

The Standard Bearer

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Joy in the Midst of the Raging Heathen

Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us. He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the LORD shall have them in derision. Then shall he speak unto them in his wrath, and vex them in his sore displeasure. Yet have I set my king upon my holy hill in Zion.

Psalm 2:1-6

The text speaks of terrible things for the children of God. David describes for us the seething enmity that prompts the wicked to persecute the church. There are the raging heathen, people imagining vain things, kings and rulers confederating and counseling together against the children of God. All of which produces the wicked threat, “let us break their bands asunder, and cast their yoke from us.” Our human reaction to all of this is retreat—how can we escape so terrible a threat?

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

But there is more to this Psalm that must not be separated. We must look heavenward and formulate a correct judgment of the earthly scene. There we find that God is laughing. No, not at His people, but at the heathen. This laughter turns to derision and holy wrath, for suddenly the heavens begin to tremble as the voice of the Lord sounds forth: “Yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion.” When this cry comes forth from the throne of God, the wicked begin to tremble as the hot breath of divine wrath falls upon them. This divine judgment brings assurance to the faithful church that is yet in the midst of the enemy that she shall certainly be victorious.

These words are not very popular today. We sing, “Why do the nations rage,” yet if one proclaims the truth concerning these words, they are very offensive to the natural man and bring untold enmity and bitterness. The world would have us believe that there is a universal love of God to all men and that there is a brotherhood of all men. Piously, all men lift their heads heavenward and say, “Yes, somewhere there is a god who loves all men. So great is his love that he sent Jesus into the world to herald a message of kindness and brotherhood. The angels sang ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good

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Editorial Office

Prof. Barrett Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
gritters@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Perry Van Egdom
2324 Fir Ave.
Doon, IA 51235
vanegdoms@gmail.com

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
38 Abbeyvale
Corbally
Co Limerick, Ireland

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will toward men.” This, according to them, shows that God loves all men and sent Christ on behalf of them. Therefore, we must practice this love to one another. We must help the poor and deprived, spread cheer to the underprivileged, advocate peace among the nations, and help Christ along by carrying the banner of human kindness. Wicked men put Christ to death, but we must resurrect this Christ by carrying on the program that He intended to accomplish but failed because men were so cruel that they nailed Him to the cross.

This, of course, is all contradicted by this text. God does not love all men and did not send Christ into the world with a view to the salvation of all men. God’s love is a holy love that is jealous in its very nature. The words of verse 6 are spoken in wrath against all the wicked who will try to overthrow the Christ of the Scriptures. God will not allow the wicked to rest complacently in their evil design, not even when these wicked creep within the church. He always sounds forth the terrible testimony of His divine derision, namely, that He is the God of consuming wrath who must judge the wicked in His sore displeasure.

This is a spiritual battle that must be viewed from the viewpoint of God’s sovereignty. Negatively, we must see that God did not will to establish a perfect universal kingdom of peace in Adam, which was spoiled by the devil and the consequent fall of man into sin. Nor is God executing a plan to make the best of things, sending Christ in order to save as many of the human race as He can. If true, then the opposition forces of sin and darkness are sovereign in their own sphere and outside of the direct control of God. But this is a blatant denial of God’s sovereignty. The battle of faith is not dualistic, made up of two forces that vie for position as if the strongest will win.

Positively, we must see that these evil forces exist only because God sovereignly willed it and because He gives them strength to continue in this world. God is the source of all power, also the power by which the enemies rage; only that power is given to them that they may be the unwilling servants of the sovereign God. Everything serves the purpose of God. God wills to save His church from the spiritual powers of darkness through Jesus Christ and to bring all the workers of iniquity to destruction. In this way God’s justice and mercy are eternally

manifested to His own glory. All this must be considered from the viewpoint God’s sovereignty.

Looking from man’s point of view, we see that under the influence of the devil he continues to exercise his natural abilities in proud rebellion against God. Fallen man is able to think, dream, imagine, and work feverishly at his own endeavors. Since he is under direction of the devil, all this ability is directed against God and His Christ. Consequently, the heathen rage and imagine a vain thing.

As a result, they take counsel against Jehovah, and against His anointed Christ and His people. The heathen are determined to destroy them. They try to do away with the true gospel of salvation, thus fabricating a Christ after their own imagination. They try to replace His kingdom with the kingdom of man. They deny the atonement of Christ and replace it with a Jesus who is a good example of human brotherhood. They try to obliterate the heavenly kingdom by holding forth an earthly kingdom of peace and prosperity. All of this because natural man hates God. All unbelievers reject God and Christ and His love as revealed in the Scriptures. They seek to make God a servant of their endeavors. Thus, they try to destroy all opposition.

This is evident from all of history. At the dawn of history the wicked tried to destroy the righteous by killing Abel. Pharaoh tried to reduce Israel to bloody subjection. David, a type of Christ, was driven from Jerusalem, in response to which he writes this Psalm. At the center of history this raging reached a climactic point. In the fullness of time God sent His only begotten Son, born of a woman, under the law. On that night in Bethlehem His work of salvation began. Immediately, the wicked began to rage and take counsel in that Herod sought to kill the baby Jesus. Later, we see this same bitterness in the breasts of those at Nazareth. This raging finally erupted into the volcano of hatred with the shout, “Let Him be crucified.”

This same raging is evident today. The heathen outside and those within the nominally Christian church try to silence the faithful church that proclaims salvation by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. This explains the spiritual turbulence of today. Everyone wants freedom, that is, from God’s law, including but not limited to the law of the Sabbath and of morality. And if they are not allowed their “freedom,” they persecute the church.

