvinists Should Not Be Circulating (But Are)"; the second section is labeled "Six Myths Non-Calvinists Should Not Be Circulating (But Are)."

Our concern is not so much with the second section, myths commonly circulated by non-Calvinists (or better, anti-Calvinists). In this section there is much with which we agree, especially Stewart's refutation of those criticisms (calumnies) that have been hurled against Calvinism and the Reformed faith for centuries. We have in mind especially the first three myths or calumnies Stewart deals with: the myth that Calvinism is largely anti-missionary; the myth that Calvinism promotes antinomianism; and the myth that Calvinism leads to theocracy (the church ruling the state). These are charges that have been thrown at Calvinism since the days of the Reformation.

While we cannot agree with everything found in these sections, such as Stewart concurring with the charge that the doctrine of eternal justification is inherently antinomian, we can agree that these charges regularly circulated by Rome and the Arminians are myths that are to be refuted and dismissed.

The three remaining myths Stewart treats in the second section are the myths that Calvinism undermines the creative arts; that Calvinism resists gender equality; and that Calvinism has fostered racial inequality. These are charges of a more modern vintage, which charges are certainly fabrications of the opponents of Calvinism, but which we leave to the interested reader to read and consider.

The focus of our issue with Stewart is found in his first section, the section entitled “Four Myths Calvinists Should Not Be Circulating (But Are).” It is here that Stewart’s growing unhappiness with (and departure from) historic Calvinism is revealed. This is made plain by what he labels as the “Four Myths”, and in particular myths two and three.

The four things that Stewart is convinced should be labeled as myths by true, heart-Calvinists are; that “One Man (Calvin) and One City (Geneva) Are Determinative”; that “Calvin’s View of Predestination Must Be Ours”; that “TULIP is the Yardstick of the Truly Reformed”; that “Calvinists Take a Dim View of Revival and Awakening.”

It is in these chapters that Stewart’s desire to revise what is nothing else than historic Calvinistic and the

historic Reformed consensus comes to light.

Stewart’s mischievous purpose is really indicated by his subtitle listed on his book’s cover: *Recovering the Breadth of the Reformed Tradition*.

In other words, there is a line of historic Calvinism that Stewart has found to be too narrow, which line he would persuade young Calvinists to broaden, that is, become more inclusive of divergent views. This becomes apparent in Stewart’s first section.

That this is Stewart’s deepest intention (and not just defending the historic Reformed faith against calumnies that continue to be hurled against it to this present day) becomes plain already in his introductory section.

Having stated that the Calvinistic strain of Christianity has generated more than its share of extremists, Stewart goes on to state that he has come to the conclusion that “...Calvinism has had more trouble restraining its ‘ultras’ than some other forms of Christianity” (12). And then, a telling remark in which Stewart suggests (but really, as becomes plain, is convinced of) that “...Calvinism’s reluctance to do this reflects the prominence given by the movement to the conception of God as omnipotent...” (13). Stewart assures his readers that he does not dispute God’s sovereign omnipotence, but even then goes on to warn against this “obsession with omnipotence” characterizing it as being “lopsided” (13).

There is reason already in the introduction to be suspect of Stew-

art’s commitment to thoroughgoing Calvinism. His stated fears and unflattering descriptions of Calvinism in the context of the sovereignty of God indicates quite a drift from what must have initially drawn Stewart to Calvinism.

The direction in which Stewart has drifted is made plain especially in the first three items he wants to label as myths.

The first matter Stewart would have the new generation of Calvinists categorize as a myth is what he labels as “One Man (Calvin) and One City (Geneva) Are Determinative,” by which he means, evidently, as determinative of what historically has come under the banner of Calvinism and what is to be considered biblically true.

Stewart’s position is that “The notion of Calvin’s and Geneva’s dominance...[is a] belief [that] has always stood on a suspect foundation” (22).

If all that Stewart was interested in demonstrating in this section was that there were many outstanding Reformers who contributed to the Reformation and the return to biblical truth that came under the name Reformed in time—men such as Bullinger, Bucer, Vermigli, à Lasco, and others—we would have no problem with Stewart’s thesis.

Who would dispute that the Reformation was the fruit of the work of more than one man and one city with its seminary, which men and their contributions ought not be forgotten. Something we here at the *Standard Bearer* are convinced is exactly the value of the upcoming 500th anniversary of the Reforma-

tion's beginning, a glorious opportunity to call to mind, once Luther took his stand and nailed the 95 theses to Wittenberg's church door, how many men of biblical conviction and spiritual resolve took heed to Luther's trumpet call and God used in reforming His church and in reviving the life of its members. Young Jean Calvin was only one of many. And Geneva was not the

only city where the truth took deep root (for a time).

But Stewart's interest is broader than that. What Stewart is set upon is to get at some of Calvin's core doctrines, and raise questions whether one really has to be committed to such doctrines without reservation in order yet to have the right to lay claim to the name "Reformed." And, we would suppose,

not be suspended and deposed from office for expressing "reservations" about this or that Calvinistic doctrine.

That this is Stewart's intention becomes clearly manifest in his following chapters, especially, what he labels as common myths two and three (cf. above), as we intend to demonstrate in a future article. ☞

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Wisdom Guards in the Way of Spiritual Reflection

Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.

Ecclesiastes 7:19-22

The Word of God is a light in a world of darkness and sin. The knowledge of that Word, directing us to God Himself, also shines on the works of God in creation, providence, and the life of the world around us. It gives wisdom as a spiritual gift, which serves as a guide through the temptations of pride and the lusts of the flesh. The internal principle of wisdom is the fear of God, that humble reverence of faith, which seeks to walk after the will of God. It is thus that "... he that feareth God shall come forth of them all" (Eccl. 7:18). The path of life is fraught with many temptations; through them wisdom is a guide.

"Wisdom strengtheneth the wise more than ten mighty men which are in the city" (Eccl. 7:19). The wise man strengthened by wisdom is one who fears God and holds the light of His Word by faith. It is the wisdom-imparting Word that makes one spiritually strong. The text uses a comparison of ten men in a city, ten being the natural number of completeness. The ten men are mighty earthly rulers. The idea of the text implies that they make the city strong by protecting it from the enemy without and maintaining order within. A city blessed with such mighty men is safe and secure, well-founded, and rightly governed in the world.

Wisdom from God, however, gives a greater strength, for it affords a spiritual foundation beyond the life of the world: a guide through the dangers of sin and temptation. It keeps one from the way of pride and folly. It governs the spirit with humility and discernment. It, in effect, stands beside the one who is wise, making him stronger than the mere earthly power of the ten mighty men in a city.

The reason for this, and the need of it at the same time, are found in the explanation given: "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not" (Eccl. 7:20). A man righteous before God, whose

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walk is upright and godly, is yet a sinner. He is just in his dealings “upon earth” and does good. Solomon himself, in his judgment on the throne, was such a man. He ruled with wisdom and ordered the coming and going of his kingdom likewise, so that the Queen of Sheba stood in wonder at the wisdom and order of his kingdom. In this too, Solomon was a type of Christ.

For all that—and our text is an indirect confession on Solomon’s part—he was still a sinner. For all the glory of his kingdom and wisdom, Solomon had many sins, particularly his heathen wives, his condoning of their idolatry, and, as he grew older, the stubbornness of his temper. Wisdom gives strength to see one’s own sin and humble one’s pride before God in repentance. It leads to a spiritual reflection on one’s own sin and weakness.

Wisdom is a means to restrain, to guard and to guide in the way, but grace alone in Christ takes away sin. The Heidelberg Catechism in Lord’s Day 44, Q&A 114 mirrors the idea of the text in connection with the law of God:

But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments? No, but even the holiest of men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience; yet so, that with a sincere resolution they begin to live not only according to some, but all the commandments of God.

Wisdom strenghtens the man who is a sinner to keep him from the folly of his own sinful human nature. It guards him in the way from the corruptions of the flesh and works a sober reflection on his own infirmity after the flesh. This is Solomon’s own reflection, which shapes his conclusion at the end of the Ecclesiastes: “...Fear God and keep his commandments.... For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:13, 14).

It is in the light of that reality of man’s sin and depravity by nature that Solomon then illustrates the value of wisdom and the reflection it occasions by directing us to the sin against the ninth commandment into which we also fall: “Also take no heed unto all words that are spoken; lest thou hear thy servant curse thee: for oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others” (Eccl. 7:21, 22).

The illustration is well chosen, for this sin is found


in everyone. Often, it lies hidden in the mind and heart. Rather than pointing to a great or manifest gross sin, he points to one close to home. Solomon’s palace and court were filled with many servants going about their business. Sins of pride, frustration, and anger were a constant reality in such an environment, much like a corporate office with a large staff today. Today, we would also have to add e-mail and other means of communication such as social media.

Walking those halls of the palace, Solomon would hear his servants’ voices, speaking to themselves under their breath, murmuring to one another, complaining, sometimes openly venting their anger, sometimes speaking softly in frustrated bitterness. There were times when, indeed, they cursed him over things small or great. The echo of their voices reached him down the corridors. He heard or sensed what was being said, alone or in the group down the hall.

The way of wisdom, was to “pay no heed unto all the words that are spoken.” The way of wisdom was to pass by without turning his attention to it, “lest thou hear thy servant curse thee.” Love exercised in wisdom covers a multitude of such sins, while pride seeks a confrontation and one’s own glory.

The reason given is rooted in the spiritual reflection and, therefore, restraint that wisdom gives as a guard against the self-willed impulses that cause one to seek his own glory. Wisdom leads one rather to search his own heart, to recognize the root of sinful infirmity that likewise lies in one’s own flesh. “For oftentimes also thine own heart knoweth that thou thyself likewise hast cursed others.” That knowledge, the self-knowledge of the heart, is the fruit of discernment wrought by wisdom as a grace of God.

The servant and his master are both alike sinners, and sin arising from within comes out of our mouth. To our shame, the mouth of a fool is often found with us. The counsel here is not to ignore sin when it is serious, but to take to heart, first of all, our own infirmity, when we see the weaknesses of others, such that we confess our own need of grace and forgiveness and walk in patience, meekness, and forgiveness with others.

It is a sober reflection that “there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not” (Eccl. 7:20). 

Hope

Basic to hope is its place in the grand spiritual trinity of the Christian life: faith, *hope*, and love (I Cor. 13:13). In this relationship, faith and hope are essentially one. Martin Luther once wrote that although faith and hope can be distinguished, there is such affinity between them that, like the two cherubim over the mercy seat, they cannot be divided. And what unites faith and hope is love. For love believeth all things and hopeth all things (I Cor. 13:7). In ardent covenant love, every child of God cleaves unto God with true faith and firm hope (Baptism Form).


Faith and hope both have as their object things we love. Our faith and hope are in God (I Pet. 1:21). Similarly, even as we love, so also we believe and hope in His mercy (Ps. 33:18), judgments, salvation, and Word (Ps. 119:43, 49, 166); His redemption (Ps. 130:7), promises (Acts 26:6), righteousness (Gal. 5:5), and Christ (I Tim. 1:1). Faith and hope have the same source, God who loves us (I Pet. 3:15); are both given by regeneration (I Pet. 1:3), in grace (II Thess. 2:16), and to infants (Ps. 22:9); and both love things unseen (Rom. 8:24; Heb. 11:1).

Although one, faith and hope are also distinct. First, faith is primary and begets hope, whereas hope proceeds from and is founded on faith. Faith is the substance of things hoped for (Heb. 11:1), the reason for hope within us (I Pet. 3:15), and faith increases hope (II Cor. 10:15). Without faith, there is no hope (Is. 38:18). And false faith begets false hope that perishes in death (Job 8:14; 11:20). Second, faith and hope emphasize different activities in our spiritual faculties. Faith is knowing the truth with the mind, and hope is assurance of that truth with the will. It is true, the Heidelberg Catechism defines faith as both a certain knowledge and an assured confidence (Q&A 21). Yet this assured confidence of faith Scripture also calls hope. It defines hope as full assurance, the firm, strong, sure, and steadfast confidence of the soul in the truth (Heb. 3:6; 6:11, 19). The things faith knows, hope expects (Prov. 10:28), trusts (Jer. 17:7),

grasps (Heb. 6:18), and desires (Prov. 13:12). And being activities of different spiritual faculties, faith and hope are also produced or grow differently. Both come by learning, but faith learns by understanding, whereas hope learns by experience, particularly under testing and trial. Tribulation works patience, patience works experience, and experience works hope (Rom. 5:4-5; 15:4).

Finally, Scripture distinguishes between the objects of faith and hope. The special quality of both faith and hope is their confidence in the reality of things even though they are unseen. However, hope usually refers to confidence in those unseen things we must wait patiently to be perfected or fulfilled in the future. The true hope of Christians is laid up for us in heaven (Col. 1:5). Our blessed hope is in the future appearing of Jesus Christ (Tit. 2:13). Our hope is that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him and see Him as He is (I John 3:2). Our lively hope is in the resurrection of the body, glory (I Pet. 1:3; Acts 24:15; Rom. 5:2; Col. 1:27), and that, being justified by His grace, we shall be heirs of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began (Tit. 1:2; 3:7).

To us who believe, therefore, hope is most precious. We rejoice in hope, for by means of hope we are blessed (Rom. 12:12; Jer. 17:7). The Lord takes pleasure in and His eye is upon those that hope in His mercy (Ps. 33:18; 147:11). Through hope, God gives us good courage and strengthens our heart, so that, although we experience sore trials and severe tribulations, we can be happy (Ps. 31:24; 146:5; Prov. 10:28). Though we may be filled with anxiety or sorrows, through hope we are given everlasting consolation, our flesh finds rest and our soul is quieted (II Thess. 2:16; Ps. 42:11; 16:9). Having hope, we are protected from every evil (I Thess. 5:8), we persevere to the end (I Pet. 1:13), and cannot be moved away from the gospel (Col. 1:23).

And so, may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 15:13). 

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Good Works

Lord's Day 32

Q. 86. Since then we are delivered from our misery merely of grace, through Christ, without any merit of ours, why must we still do good works?