But all of this is sovereignly directed. First, we see that God laughs at the wicked, holds them in derision. This is not laughter of pleasure, but is God's holy derision against their feeble plot to destroy His anointed. God derides the wicked because they are so proud as to imagine that they can actually destroy the witness of the anointed of Christ as they live in the world. Proud man will not recognize that the very breath in his nostrils is given him by the Jehovah whom he hates. Nor will he recognize that Jehovah overrules all things so that even that opposition is not contrary to His purpose, but serves it. Man imagines vainly that he can overthrow God and His Christ, but Jehovah laughs and replies, "Impossible, I am Jehovah and my anointed have I set upon my holy hill of Zion." All serve God's good purpose for Christ and His church.

This too is evident from history. Parallel with the raging of the devil one finds the victory of the church because of God's sovereign direction. In the time of Enoch and Noah the flood came and destroyed all the wicked. Haman plotted to kill the Jews, but God placed Esther in the court of the king. The decree of the wicked Caesar was used by God to bring Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem. Herod plotted the death of Christ, but God answered triumphantly, "Out of Egypt have I called my Son." The Jews plotted to kill Christ secretly, but God so determined all things that even by means of the raging of Satan at the cross He stirred the Jews to cry out, "His blood be upon us and our children;" thus His will was being done. The Romans through Pilate washed their hands of the whole affair choosing to be friends with Caesar rather than with God. All the people said, "Let Him be crucified."

Was it a shame that Christ died? No! God directed all things so that that raging crowd served His purpose in nailing Christ to the cross so that atonement was made for the sins of those whom the Father had given Him.

God's answer to the cross can be seen in the words of Christ, "It is finished; Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." The empty tomb is God's final answer, for He drew up Christ into heaven and set Him at His own right hand, crowning Him with all power, honor, and glory forever.

And so we have joy. It is not joy in a general world peace brought about by the heathen who rage against the Anointed of God and proudly claim to be the Christ, but are the antichrist. We must take note, for they are raging now. By craft and scheming the wicked world pretends to have become Christian and claims that all the religions of the world are the same, so that we should have one church in one world empire. The church that preaches the atoning blood of Christ and practices her Christianity will have no place in the kingdom of the antichrist. Jesus said, "The servant is not greater than his

lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

Positively, our joy is that God is sovereign. He is the mighty One who has already set His King on Zion's hill. Christ is Lord of all. Let those who walk in darkness, who vainly imagine that the world shall become truly Christianized, who strive day and night for this kingdom of man, hear the Word of God, as He breathes in his wrath, "I have set my King upon My holy hill."

All this means that the wicked shall fail; they shall be destroyed forever by the rod of iron. To them Jehovah will say, "Depart from me, I never knew you."

For the church it means that she will surely be saved. Everyone whom God freely willed to be included in the counsel of divine election, and for whom Christ died, and who reveal themselves as anointed by Christ, will surely be saved. Even the gates of hell shall not prevail against them. They shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, for all things work together for good to them that love God.



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the Father had given Him.*

What It Means To Be Reformed (16—Conclusion)

The Reformed Christian Life

**5. Church and world:
dual citizenships**

Controversy about the Christian life becomes very sharp when we speak of living in both church and world. To be Reformed is to have a unique view of the Christian life, and that view includes a clear vision of how to relate to both church and world. The importance of clear thinking here is especially true in these days when, in Reformed circles, the vision of the Christian's place in these spheres is "shifting."

We spoke of *church* already in connection with the third of the five "C's" in "What It Means To Be Reformed." But the church needs emphasis again here, even if briefly, as we look at the Reformed Christian *life*.

When the Reformed Christian's spiritual GPS asks him to assign an address for "Home," he enters "*Church*." Membership in and life in a true church is the starting point and ending point of his existence. The center of his life is the church—the church as *institute*. Although he has many interests in the world and a multitude of responsibilities, these interests and responsibilities

all trace their significance back to his membership in the church.

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COVENANTAL
CALVINISTIC
CHURCH
CONFESSIONAL
CHRISTIAN LIFE

What demands that he make the church central is his union with Christ. Christ Himself makes the church central. He ascended into heaven "that He might appear as head of His *church*," as the Heidelberg Catechism says. God "put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the *church*," as Paul teaches in Ephesians 1. "The *church* He loveth well," the Psalms teach us to sing. For the Reformed Christian, no minimizing of church is permissible. Hold that thought.

**In the world...
but not of the world**

Reformed Christians also live in, and have a citizenship in, the *world*. They are citizens in a particular country and reside in an earthly community where not all are Christians. They have responsibilities there. They do not flee the world, Anabaptist-fashion, but live as pro-

ductive citizens in it, engaging freely but cautiously in all its dimensions. They seek an occupation that fits their gifts, study to advance understanding in science and the liberal arts, and delight in good music and arts. In other words, they live broadly as productive citizens with a view to the welfare of the community. Part of that life is submitting to the magistrate. Reformed Christians usually cast votes for their leaders and, if necessary, write letters of concern to the powers that be. Some will sign petitions to keep a business closed on Sunday, or to bar from the neighborhood a so-called Gentlemen's Club, an abortion clinic, or a casino. Others will join with fellow citizens—of course, in a manner that does not compromise their Christian principles—to oppose evils like abortion, or do good for the community or nation in which they live. They are citizens of an earthly country.