A. Because Christ, having redeemed and delivered us by His blood, also renews us by His Holy Spirit after His own image; that so we may testify by the whole of our conduct our gratitude to God for His blessings, and that He may be praised by us; also, that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof; and that by our godly conversation others may be gained to Christ.

Q. 87. Cannot they then be saved, who, continuing in their wicked and ungrateful lives, are not converted to God?

A. By no means; for the Holy Scripture declares that no unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like, shall inherit the kingdom of God.

This Lord's Day begins the third major section of the Heidelberg Catechism, "Of Thankfulness." After guilt and grace comes gratitude. How grateful we should be for our salvation! Jesus once said that the person who has been forgiven much will love much in return (Luke 7:47). Everyone who has experienced the saving grace of God knows that he owes an eternal debt of gratitude to God. We show this gratitude by always presenting ourselves to God as living sacrifices of obedience (Rom. 12:1).

The subject of this Lord's Day and the next is "good works." We are taught here that even though we are not saved *by* our good works, still we *must* do good works. Salvation by grace does not free us from the obligation of obedience. The law of God is necessary, not only to demonstrate to us our sin and need of repentance, but also to show us how we ought to live in gratitude for our salvation.

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The Necessity of Good Works

When it speaks of the necessity of good works, the Catechism uses absolute language. Question 86 says that we *must* do good works! This is another way of saying that good works are *essential* to, and *absolutely necessary* in the life of the Christian. Q&A 87 teaches that without good works one cannot be saved and cannot inherit the kingdom of God.

We are inclined to soften this. Arguing from the position that salvation is all of grace without works, we tend to view good works as "important" and "desirable" in the Christian life, but we do not like to hear that they are demanded and essential. "After all," we say, "we are not able to keep the law, so let the law show me what I cannot do, not what I must do." Though we are not ready to admit it, we usually think this way because there is some sin in our lives that we are enjoying too much to let go. We see obedience as "optional" and not "necessary." We compartmentalize the time, relationships, and pleasures of our lives—"this one for God, this one for me"—and figure that in the end God will forgive us.

If this describes you at all, then you need to repent of the sin of presuming on the grace of God, of saying, “Let us sin that grace may abound” (Rom. 6:1). In Psalm 19, David prays not only to be cleansed from his secret faults, but also to be kept back from presumptuous sins. A presumptuous sin is one of which he is aware, but he goes ahead and does it anyway. The danger, he realizes, is that if he indulges these sins, they will have dominion over him (Ps. 19:12-13). Sin gives the devil a foothold (Eph. 4:27).

The Scriptures are not indifferent to good works. Those who live habitually and impenitently in known sin show themselves not to be true Christians. Yes, we all stumble along the way (James 3:2; I John 1:8); but there is a difference between falling into a sin and jumping in with both feet. And, it does not matter what that sin is—pride, slander, theft, covetousness, sexual immorality—if we continually give ourselves to it day after day, without a fight and without repentance, the Bible says we will not and cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven. So we read in Ephesians 5:5, “For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.”

The true Christian is always discovering the greater depths of his sinful heart and is continually fighting against and repenting of his sin. Good works and obedience are essential to the Christian life.

The Place of Good Works

Although the Bible teaches good works, there is always an order: first salvation, then good works. Salvation is not based upon works, but rather salvation is the sovereign work of God by His grace and Spirit and it produces good works. Good works are a part of the salvation that God works in us.

Arminian theology (and indeed all false religion—consider Catholicism, Mormonism, Islam, Hinduism)

puts works ahead of salvation. It teaches that we are saved because of our good works, that by the exercise of our free will we are able to believe, and that this is pleasing to God and accepted by Him in the place of perfect obedience. The Scriptures teach, however, that the only possibility of our doing any good works, including believing, is that God first works by His saving grace in us (Eph. 2:8-10). When the Catechism teaches that good works are essential, it does not mean that good works are meritorious.

This order can be seen when we, on the one hand, look at salvation from God’s point of view. When God chose us in eternity, when Jesus died to redeem us, when God the Holy Spirit regenerates us, God always had our good works in view. This is the purpose of His sovereign, saving work. Titus 2:14 says that He “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” Similarly, I Peter 2:9 teaches that we are chosen and sanctified in order that we “should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.” The God who made all things for His own glory, saves us so that we might bring glory

to Him by our good works.

On the other hand, looking at salvation from our perspective, we see the same order: first salvation, then good works follow. In Luke 7, Jesus tells the parable of the two debtors, one forgiven little and one forgiven much. Simon the Pharisee is the debtor forgiven little, and so loves little, whereas the woman who knows she has been forgiven much loves much. When once we have experienced the grace of God, our hearts are filled with gratitude and love to God. This gratitude shows itself in an obedient life of good works (Rom. 12:1-2).

This must be the order because, as Jesus says, “a corrupt tree cannot bring forth good fruit” (Matt. 7:18). Good works come from a heart that has been changed by the grace of God.

*The true Christian
is always discovering
the greater depths
of his sinful heart
and is continually fighting
against and repenting
of his sin.*

The Purpose of Good Works

“Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit” (John 15:8). The primary purpose of good works is God’s glory. In fact, this is really the only purpose, and all other purposes serve this one. In the beginning, God made us for His glory. When sin entered, we turned from glorifying God to glorifying the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:25). God’s purpose in re-creating us is that we again bring Him glory.

This means that we ought to live a life of good works without regard for man. We do not do good works for the recognition of man, and we live a life of godliness and good works without worrying about the displeasure of our fellow man. God does not give you the ability to do good works in order that you may receive a medal on your chest, but that He might be praised by you. Too often when we do what is good, we are checking that others are watching, we are looking for praise, and then our pride stands in the way of God’s glory.


There are two other, subsidiary purposes for good works. These too ultimately bring God the glory, but they show that good works also benefit us. There is, first, a personal benefit for the Christian who lives a life of good works. The Catechism puts it this way, “that every one may be assured in himself of his faith by the fruits thereof.” Scripture puts it this way, “And hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments” (1 John 2:3). This does not mean that good works are the basis of our assurance—no, that is the cross and blood of Jesus Christ. However, the believer in faith may reason this way: I do good works; good works are always the result of grace; therefore, I must be saved. The result is a stronger faith in Christ, a deeper love for and gratitude to God, and praise for the work of grace.

The other benefit of good works is the increase of the church. Not only do our good works benefit the other members of the body, but they also have an evangelistic purpose. “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evil-doers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation” (1 Pet. 2:12). Our conduct—what we do and do not do; our words—both the kinds of words we use and the subject of our conversation; our deeds—kindness, service, forgiveness; and especially our attitudes—towards life and others, are

compelling demonstrations of the transforming power of the gospel. By them someone who does not know Christ and the gospel can know what a Christian is, and can be induced to ask the reason of our hope (1 Pet. 3:15). Of course, witnessing is more than living; it is also speaking. But if you are not living a godly life, your witness loses its power and credibility.

Are you a Christian who is zealous of good works?

Questions for Discussion

1. How are we tempted to downplay the importance and necessity of good works?
2. What is antinomianism? What does it teach about good works? How might this become a danger in a Reformed church?
3. What is legalism? Is the Heidelberg Catechism legalistic in stating that we *must* do good works? Why, or why not?
4. Give proof from Scripture that obedience to the law of God is not contrary to salvation by grace.
5. What is a presumptuous sin (Ps. 19:12-13)? What is the unique danger of such sins (1 Tim. 4:2)?
6. You are familiar with the expression “Sunday Christians.” Does God’s Word allow for this kind of compartmentalizing of our lives? Does going to church nullify a life of disobedience?
7. What is the only way into heaven for an “unchaste person, idolater, adulterer, thief, covetous man, drunkard, slanderer, robber, or any such like”?
8. Are good works God’s gift to us, our gift to Him, or both? Explain.
9. Are good works possible apart from saving grace that produces love for God? What does “common grace” as adopted by the Christian Reformed Church in 1924 teach concerning good works? How do Romans 14:23 and Proverbs 21:4 answer this?
10. What is the source of our good works? Can you prove this from Scripture?
11. What moves you as a believer to want to live in good works?
12. What is the primary purpose of our good works?
13. How do our good works assure us of our salvation? Do we focus on the good works themselves for assurance?
14. Is your life a testimony to unbelievers of the power of God’s saving grace? Are you deliberately evangelistic in your living? 

“To Teach Them War”

Knowing War's Origin: In God's Declaration of War (11)

Whereas the Imperial Government of Japan has committed unprovoked acts of war against the Government and the people of the United States of America: Therefore be it resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, that the state of war between the United States and the Imperial Government of Japan, which has thus been thrust upon the United States is hereby formally declared, and the President is hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire naval and military forces of the United States and the resources of the Government to carry on war against the Imperial Government of Japan, and, to bring the conflict to a successful termination, all of the resources of the country are hereby pledged by the Congress of the United States.

With these words of December 8, 1941, the Congress of the United States of America officially declared war against Japan. What the Congress did is an example of what man has done formally or informally throughout history. Whether it is deemed just or unjust from the human perspective, war is declared and war is waged—man against man, nation against nation. Rare are the national archives containing no declarations of war. As the youth are schooled in national military history and its many declarations of war, so they must be schooled in *covenantal* military history and God's declaration of war.

We have already learned that the first declaration of

war in history occurred in the obscurity of the heavenly realm and was issued by Satan against God. He foolishly assaulted God's throne. We have also seen Satan acting on his declaration by coming to man in the garden in order to instigate man's rebellion. Although Adam and Eve signed no formal document, they joined themselves in alliance with Satan and declared war against God through their disobedience in the Fall. Were any spectator standing in Eden during the Fall and possessing some spiritual understanding of what just occurred, it would have been clear that the trajectory of history had just been established as the perpetual waging of the war Adam declared. On one side of the battle stand Satan, all of his fellow fallen angels, Adam, Eve, and all of their future descendants united in the spiritual fellowship of darkness against God. On the other side stand the triune God and the unfallen, holy angels united in the spiritual fellowship of light against the darkness. Essentially, it was God against men and demons. Because God is God, victory and glory would be His everlastingly. Defeated, the devil, his demons, and all human beings would be drowned in everlasting destruction. It looked that way. It looked hopeless for all mankind.

But God, who is sovereign in all these developments and who eternally purposed to reveal His Christ, came to the garden and uttered this surprising and gracious declaration of war now located in the archives of heaven and written in Genesis 3:15, “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed, it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel” (Gen. 3:15). This joint resolution of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the gospel promise of salvation and the explanation for all our spiritual warfare in and on behalf of

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God's covenant. Understanding our daily warfare against sin and Satan is impossible without knowing the origin of our war in God's declaration.

The War God Declared

The war God declared is "enmity." It is ongoing, unrelenting, mutual hostility between two.

The war is between the serpent ("thee") to whom God was speaking and "the woman." The war continues between "the seed" of the serpent and "the seed" of the woman.

The war consists of "bruising" or smiting. In superiority, "It" (the seed of the woman) will come from above and with a painful and deadly blow bruise the head of the serpent (and thus the serpent's seed). In inferiority, the serpent (and his seed) will come from behind and from below and with a painful but non-deadly strike bruise the heel of the seed of the woman. The head-bruise will defeat the heel-bruise.

That God was speaking directly to the serpent does not mean He was speaking only or even primarily to the serpent. Nevertheless, God surely had a word for that literal snake. God put enmity between that snake and the woman and between their seeds. Thus, the war God declared is carried out over the physical terrain of the earth between literal dust-eating, belly-going snakes and the children of Eve. While many snakes come from below and are able to inflict painful bites to our extremities, we often take our shovels to the heads of those snakes. The victories we have in cutting off snake heads are not as such fruits of grace, for even the reprobate bruise serpent heads in their yards, around their log piles, and on their hiking paths.

The serpent addressed in God's declaration of war was the instrument of the rational, moral, tempting, speaking Satan (Rev. 12:9). God declared war between Satan and the woman. In this God was so gracious to Eve. Her earlier fellowship and conniving with Satan over the forbidden fruit of the garden was destructive to her wellbeing in the garden and thereafter. But in His declaration of war, God had declared that Eve and Satan would no longer be allied as partners in iniquity. They would fight. God would love Eve in His covenant of fellowship and Eve would love God. Loving God, Eve would despise and resist the devil all her days.

Yet the declaration would have far-reaching consequences through all of history, for God declared war between the *seeds* of the serpent and the woman. Unable to procreate as a spirit being, Satan would never produce the "seed" of infant devils that would grow up like him, their father. His new enemy Eve would have to produce seed for him. Satan's "seed" refers to the totality of murderous, lying, reprobate mankind that ultimately gives birth to the Antichrist. Each reprobate person is a physical child of the woman but a spiritual child of Satan (John 8:44), belonging to the seed of the wicked world of condemned humanity. Cain belonged to that seed. The seed of the woman is the totality of the elect who would be born of mother Eve and by grace be made a new organism of the spiritual children of God. The seed of the woman is the church. Abel belonged to that seed. All through history there will be enmity between the world and the true church. If you are a child of God and live like one, you may never be surprised by opposition you face in the university, at work, in the neighborhood, from the false church, or perhaps even in your own family. God declared war. This war even comes to realization within you so that in your new man of humility you must always bruise that old man of pride that wants the praise of man.

In the highest sense, *the Seed* of the woman in whom all of the elect are united is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16; Rom. 16:20) who according to the flesh is born of Eve through her descendant Mary. Satan came at Christ's heel again and again through king Herod and the slaughterer of babies, through the wilderness temptations, through the murderous synagogue worshippers in Nazareth; he came through the hatred and opposition of the Pharisees, through the betrayer Judas Iscariot, and through Pontius Pilate together with the Sanhedrin and the taunting Jewish mobs, who all united to kill Him by nailing Him to a tree.

He was bruised. But not defeated.

Sight saw the serpent bruise the *head* of the woman's Seed. Faith saw otherwise.