There is a real danger that we Reformed Christians belittle or even shun these components of the Christian's existence, huddle in a little corner, and avoid contact with the world. There is a history of Christians making this mistake, and we must not repeat it by an unbiblical understanding of antithetical living. Living antithetically does not

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mean physical separation from the world. Healthy Reformed Christians grasp the teaching of the Belgic Confession's Article 36, and appreciate its reference to I Timothy 2's call to pray for rulers. And even if they do reject the new, but common and foolish, interpretation of Jeremiah 29:7—that Babylon must somehow be transformed by our efforts and even become the friend of the church—they also *properly* understand Jeremiah's call to seek the peace of today's "Babylon."

But if world-flight is a danger for some, for others there is a danger of loving this world, adopting the attitude of a "permanent resident" instead of "pilgrim and stranger." Reformed Christians today are bombarded with calls to live by "Word and deed" (less and less "Word" and more and more "deed"). Some of these calls imply too much interest in this life and too little interest in the life to come. This is the "shifting vision" of the Christian life I referred to earlier, and explains the improper exegesis of Jeremiah 29, promoted by Neo-Calvinists who seem to dominate Reformed thinking in the twenty-first century.¹

The *Reformed* vision of the Christian life—old-Calvinism, original-Calvinism—remembers what Calvin said: Christians ought to

have a contempt for the present life and be busy meditating on the life to come. "...either the world must become worthless to us or hold us bound by intemperate love of it" (*Institutes*: 3.9.2). Hyperbole or not, these are not sentiments that appear in Neo-Calvinist writings.

Neo-Calvinism's vision of the Christian life more and more shrinks the church institute and magnifies the world. Their new refrain is familiar by now: Trans-

*But if world-flight
is a danger for some,
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and stranger."*

form society! Renew communities! Indeed, *use* the church (as organism) to accomplish this! But what is important, in the end, is not the church—merely a "sign of the kingdom"—but the world, which we will transform into the kingdom of God!

In the old Reformed view, the world served the church. The "shifted vision" has the *church* serving the *world*. We must opt for the old view. It is confessional, biblical,

and has history on its side. The old view has a clear understanding of the Christian's place in the church (member!) and world (stranger!).²

Be ready to suffer

Christians suffer for many reasons. God's good providence leads us into suffering for our spiritual growth—sufferings of illness and loss, heavy disappointments and blackest sorrows. God the Father sends evils upon us, and turns them to our spiritual advantage (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 26). Calvin spoke of three essential ingredients for Christians to grow: the Word, prayer, and suffering.

But there is also a suffering that comes from being *in* the world.

If Christ's *church* is your priority and the *world* is not your home, Christian living will be costly and very painful. Because most citizens of this world have no love for the church, their animosity will be strong toward Christians who devote their lives to the church instead of the world. Consider: if Christians can, but will not, use their means to feed the world's multitudes and heal the world's sick, transform communities and advocate social justice, they will be drummed out of the city just as Jesus was when He refused to do these very things. He could have. Jesus had the power to feed everyone, the ability to heal all the sick. He would have been able even to

¹ A noteworthy exception at Calvin Theological Seminary, one of the centers of Neo-Calvinist thinking, is Calvin Van Reken's 2003 convocation address entitled "The Shifting Vision of the Christian Life." Later published as "Christians in This World: Pilgrims or Settlers," in *Calvin Theological Journal* 43 (2008): 234-56, it is a bold corrective of the errors inherent in Neo-Calvinism.

² For a lengthier explanation of the prevalence of Neo-Calvinism in Christian colleges, see my "A (Sharp) Pastoral Warning to Students in Christian Colleges," beginning October 1, 2010 (*SB*, vol. 87, 4).

throw off the yoke of Rome's unjust oppression. But He *would* not, because of the nature of His kingdom. And because He would not, they crucified Him. So consider again: if Jesus would return today and refuse again to focus on these social issues, the false church would hang Him with as much animosity and disgust as they did 2,000 years ago.

Jesus told His disciples, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you" (John 15:18). That is, be ready and willing to suffer for living the Christian life *in* the world but not *of* it, a stranger in it. Be assured that God will use the suffering to teach us many good things. He has before. That's why Luther once quipped, "Suffering is the best book in my library." He meant it. He knew it by experience.

6. Past, present, and future

The sixth "satellite" that guides us in the Christian life we label *Time*. That is, the signals sent from this "satellite" to our spiritual "GPS" give believers a good understanding of the past, of the present, and of the future. We cannot know how to behave in the present without asking how our spiritual ancestors behaved in the past. At the same time, what we do today has everything to do with our hopes for the future. If we forget the past, we become fools in the present. But if we have misdirected hopes, matters are no better because we work for the wrong goal.

Here, one can draw a straight line from the Christian life to one's eschatology (the doctrine of the end times). Neo-Calvinists must admit that their hope for world-transfor-

mation is a form of post-millennialism, the old but ever-recurring error that promises a future Golden Age on this earth and pins man's hope on *this* world. The old error appears as persistently and as annoyingly as "Whac-a-mole." It keeps popping up even if in different forms. It steers man's hope away from heaven to earth. It makes him earthly-minded.

If Christian children will live properly in the present, let them "learn from *history*." So says Psalm

*...the Christian life
lays claim to
every area of life,
and from birth to death....
Christ my Lord
is Master of everything.
Every square inch
of this creation is His.
So is every little
millimeter of my life.*

78, exhorting Christians to pass in tradition from father to son what God did in the past. But at the same time that Christians learn history, they are forward-looking. They fix their eyes on the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God. That makes them heavenly-minded.