For in that crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, faith beholds Jesus rising above the serpent and delivering the mortal blow to the devil whose dastardly head is now in principle crushed, accomplishing the once-for-all atonement for our sins in satisfaction of divine justice, and realizing the everlasting kingdom of righteousness.

All so that He might enjoy a covenant of friendship with Jesus Christ and His church, God ordained war between Christ and Satan.

The Declaration of that War

God declared this war when He said, “I will put enmity between.” Because the Sovereign declared war, war is absolutely certain. If God says, “I will put enmity,” then there will be enmity. To the end of history there will never be any relenting of this war. Peace between the church and the world is impossible. Elect believers and their spiritual seed will never live and die in alliance with reprobate unbelievers and their seed. There will never be an apostasy so universal that the gospel is entirely forsaken on earth, but there will always be a remnant warring for the truth. There will never truly be one world kingdom in which all human beings are spiritually united in iniquity. There will always be a holy nation, ever so small, fighting to lay hold on eternal life and making a good profession. All the demonic forces of hell marshalled together under the Antichrist at the very end of history will never be able, by cunning deceit or by the force of fearsome torture, to pressure Christ’s own into apostasy and conformity with hell. Even when the hotly persecuted remnant, looking heavenward for Jesus, is so weary of persecution and in weakness of the flesh ready to throw in the white flag of surrender, gasping, “Now take from our mouths these gags and from our throats these knives, for we know not Jesus of Nazareth,” she never will. She will always fight. There will be enmity between the seeds forever. No matter how she cries in pain because her heel is bruised, the suffering church will carry on in the conflict.

What is true for the church is true for you also, believer. Through your last and dying breath you will never apostatize. You will never so weary of Satan’s attacks to your faith that you finally give up the Christian faith and fall away into perdition. You will never be overcome by your besetting sin so that you become an unholy cast-away to whom the gates of the Father’s house are forever locked. You will always battle sin.

I did not ordain this enmity, nor did you. The church did not ordain this war. Neither Adam nor Eve declared this war. We do not continue in enmity against sin and Satan because the battle is ours. The battle is *God’s*. He

said, “I will put enmity....” I will! He will bring forth the promised Seed through an impossible virgin birth. He will see to it that Satan bruises Jesus’ heel. He will see to it that Jesus bruises Satan’s head at Calvary, then rises from the dead and takes His royal scepter in heaven. He will see to it that the Spirit regenerates you and gives you hatred for sin. He will see to it that you want to become a member of His church and confess your faith, and that you live in prayer, study your Bible, make friends with His saints, and strive to be godly. He will give you words to speak before evil men. He will give you steel in your spiritual spine. He will give you love for the Lord Jesus in the midst of the alluring pleasures of mammon. He will do whatever it takes to keep you living in enmity with sin and Satan. For He said, “I will!” Victory always belongs to the church because her battle belongs to the Lord.

That “I will” is the revelation of God’s eternal love for His covenant. From all eternity He determined to realize a covenant of friendship between Himself as the triune God and the man Jesus Christ with all those who are in Jesus, including Adam and Eve. He is devoted to that covenant of peace. In love for His covenant He declared war between the serpent and the woman so that their alliance would be broken, and the woman and her seed after her could be taken into the everlasting covenant of friendship with Him.

In view of the opening verses of Genesis 3, where God tells of Adam and Eve’s sins—hiding, arrogance, blaming, self-justifying, and more—it is surprising that Genesis 3:15 does not read something like the document from the U.S. Congress of 1941:

Whereas Adam and Eve have committed unprovoked acts of war against their Creator and Friend: Therefore, be it resolved by the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit of the Godhead united that the state of war between God and man in alliance with Satan, which has thus been thrust upon God is hereby formally declared, and all the holy cherubim are hereby authorized and directed to employ the entire arsenal of the flaming swords of God and the resources of heaven to carry on war against Adam and Eve and their seed, and, to bring the conflict to a successful termination, all of the resources of heaven are hereby pledged by God.

How unfathomably deep are God’s ways in ordaining

the Fall of man! And how profoundly gracious is God in putting enmity between us and Satan through Jesus in order that we might live with Him in fellowship forever!

Thank Him for His covenant and its war. He declared it for you. 

News from the Seminary

In April of 1925, in Grand Rapids, MI, elders and ministers from three Christian Reformed Churches, recently cut off by their denomination, met to make plans for the future of their churches. The minutes of the combined consistories' meeting indicate a significant concern. Article 9 states:

The training of ministers of the Word is discussed. It is decided to appoint a committee that will serve with advice at the next meeting. Committee: Revs. Ophoff and Hoeksema.

At the next meeting of these consistories, held May 6, Article 8 states that the "committee appointed at the last meeting to discuss the matter of the instruction of the students and to report at this meeting renders its report...." The committee proposed to the consistories a two-tier course of instruction. The "Elementary Course" included:

- A. Holland: [Dutch] Reading, Writing, Speaking.
- B. Greek: Grammar, Reading.
- C. English: Reading, Composition, Speaking.
- D. Hebrew: Grammar, Reading.
- E. Old Testament History.
- F. New Testament History.

The "Advanced Course" included:

- A. New Testament.
 - 1. Greek: Reading, Forms.
 - 2. Exegesis: Proper, Introductory, Questions.

- B. Old Testament.
 - 1. Hebrew: Reading, Forms.
 - 2. Exegesis: Proper, Introductory, Questions.
- C. Dogmatics.
 - 1. Dogma Geschichte (History of Dogma).
 - 2. Dogmatics.
 - 3. Confessions.

And for both classes: Essays and sermons.

The minutes record: "Now the report is treated and adopted without change." And, "The various courses in which instruction will be given will be divided among the three ministers Hoeksema, Danhof, and Ophoff."

Thus it was that the instruction for the ministry in the then "Protesting Christian Reformed Church" (as they officially identified themselves for over a year and a half) began in the summer of 1925. The sense of urgency can be grasped from the minutes. The churches will need faithful preachers of the Word.

Year Ninety-two Begins

On August 29, 2016, the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary opened its doors for the ninety-second year of instruction. Much has changed since 1925. Over the years, the "elementary course" changed its name to pre-seminary courses, dropping the Holland (Dutch) and English (since a college degree is required), and shifting Hebrew, Old Testament History and New Testament History to the seminary. The "advanced course" became seminary proper, and to these subjects were added: Hermeneutics, Homiletics, four courses in Church History, Missions, Catechetics, Poimenics, and more. The number of instructors is still three, but none of them have

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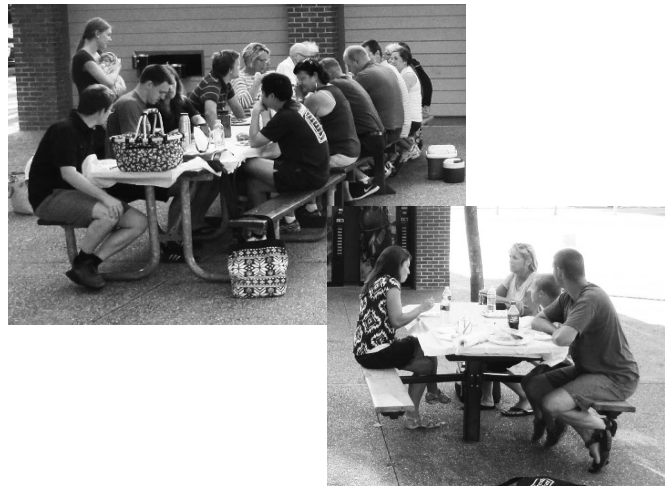
congregations to pastor, as the original three instructors had. And while students in the first forty or fifty years of the seminary's existence were sent into vacant churches for summer assignments (or in times of dire need, in the middle of the semester) with a minimum of training and perhaps one or two sermons, current students have the luxury of an experienced minister to guide them in their six-month internship.

In other ways, by the grace of God, nothing has changed. The biblical languages (Greek and Hebrew) are still rigorously taught. Dogmatics and Exegesis are still the core of the curriculum (a total of seventeen semester courses of Dogmatics, History of Dogma, Confessions, and Exegesis). And all the instruction is directed toward the original reason for the seminary, namely, preaching—the making and effective delivery of sermons—still emphasized, as the students will write and deliver around twenty sermons in four years. No wonder that we now need four years to accomplish all this.

More importantly, by God's indispensable grace, the same doctrines are being taught in the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary in 2016 as were taught in 1925—in particular, the truth of sovereign, particular grace over against the errors of common grace and the well-meant offer of the gospel. In addition, the doctrine of God's everlasting covenant of grace in harmony with the doctrines of sovereign grace, enriched and sharpened through the controversy of 1953, is woven into all the instruction of the PRTS. How good and merciful Jehovah God has been to the Protestant Reformed Churches!

But, as important as all that is, we must not neglect one important purpose of this article, which is to inform the readers of the seminary life in the current year of instruction. It can be noted that the seminary staff, professors, and students (with wives and families) gathered for the annual picnic at Hagar Park in Georgetown Township on September 2 (a mere seventeen-year tradition). The following Wednesday, the annual convocation was held in Grandville

PRC, with Prof. Dykstra (by rotation) addressing the seminary and supporting members of the PRC.



Even though the seminary had no graduating class in the Spring of 2016, our student body has changed some from the previous year. Aaron Lim discontinued his studies at the end of the last year and returned to Singapore with his wife Iva. We wish them God's blessing in finding what the Lord's vocation is for Aaron.

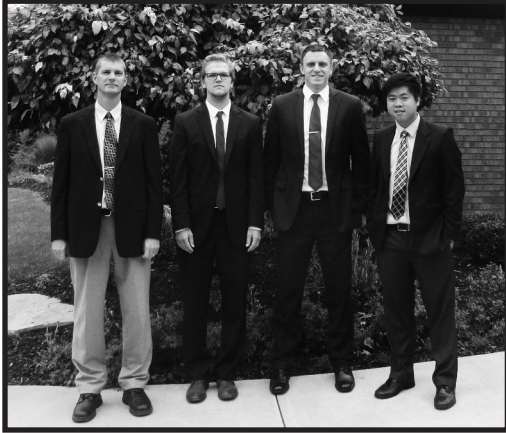
For the first semester, the student body is somewhat dispersed, with all seven of the fourth-year students serving various congregations in their internships (a list is given at the end of the article). Three of the young men are in the Grand Rapids area, and four are in congregations in Classis West.

All three second-year students have returned. Matt Kortus (and Sarah) are members of Faith PRC. Jacob Maatman (and Rachel and son) are members of Southwest PRC. Darren Vink (and Stephanie, with their two girls and two boys) are members of First PRC (GR). These men have knowingly shouldered a heavier load than their previous year, for Exegesis and Practice Preaching are now in their schedule. Each one is also teaching one catechism class—Seminarrians Vink and Maatman in Holland PRC, and Seminarrian Kortus in Trinity PRC.

The one addition to the seminary is Josiah Tan, the

*...by God's indispensable grace,
the same doctrines
are being taught in the
PR Theological Seminary
in 2016 as were taught in 1925*

lone student in the first year. Josiah and his wife Hui Qi come from Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. They plan to be with us, D.V., for the four-year course of instruction. The Tan's have joined Georgetown PRC. They are looking forward to the birth of their first child in November, D.V.



L. to R.: Darren Vink, Jacob Maatman, Matt Kortus, Josiah Tan

In addition, the seminary has one student taking pre-seminary Greek reading. Well, two actually, with one young man actively participating in the class through an internet connection (Skype). Both these men have completed Greek Grammar and are in their second year of Greek studies.

If you are interested in seeing all the classes being taught in the seminary, the schedule of classes is posted

on the seminary website. A number of visitors (men and women) have taken up the invitation to sit in on four different classes this semester.

The seminary anticipates one change in the daily routine this semester—attendance at the Classis West Officebearers' Conference in Randolph PRC on September 27. These conferences are always a highlight of a man's seminary career, for he relishes the opportunity to hear good speeches and to benefit from the experience of those in the special offices of the church.

We look forward to a good year, with the Lord's blessing. And for that, we earnestly implore you, the readers of the *Standard Bearer*, to keep the seminary in your prayers.

Internships:

M. De Boer—Georgetown PRC, Hudsonville, MI
B. Feenstra—Loveland PRC, CO
J. Holstege—Calvary PRC, Hull, IA
J. Langerak—Edgerton PRC, MN
D. Noorman—Hope PRC, Redlands, CA
S. Regnerus—Southeast PRC, Grand Rapids, MI
J. Smidstra—Faith PRC, Jenison, MI

RJD, Rector 

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

Psalter Revision: Synod 2016

That the Free Reformed Churches (FRC), Heritage Reformed Churches (HRC), and Protestant Reformed Churches (PRC) are joining efforts to revise our Psalter, members of the PRC and readers of the *Standard Bearer* already know. In the March 1, 2016 issue of the *SB*, Prof. B. Gritters explained

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

that Synod 2015 instructed the Contact Committee to bring a well-grounded proposal to Synod 2016 regarding Psalter revision, and to appoint three men to serve on an interim committee to begin the work. Prof. Gritters also reviewed the history that brought us to this point, noting that the PRC's concerns regarding the Psalter's faithfulness to Scripture, doctrinal purity, and musical renditions date back to the 1940s.

But *why*, and *how*, and *according to which principles* is this revision taking place? Taking a hiatus from treat-

ing the office of elder, I will devote several articles in the rubric “Ministering to the Saints” to explain these matters.

My primary goal is to inform. I understand that not every member of our denomination appreciates synod’s decision to continue the project. Some question the necessity of Psalter revision; others are afraid that the revision will not include their favorite Psalter numbers; perhaps some even have fears that the PRC is slipping, pointing to other denominations whose efforts to revise their song book were symptoms of doctrinal apostasy.

Providing information will not remove every concern or objection regarding the work. But it should help all understand why the work is going on, and see that the work of Psalter revision is motivated by a desire to be faithful to God’s Word. This is true of all three denominations involved in the work. Although the FRC, HRC, and PRC have their differences, all have in common a commitment to be faithful to Scripture, a desire to worship God in a way that pleases Him, and a love for the Psalter.