"I believe an holy catholic church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

The ancient creed might not address our relation to this world, but it certainly helps us focus on what is most important. And it is not *this* life.

7. An all-comprehensive embrace

We label the seventh in our system of "satellites" that direct believers in Christian living "An All-Comprehensive Embrace." That title is our reminder that the Christian life lays claim to every area of life, and from birth to death. It extends to my work and my play, to my public life and my private life. The Christian life is not merely church membership and Sabbath observance. It does not claim my work and then leave out my play, or regulate my public life but ignore what I do in private. Christ my Lord is Master of everything. Every square inch of this *creation* is His. So is every little millimeter of my *life*.

With body and soul, both in life and death, I am not my own, but belong to Jesus. I love and serve God with *all* my heart and *all* my soul and *all* my mind and *all* my strength. Whether I eat or drink or whatever I do, I do it with an eye on God's glory. From birth to death, in every dimension. There is no "neutral zone" where man reigns sovereignly, no area of our life about which God says, "That's your business, not mine." My life is God's.

The signal sent from this satellite must not be received wrongly, though. But it has been. Badly at times. Some have heard this "all things" embrace and concluded that Christians have no freedom.

Or no freedom to make their own choices and decisions. Or no freedom to make choices and decisions *different* from their Christian neighbor. This wrong view of the Christian life supposes that if we all do our spiritual calculus properly, we will all come to the same decisions with regard to the smallest details of life.

This thinking smothers Christians. It robs them of their liberty in Christ. This subject really warrants an entire article. Here, at the least, it deserves mention. No one may command you how to vote, whether or not to marry, or whether or not to “carry.” You are free to vacation or take retirement, or to refrain from both. Where the Word of God does not give specific direction, you are free to use and enjoy, or to decline to use and enjoy many things. To lose this dimension of Christian living is to lose my liberty

in Christ—an essential element of the gospel itself.

Yes, I make all my decisions with an eye on God and His law, the God who lays claim to everything about me. And I will serve Him because I love Him.

8. An earnest desire for more

The last biblical truth that directs us in Christian living—our eighth satellite—is that we must always be pressing forward, going higher, *growing* in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. We may never be satisfied with the *status quo* in our life. “Further up and further in” is the way C.S. Lewis put it.

“More and more” is the language of the Reformed confessions, by my count at least nine times! David wants to “praise God more and more” (Ps. 71:14). Paul urges the

Philippians that their love “abound more and more” (1:9), and warns them never to suppose they have attained (3:12-14). Paul had taught the Thessalonians about the Christian life, how they “ought to walk and to please God.” Now he presses them to “abound more and more” in it (I Thess. 4:1). We aim at this increase with confidence, believing that the Lord Himself will “increase you more and more” (Ps. 115:14), because He wills to bring us “from glory to glory” (II Cor. 3:18).

In the end—and here we come back to the beginning and center of it all—love for our Lord who loved us, who married us, and who owns us—love for Him will make us ask, What *progress* have I made in the Christian life? Every day anew, and every year again, how may I grow closer to Jesus Christ, whose I am, and whom I serve?

I am a Reformed Christian. 

LETTERS

Presidential Candidates and Politics

In the article in the February 15 issue of the *Standard Bearer* (p. 226), quite a bit of ink and paper was expended in writing about Donald Trump’s specious religious claims. I have been waiting for a sequel exposé of Senator Rafael Edward (“Ted”) Cruz, but so far in vain.

The readers and subscribers of the *SB*, I believe, are astute enough to recognize that Mr. Trump’s Presbyterian claims are not credible. It is no feat to recognize error when it is so wrong.

However, Mr. Cruz’s Christian claims are not so easily discerned. He and his father have connections to Pentecostal/Charismatic churches with unusual (to put it mildly) theological positions. At least to me, his blatant use of his faith to attract “evangelical” voters is reprehensible, and contradicts the spirit of the anti-

establishment clause of the Constitution, as well as the express reminder of our Lord that His Kingdom is not of this world.

Would you please consider writing this sequel, and teaching us the much-needed art of discernment? We could also learn much from an authoritative comparison of Dr. Abraham Kuyper’s political career to that of Mr. Trump and Mr. Cruz. More light, please!

Blessings,
Victor Lee
Arlington, Massachusetts

Response:

My article was a simple matter of timing and publicity. When I commented on Mr. Trump, many media outlets used much ink, paper, and Internet space to report about his claim to be a Presbyterian. The time came for me to

submit an article for the “All Around Us” rubric, and I selected what I considered to be a timely topic.

Your letter seems to assume it was my purpose simply to expose Mr. Trump’s religious claims as “specious.” I share your confidence in the ability of the readers of the *SB* to be able to identify Mr. Trump’s “error.” However, I am equally confident that they are also astute enough to discern the theological errors of Ted Cruz (and I would add, of his father, who masquerades as an evangelical minister). Pentecostalism is radically different from Presbyterianism. Many of the readers probably already know the points of difference between Ted Cruz’s beliefs and the Reformed faith. If they do not, it is likely only due to the fact that they have not taken the time to examine his beliefs.