Synod 2016

Let me first explain what Synod 2016 decided.¹

As Synod 2015 mandated it to do, the Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC) brought recommendations to Synod 2016 on the basis of several well-developed grounds. Synod decided to “continue in their participation in the interdenominational project of Psalter revision, and mandate the CC to carry out this work through its committee,” which is Prof. B. Gritters, Mr. Joshua Hoekstra, and Rev. D. Kuiper. Synod also adopted the committee’s significant grounds.

Then Synod adopted a process by which it would approve the work being done. To our Synod 2017 the Psalter Revision Committee will explain its suggested changes.² Synod will evaluate that work, and express any objections to the interdenominational committee. The Psalter Revision Committee will then inform our Synod

¹ All references to decisions of Synod 2016 can be found in the *PRC Acts of Synod 2016*, 61-63.

² The committee has the ambitious goal of covering by next year all the Psalter numbers based on Psalms 1-89 (Psalms 1-243, 414-422, and 437-442). Because the version of the Psalter used by the Free Reformed Churches and Heritage Reformed Churches includes Psalms 435-450, the committee will review these numbers and decide whether to recommend including some or all of them in the revised Psalter. That some will be included is likely.

2018 regarding how it has responded to the concerns of Synod 2017.

Furthermore, Synod 2016 spoke to the committee’s work up to this point. The committee submitted its evaluation of Psalter numbers 201-243 to the three synods and showed what revisions of these numbers it will be recommending. The work on this section is largely, but not completely, finished. First, trained eyes must view the work to find mistakes in it.³ Second, the Genevan Psalter numbers (found in our “Chorale section”) that are based on these Psalms must still be reviewed. The synods of the FRC and HRC approved the work done so far. The synod of the PRC expressed “a concern that the scope of the revision has become too broad,” on the basis of two grounds:

1. The tunes of the Psalter are being changed too frequently—33% (16 of 47)—and often without explanation.
2. The lyrics of the Psalter are being altered and at times substituted for no compelling reason. This would result in a Psalter that is no longer familiar to our people.

The three PRC men on the committee understand Synod’s concerns and conveyed and explained them to the rest of the interdenominational committee at our recent face-to-face meeting in September. The following comments will help the reader better understand what the committee is doing.

Tunes

Regarding the tunes, the statistic of 33% (16 of 47) is alarming at first glance. Although Synod desires to revise and improve our Psalter, it also desires that the revised Psalter be familiar. All can appreciate that. If 33% of the tunes are changed, will we recognize it as a revision of our current Psalter, or think of it as virtually a new songbook?

I want the reader to understand that if a future Synod adopts the proposed revisions in full, our revised Psalter will be familiar—very familiar, not barely so.

Of the 47 first and second tunes which make up Psalter numbers 201-243, the Psalter Revision Com-

³ The entire Psalter, music as well as lyrics, is being retypeset using *Finale* music notation software. Inevitably, those entering the music will make mistakes. Ideally, these mistakes will be corrected before the revised Psalter would be presented for approval.

mittee suggests *replacing six* of them. Not the words, but the tunes, would be replaced. Most of these tunes will be familiar. Of the six suggested replacements, one is the tune to Psalter number 185. Two are familiar hymn tunes, “The King of Love My Shepherd Is” and “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven.” A fourth tune will be familiar to some, not all. It is the tune “O Liebe Meiner Liebe,” used with the hymn “Hours and Days and Years and Ages...,” which is selection 474 in the 1959 CRC *Psalter Hymnal*. The other two tunes will probably be unfamiliar to PRC members initially.

The Psalter Revision Committee is also recommending to *move or remove ten* tunes. I hope in a future article to explain why we would recommend moving or removing tunes. For now, note that the committee considers some of these tunes to be not well suited for edifying congregational singing, so that it proposes removing them entirely. Examples are the second tune of 212 and the tune of 219. Other tunes the committee deems good in themselves but not needed in their current location. It proposes moving them to another song (the second tune of 234 is being suggested as the melody to a new, second versification of Psalm 88) or is putting them in the “parking lot” for later use if needed (the second tune of 201). Again, in every instance in which the *tune* is removed, the *lyrics* (*words*) will be retained. The words of 219 are already found in 218, and the words of second tunes are always found in first tunes. Other lyrics will be combined with the tune just before or after that Psalter number.

The last two paragraphs have explained the statistic of tunes in the current Psalter that would be replaced, moved, or removed: “33%—16 of 47.”

After one more comment, I’ll give a different statistic.

In addition to the replacing of six tunes and the moving or removing of ten, the suggested revision includes two new tunes. Our Psalter has only one versification of Psalm 82. It is proposed to add a second versification—the tune and words of selection 157 in the 1959 CRC *Psalter Hymnal*. And Psalter number 243 (currently 19 stanzas) is being divided into two songs; the proposed tune of the second is the tune to the hymn “If Thou but Suffer God to Guide Thee.”

Here is the different statistic. Apart from the Geneva selections, the proposed revision of Psalms 73-89 includes 41 selections. The tunes of 34 of these 41 se-

lections are current Psalter tunes. That is 83%! Of the remaining 17% (7 tunes), at least two will probably be unfamiliar, possibly two will be somewhat familiar, and perhaps three will be very familiar to most members of the PRC.

Lyrics

Synod also expressed concern that “the lyrics of the Psalter are being altered and at times substituted for no compelling reason.”

Here are the statistics.

The Psalter Revision Committee informed the three denominational synods that, “of the 268 stanzas reviewed, 86% remain unchanged (though some were moved/copied to different tunes); 6% had changes to minimize archaisms; 2% had modifications to make them more accurate to the Psalm; and 6% are new lyrics.”⁴

The 6% new lyrics refers to 18 new stanzas. Psalter number 213 treats the ten plagues mentioned in Psalm 78:45-50 in only a few lines; two new stanzas were added to treat those verses more completely. The proposed additional versification of Psalm 82 has three stanzas, and that of Psalm 88 has thirteen. Considering that Psalm 88 has eighteen verses, a versification of that Psalm with thirteen stanzas is a more complete rendition of that Psalm than a versification with five stanzas, as our Psalter number 240 has.

I am not ready to give a percentage of words changed, but bear in mind that a change to a stanza is not a change to all the words in the stanza. In other words, if 86% of *stanzas* are unchanged, then a far greater percentage of *words* are unchanged. What our people will find most unfamiliar about the lyrics are the eighteen *new* stanzas added to present a more complete rendition of the Psalm than our current Psalter gives.


This means that our project, to this point, is on target with what Synod 2015 was told, and what the men said who attended the meeting to explore the possibility of working together to revise the Psalter:

The aim will not be to produce a new book of Psalms but to improve the existing Psalter in a way that makes it clearer, more accurate, and singable. This could mean a revision of 15-20% of the current Psalter. Meeting [that

⁴ Acts of Synod 2016, 172.

is, the committee] agrees that a revision effort should take care to preserve the essence of the current Psalter so that the revision is recognized as an improved version of the Psalter of 1912.⁵

Inherent in the very work of Psalter revision is the fact that our people will have to become familiar with the end product. But the committee will not bring a song book with completely new lyrics, tunes, and songs; we do not even envision one in which the people find 33% of the tunes or stanzas unfamiliar. We want our people to recognize that the revised Psalter is a revision, not a re-

placement, of our current Psalter. This was the intent of the men who attended an exploratory meeting in January 2015, which desired “the establishment of a committee that would operate...in pursuit of accuracy, completeness, clarity, singability, avoidance of redundancy, and connecting the selection number with the psalm number.”⁶ And this is the goal of the committee that has now been established: “Our goal is to make the best possible Psalter for our churches, keeping it familiar in worship, as well as increasing the connection to the biblical Psalms, and increasing the singability and usability for worship.”⁷ 

⁵ *Acts of Synod 2015*, 132.

⁶ *Acts of Synod 2015*, 132.

⁷ *Acts of Synod 2016*, 170-171.

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Mission Activities

There was much to rejoice about in the Maranatha PRC of Valenzuela City, the Philippines on August 28. A young sister made public profession of her faith during the second service that day. In addition, two young men of the congregation also recently made public the confession of their faith and received the sacrament of adult baptism at the hand of missionary-pastor Daniel Kleyn. We thank and praise God for His work of grace in the lives of these young people! May God bless them as they strive to live according to the confession they have made. May they be encouraged by the words of Jesus Christ in Matthew 10:32: “Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.”

Pastor Vernon Ibe of the Berean PRC in Antipolo City, Manila led a public worship service at Sitio Ka-

rugang, Barangay Bugnan, Gabaldon, in the province of Nueva Ecija and reported that it went very well. Pastor Ibe also led the saints in Gabaldon in a study of the Five Points of Calvinism. The Young People’s Society of the Berean PRC scheduled a Youth Fellowship at their church with Pastor Ibe speaking on the theme “Kabataang Kristyano” or “Christian Young People: Living Examples of Christ.”

From the bulletin of Byron Center, MI PRC we find this note:

Synod 2016 has given to Byron Center PRC the unique calling to be the calling church of a new home missionary. In the next month, the council will be choosing from a gross list of ministers a trio for the congregation to vote for extending a call to a minister to be our missionary. The council will also be selecting a subcommittee to work on its behalf in working with the DMC and supervising the work of our missionary. The council has decided to have two men of the congrega-

tion serving on that committee as well as an elder, a deacon, and our pastor. The two men from the congregation would be asked to serve for an indefinite time, thus creating stability in the makeup of the subcommittee. Please pray for wisdom for our council in this process. If you are eager to be a part of that subcommittee, please let our clerk know. We rejoice in this opportunity and pray for God’s richest blessings upon it.

As a denomination we rejoice in this exciting time also!

Sister Church Activities

The Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore is planning a Reformation Day Conference to be held November 4-5 with the theme “The Church in the Last Days: Reforming or Deforming?” Plans are also in the making for a youth conference there in November, D.V.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of

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

Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD (population about 160,000) announced plans to hold a Bible study in the nearby town of Harrisburg once again. This began in mid-September with the study of the Babylonian captivity. The committee sent full-color mailers to all the residents of Harrisburg (population 4,000) and will be running ads in the *Sioux Valley News*. May God use this endeavor for the spread of His name.

School Activities

From the bulletin of Hudsonville, MI PRC:

As the new school year begins for the grade schools and high school, we pray for God's blessing upon another year of truth-based instruction. May the Lord give to our teachers (we have many in our congregation) the strength they need to teach and instruct in truth and godliness, being examples in their own lives; and may He give to our students submission to teachers, a desire to develop their gifts for His glory, and willingness to live in love with their fellow classmates. We take this opportunity

to give thanks for our Christian schools. We also remember our college students who are beginning or returning to school this year. May God bless them in their studies and give them strength to remain faithful to Him.

From the bulletin of the Lynden, WA PRC:


Covenant Christian School clean-up day is set for this coming Saturday from 8:30 to 1. Besides a few small projects it will be mostly a cleanup day and prepping for painting the outside of both buildings. Planning on a lot of pressure washing, hedge trimming, pruning, and cleaning up the flower beds. Please bring your gardening tools (with your name on them), gloves and lots of elbow grease! Thanks!

The annual Protestant Reformed Teachers' Convention will be held October 19-21 in the Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, IN.

Instructional Quote

Quote for contemplation from a recent bulletin:

Singing in public, corporate worship is demanded by the regulative principle of worship, for not only the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well, calls us to sing in worship. Colossians 3:16, which does not talk only about corporate worship, nonetheless speaks to corporate worship, calling us to sing in worship, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." For singing, the primary purpose is praise. So often in the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms, the word "sing" and the word "praise" are put together, as though the Spirit defines singing as praise. Sometimes the two words are put together back-to-back and repeated, as, for example, in Psalm 47:6, "Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises." Rev. Cory Griess

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Adult Fellowship Society of Hope PRC Redlands extends its sincere sympathy to Todd and Kim DeMeester and family in the death of their mother and grandmother,

MRS. MARJORIE KAMPS.

May the Lord grant them His comfort and peace. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee" (Isaiah 26:3).

Rev. Brian Huizinga, President
Linda Smit, Secretary

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their sincere sympathy to Martin Hoekstra and his family in the death of his wife,

CLARA HOEKSTRA.

May he and his family find comfort in the Word of God which assures us that "precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Hull PRC Council

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express our sympathy to Henry Hoekstra and his family in the death of their beloved wife, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother,

HILDRED HOEKSTRA.

May the Lord continue to uphold and comfort them, drawing them ever nigh unto Him. "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump" (I Corinthians 15:51-52a).

Hull PRC Council

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The Reformed Baptism Form: A Commentary

B. Wielenga

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Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their sincere sympathy to Bill and Jennie Den Besten, Elmer Van Den Top, Peter Van Den Top, and Ed and Alice Van Ginkel and families in the death of

ELLEN VAN DEN TOP,

a sister and sister-in-law. May they be comforted by the Word of God in II Corinthians 5:17, "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."

Alan De Boer, Ass't. Clerk,
Doon PRC

Wedding Anniversary

■ With joy and gratitude to their heavenly Father,
IVAN and HELEN MAWHINNEY

will celebrate their 45th wedding anniversary on October 5, 2016. We are thankful for the years that the Lord has graciously given them and their godly witness to the Reformed faith. We pray that He will continue to bless their marriage now and in the years ahead. "O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart" (Psalm 36:10).

*Their church family
In the Covenant PRC of Northern Ireland*

Reformed Witness Hour

October 2016

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

Date	Topic	Text
October 2	"The Woman that Fears Jehovah"	Proverbs 31:30
October 9	"Unmarried and Devoted to God"	I Corinthians 7:34
October 16	"The Adornment of a Godly Woman"	I Timothy 2:9, 10
October 23	"Finding a God-Fearing Wife"	Proverbs 18:22
October 30	"She Does Her Husband Good"	Proverbs 31:11, 12

REMINDER:

■ The September 15 issue marked the end of Volume 92. If you are interested in having your copies bound, drop them off at the RFPA office by October 31. Price - \$24.