But I did not and do not intend to write an “exposé” of Mr. Trump or any of the other political candidates. To do so would give the impression that I am giving political advice to our readers, which I am loathe to do. It is not my goal to add or subtract votes for any of the candidates by unmasking their theological or moral failings. Readers of the *SB* know that they have to look elsewhere for po-

litical advice. In these pages we promote and defend the glorious doctrines of the Reformed faith and hope to be a tool to help our readers develop theological (not political) discernment.

Writing about Donald Trump gave me the opportunity to write about the important subjects of seeking the forgiveness of sins and of the necessity of church membership—important for all of our readers, especially the younger ones. It also gave me opportunity to say something about the sad decline of denominations whose heritage is historically more closely connected to the readers of the *SB* than the churches with which the other candidates associate. Sadly, these denominations are uninterested in doctrine but very much interested in politics. Little to no ink is spilled to denounce a heretic. But much ink and hot air are expended to denounce a presidential candidate for his political views. This is a warning to us, and we must heed it: that the church must proclaim and defend the gospel and stay out of politics. This is why Dr. Abraham Kuyper’s political career has never met any approval in the *SB*, nor should it.

—Rev. C. Spronk 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Wisdom Gives Life

Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun. For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence: but the excellency of knowledge is, that wisdom giveth life to them that have it. Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

Ecclesiastes 7:11-14

Rev. Miersma is pastor of the Immanuel Protestant Reformed Church in Lacombe, Alberta.

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“Wisdom is good with an inheritance: and by it there is profit to them that see the sun” (Eccl. 7:11). After calling us to be patient in spirit in the midst of trials and vexation along the path of life and activity, Solomon now turns to the role of wisdom. One who is soon angry, proud in spirit and questioning God’s ways, walks the way of spiritual folly and works his own spiritual hurt. Wisdom, which is principally the fear of God (that is the aspect of wisdom in view), is profitable in a certain way which he will explain.

The text could better be rendered, “wisdom with an

inheritance is good.” While it is possible to understand wisdom *as* the inheritance, that is, in the sense of a spiritual inheritance, the contrast in the next verse is between wisdom and money or silver and would suggest he has in view first an earthly inheritance. He is speaking too of “them that see the sun.” Material gifts or treasures have a place, but wisdom, with them, is truly profitable. What is profitable, according to the figure in the text, is that which goes over and beyond. It excels and thus profits or benefits. Wisdom is good, a blessing of God, and in that sense it is also a spiritual inheritance of more value than an earthly one alone. Indeed without wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, an earthly inheritance will not truly profit at all. Wisdom profits because it leads us beyond what we see with the eye to a walk by faith, in a humble spirit with patience.

How so? “For wisdom is a defence, and money is a defence; but the excellency of knowledge is that wisdom giveth life to them that have it” (Eccl. 7:12). The idea of a defense draws a picture of a shadow that is a refuge, protection, and defense in trial and trouble. As the shade of a tree protects one from the burning rays of the sun, so, figuratively, a shadow is a protection and defense. Now money or silver, earthly riches, certainly fill that function in some measure under the sun. They may well serve to smooth the way of someone through many of the earthly troubles of life: “The rich man’s wealth is his strong city...” (Prov. 10:15). But such silver or money cannot order all things, nor deliver from death, the end of life’s way, nor answer all the troubles even of life under the sun. Wisdom in the fear of God is more profitable; it goes beyond what earthly treasure can do. It excels or profits because it gives life. It too is a defense and protection to them that see the sun.

The expression “gives life” is one word, which means

to make alive. Here, it must be understood that it is God who quickens and works by wisdom to impart life in His grace. Walking in the fear of God, “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). In His shadow as our faithful heavenly Father, the believer is safe in a way that no earthly refuge can afford. But that refuge is known only by faith in the fear of God. That wisdom of faith, which is a gift of God, imparts life in communion with God, grace in time of trouble, and is a spiritual refuge, imparting life to him that has or possesses it. It answers not only present trials but also the end of our earthly sojourning in death and the house of mourning. Wisdom is a spiritual possession beyond an earthly one.

That is something no earthly inheritance can do. Earthly blessings, “the day of prosperity” (Eccl. 7:14), are but for a moment and transitory. Wisdom, which gives life, sustains a meek and patient spirit in trouble

and quickens in the hope of an eternal life that is beyond the vanity of this world seen under the sun. To underscore that point, Solomon adds a question: “Consider the work of God: for who can make that straight, which he hath made crooked?” (Eccl. 7:13). God is God Almighty. He determines the times and seasons of life according to His counsel and wisdom. He upholds and governs heaven, earth, and all creatures, as our Heidelberg Catechism puts it, “so that herbs and grass, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, and all things come, not by chance,

but by His fatherly hand” (LD 10, Q&A 27).

It is the fool who seeks by his own strength or by his wealth to make that straight which God has bent or made crooked. He who is but dust will impose his will on the world, on his own life and order his own way. Yet he fails, and will always fail because he is not God. The answer to Solomon’s question, “Who can make that

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straight which he hath made crooked?" is this: no mere man. God's works order the life of all creatures, their time and seasons. He sets boundaries which no man can change. It belongs to the folly of sin and the spirit of antichrist to try to change times and laws and seasons. Yet that which God works stands; it comes to pass.

As we increasingly live in a world that strives with God Almighty, we need to note well what the Word of God says here. God is God, righteous in judgment and merciful unto them that fear Him. For the idea of the text is not that of fatalism or a shrug of despair, but that standing before that wonder of the sovereign majesty of God we may with wisdom, which an understanding heart gives, acknowledge Him to be God, even our God and ourselves His creatures under His hand—yea more, His children adopted of grace in Christ. We would walk in the care of His grace, humbly under His power and in the shadow of His protecting care that gives life to them that fear Him. Solomon then applies this consideration in the following verse, setting prosperity over against adversity, for both shall come under the sun.

"In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him" (Eccl. 7:14). The contrast is not simply between two single days, but, as a figure, also the contrast of seasons or times of life, marked by good or evil from the viewpoint of our life in the world. As such, the idea is broader than prosperity in terms of earthly abundance, but also includes when things go well with us in our course of life. The day may include times of prosperity, health, or circumstances that we find desirable under the sun. In such a day the text says not simply be joyful but uses a word that means "to be good," so that it includes the idea of a fitting response of thankfulness and contentment as well as a joyful heart. We are to offer up a fitting response for our portion for the day and for God's provision when our labors also are fruitful and attain the end toward which

we labored. These are gifts or blessings of God. They are under His sovereign disposition. They are not due to our own merit, as the world so often ascribes to man in pride of heart.

But Solomon would also have us understand that there are also days of evil, of trouble and distress, of adversity. In such an evil day, whether a single day or a season of life, we are to see or consider God's design. He has set the one over against the other. These days too, come from His almighty hand, according to His counsel and purpose. This is the instruction also of Job in his troubles, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10). Thus Job also says, "The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21).

It is this consideration Solomon would also have us see. It is easy when things go well with us to take them for granted. When the way is evil in character in earthly terms, a day of trouble and trial, then to say this is God's

work in His providence and receive it with a patient spirit is the way of wisdom. It is the way also to contentment in heart. There is much hidden from us in God's purpose and works. Solomon points us to one aspect of God's purpose in such ups and downs in life: God so works to this end, "that man should find nothing after him." That is, that man, not knowing what the morrow may bring, what comes after him, and thus what the future holds, should be reminded that he is

man, a creature of the dust as was Adam his father. It should, in fact, drive him to humble himself before God in whose hand is his life and turn in the fear of God to Him as Lord of all. For finding that his days are not in his own hand, he must turn to God in whose hand is his life and breath. Wisdom in the fear of God does so, while the folly of sin in man is that he walks after his own imagination in pride of heart. The Word of God would teach us the knowledge of the wisdom whose excellency or profit is that it gives life to them that have it. ~

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Contentment

Are you content? Content right now, at this very moment, in your current situation as you read this article? Are you content with your government and its leaders, with your church and its members and officers, with your life and its circumstances? Are you content with your health and appearance, abilities and personality, possessions and home, station and calling, marriage and spouse, family and friends? And content even with any lack of these things? We should be.

Our gracious, kind, and beneficent Lord Jesus says that, having food and raiment, let us therewith be content (I Tim. 6:8). Surely we have eaten and put on clothes today. In fact, we are not even to think about food and clothes, for our heavenly Father knows we need them and He faithfully provides them daily in response to our prayers (Matt. 6:31-32). So we must be content with them. And not only with them, but with whatever else our great King is pleased to give us. Be content, says Lord Jesus, with such things as ye have (Heb. 13:5).

Contentment is basically a state, feeling, or attitude of satisfaction. The main Greek word is a compound word consisting of the word for “self” plus a word meaning “to be full, sufficed, or have enough” (John 6:7; 14:8; Matt. 25:9). Contentment, therefore, is literally to be self-sufficient. In other words, it is the ability to be satisfied with what one is or one has, to say I am full, that what I am and what I have is enough, and thus to live independent of, aloof to, and unaffected mentally, psychologically, or spiritually by anything outside of one’s self.


The outstanding biblical picture of contentment is a nursing infant. We sing of this in Psalter #366, “In Thee I calmly rest, contented as a little child upon its mother’s breast” (Ps. 131:1). Oblivious to its surroundings, not having yet learned all the world has to offer, lovingly cared for and being filled with mother’s milk, the newborn is completely satisfied and happy. But this does not imply that contentment is natural or innate. Contentment must be acquired and practiced. I have *learned*,

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Paul said, to be content in whatsoever state I am (Phil. 4:11).

We learn contentment, first, by learning not to covet, or as Paul puts it, having our conversation be without covetousness (Heb. 13:5). In all of us, even as newborns, is the seed of covetousness, the sinful desire to have more and more. And, therefore, covetousness always produces discontentment with what we have. Like the empty grave, barren womb, earth in drought, and burning fire, the covetous heart never says, “It is enough” (Prov. 30:15-16). And so, as a wise man once said, a Christian learns contentment by subtraction, not addition; it comes not by adding to what we have, but rather by subtracting from what we desire.

Secondly, we learn contentment by being satisfied with God alone. Contentment is not merely the suppression of desires as Buddhists teach, or satisfaction in self as the Stoics taught, or even absolute self-sufficiency as the word itself indicates. Rather, true Christian contentment is to be satisfied with having God as our God. He is the only self-sufficient One. And all things are His. So we not only depend upon Him, but He is our strength, beauty, wisdom, riches, and life. Contentment, therefore, comes by learning that by faith in Him I have all things (II Cor. 9:8). It is acquired by trusting that His grace is sufficient for me (II Cor. 12:9), and believing my life is Christ and not the abundance of things I possess, as covetousness supposes (I Tim. 6:6).

Calvin once wrote: “We have sufficient cause for being contented, since He who has in Himself an absolute fullness of all good has given Himself to be enjoyed by us. In this way, we will experience our condition to be always pleasant; for He who has God as His portion is destitute of nothing which is requisite to constitute a happy life” (commentary on Psalm 16). And Lord Jesus said, “Be content with such things as ye have, for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee” (Heb. 13:5). Truly, having brought nothing into this world, and it being certain we can carry nothing out, “godliness with contentment is great gain” (I Tim. 6:6-7). 

Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (15)

“What Saith the Scripture: The Bible’s Authority

Introduction

In April of 1521 someone did what no one had done, at least publicly, for centuries. He appealed to Scripture as the final authority to which alone he would submit. Before some of the most important, influential, and powerful men in the world, the man said:

Since you majesty and your lordships desire a simple reply, I will answer without horns and without teeth. Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand, I can do no other. God help me! Amen.¹

The man, of course, was Martin Luther, at that time a humble monk and university professor from Wittenberg, Germany. He had been summoned by the pope and the emperor to stand trial for his teachings before a Diet that was assembled at Worms, a city in Germany. It had been more than three years before this that Luther had posted

his famous Ninety-Five Theses on the chapel door of the university in Wittenberg.

The day before Luther took his courageous stand, he had made his first appearance before the Diet. On a table in front of the members of the Diet was a stack of books written by Luther. In the books he had criticized the practices and teachings of the church of his day, the Roman Catholic Church. He had been especially critical of the church’s teaching that the pope was the supreme authority in the church. He was also an outspoken critic of the teaching of the church that people are saved not only on the basis of the cross work of Jesus, but that their own merits and the merits of the saints had to be added to Christ’s merits. Before the assembly, the spokesman for the Roman Catholic Church, Johann Eck, demanded that Luther recant what he had written and make public apology for his errors. Luther had asked the emperor, Charles V, for a reprieve of one day so that he could formulate a careful response to the demand of Eck. To Eck’s consternation, the emperor granted Luther’s request. It was the next day, on April 18, 1521, that Luther made his defense before the Diet and spoke the well-known words in which he appealed to God and took his stand on the authority of Holy Scripture: “Here I stand.”

In our treatment of the doctrine of Holy Scripture we have concluded our consideration of what the Bible teaches about itself. We have seen that there can be no question that Scripture views itself as the infallibly inspired, inerrant Word of God—the Word of God in the words of men. The Bible is like no other book. It is a holy book, and it is a holy book by virtue of the fact that it is the Word of the Holy God. The Word of God is not *in* Scripture. Scripture does not merely *contain* the Word of God. Neither does Scripture *become* the Word of

¹ Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950), 185. Cf. also J. J. Ellis, *Martin Luther: The Hero of the Reformation Which Changed the World* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1941), 59-60. The quotation of Luther is a blend of that found in the two sources cited here. There is some dispute whether Luther spoke the words “Here I stand,” or whether they were added to the record later. Whatever the case may be, that is certainly what Luther intended to convey, that he was taking his stand on the authority of Scripture alone.

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

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God. Scripture is the Word of God. It is the Word of God in its entirety. It is the Word of God from Genesis 1:1 to Revelation 22:21. Nothing need be and nothing can be added to the Scriptures.

Because Scripture is the Word of God, Scripture partakes of the perfection of God. The Reformers identified certain perfections of Scripture. These perfections or properties of Scripture are a result of Scripture's infallible inspiration. These perfections set Scripture apart from every other book. There is no book like this book. Following the lead of the Reformers, the Reformed faith distinguishes five outstanding perfections of Scripture. The perfections of Scripture are: Scripture's authority, Scripture's necessity, Scripture's perspicuity, Scripture's sufficiency, and Scripture's reliability or trustworthiness. In this article and those that follow, we will consider together these perfections of Scripture.

The first perfection of Scripture is Scripture's authority.

God's Authority

Authority is a fact of life. Everywhere we turn, wherever we are, whatever we are doing we are under authority. We confront authority in society, where the government exercises its authority over the lives of the citizens. We confront authority in the workplace, where the boss or the owner of the business exercises authority over his workers. In the church, we confront the authority of the officebearers. In school, we confront the authority of the teachers and of the principal. In the home, we confront the authority of our parents. And in marriage, God gives to the husband authority over his wife, an authority that he is called to exercise in a loving, caring, and nurturing way.

Authority is the *right* to rule. It is the right to impose your will on someone else, the right to tell them what they must be and how they must live. Authority is the right to command obedience and require compliance to your desires. The fifth commandment of God's law concerns authority. And although the wording of the commandment concerns the obedience required of children to their parents, implied in the fifth commandment is the obedience that the child of God owes to all authority, authority in every area of earthly life.

Ultimately, all authority comes from God. God has all

authority in Himself simply because He is God. He has created all things and owns everything. In Romans 13:1, the apostle says that "there is no power [the word in the original is 'authority'] but of God." Jude adores God as "the only wise God our Savior" and says that to Him "be glory and majesty, dominion and power," and once again the word "power" is literally the word "authority." Jesus says to Pontius Pilate in John 19:11, "Thou couldest have no power [authority] against me, except it were given thee from above."

They that exercise authority have their authority from God. God gives to parents authority over their children. Parents do not have authority over their children because they are older or wiser or bigger. Might does not make right. Rather, God gives the right to rule to parents and to all those who are in positions of authority. They have their authority from God and are called to exercise their authority on behalf of God, whether parents in the home, king or president, policeman or mayor, elder or Christian school teacher.

God exercises His authority especially through His Word. That word is first of all the incarnate Word, our Lord Jesus Christ, whom He has exalted and glorified at His own right hand. But that word through which He exercises His authority is also His Word written. That is generally the case, that those who are in authority exercise their authority through their word. Parents exercise their authority through the word that they speak to their children. The government exercises its authority over its citizens through the laws that it passes. The church exercises its authority through its decisions. So too God exercises His authority through His Word.

Scripture's Authority

Because Scripture is the Word of God, Scripture is authoritative. It ought to be obvious that only if Scripture is the infallible and inerrant Word of God, without any error or contradiction, can it be the authority in the church. Suppose once that Scripture contained errors, contradictions, and untruths. How could Scripture possibly function as the authority in the church? It could not. If Scripture is to be the authority in and over the church, the supreme authority, it must be infallible. To deny Scripture's infallibility is effectively to dismiss Scripture as the authority in the church. What confi-

dence could we have in Scripture's authority if it is filled with errors and contradictions? We could not have any confidence in its authority.

As the authority of the sovereign God Himself, whose Word Scripture is, the authority of Scripture is the highest, the ultimate, the supreme authority. Its authority is the final authority in the church. By insisting on the authority of Scripture, Luther did not despise the authority of the church or the authority of the church councils. His praise of the Council of Nicea is well-known. Luther and the other Reformers did not mean by *sola Scriptura* that the Bible is the only authority in the church. He did not deny any and all authority to tradition or to the officers of the church. Rather, what Luther insisted on was that the Bible was the only *infallible* authority. What he meant was that the Bible had unique authority. What he meant is that the Bible is the *highest* and *ultimate* authority in the church, the authority that is over all other authority. What he meant was that the Bible is the only *independent* authority, whereas all other authority in the church is derived.

In addition, Scripture's authority is an absolute and over-arching authority. It is that *for the believer*. It is the authority over the faith, that is, what we believe and confess. It is the authority over life, that is, how we are to conduct ourselves in every situation and at all times. Scripture alone binds the conscience of the believer. That is what Luther affirmed before the Diet of Worms: "My conscience is captive [that is, 'bound'] to the Word of God." And he went on to say that "going against conscience is neither safe nor salutary." Only God's Word binds the conscience, binds it in such a way that we must believe that Word in its teaching and submit to that Word in its commands. No other book—merely human book—possesses such authority.

Scripture is the supreme authority *for the church*. It is the authority over the teaching of the church. It is the authority over the worship of the church. It is the authority over the life of the church. It is the authority over the discipline of the church. There is not and there may not be introduced any other authority in the church than the authority of the Word of God.

In that connection, Scripture is the ultimate authority over the assemblies of the church. Scripture is the authority over the consistory, the classis, and the synod.

And Scripture is the authority over the session, the presbytery, and the general assembly.

Scripture is *uniquely* the absolute authority in the church. Not Scripture *and* something in addition to Scripture, but Scripture *alone*. That was the critical word at the time of the Reformation, as it is the critical word still today. Just as Rome taught that salvation was not by faith alone, but by faith *and* works, so she also taught that the authority in the church was not Scripture alone, but Scripture *and* something in addition to Scripture. Scripture *and* the *ex cathedra* pronouncements of the pope; Scripture *and* tradition; Scripture *and* the writings of the church fathers; Scripture *and* the apocrypha; Scripture *and* the decrees of the church councils. Over against the view that held to the authority of Scripture *and...*, the Reformation called the church to recognize the authority of Scripture *alone*.

Just as the Roman Catholic Church denies the authority of Scripture, not outright but by adding some other authority alongside the authority of Scripture, so do also the cults and sects characteristically add to the authority of Scripture. To Scripture the Mormons add the *Book of Mormon*, the *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *The Pearl of Great Price*. The Muslims add to Scripture the *Quran*. The Seventh-Day Adventists place the writings of Ellen G. White alongside Scripture—though some SDAs would deny this. And the Jehovah's Witnesses add the writings of Charles Taze Russell as an authority alongside of Scripture.

That Scripture is the only authority also condemns those who add other revelations of God to Scripture. Scripture can be the only authority in the church only if it alone contains God's revelation to His church. That Scripture alone is the authority in the church and in the life of the believer condemns the modern Charismatic movement which insists that revelation is ongoing. The Reformers also repudiated those in their day who insisted that revelation was not to be confined to Holy Scripture. In a sermon on John 16:14, Luther said:

For this reason I have said that if we are to hold to Christ's Word and prophecy and to judge all teaching and signs, life and activity, according to this, the Holy Spirit Himself must be present with His revelation. If teaching, signs, life, and activity are in opposition to this chief doctrine and article of Christ—concerning which


Christ says here that the Holy Spirit will declare it to His disciples—one should ignore and reject them, even if it snows miracles every day. For anything in opposition to this doctrine [set forth in Scripture] is surely a lie and is introduced by the devil for the seduction of souls.²

“Even if it snows miracles every day,” that is, even if those who deny Scripture’s sole authority and claim authority for their own purported revelations are able to “snow miracles” upon the church, they must not be believed. Scripture alone is the authority in the church. And Scripture alone is the authority in the church because

² *Luther’s Works, Volume 24, Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 14-16*, Jaroslav Pelikan and Daniel E. Poellot, ed. (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1961), 371.

Scripture alone is the infallibly inspired and inerrant Word of God. In full agreement with Luther, Calvin writes that

[s]ince the church is Christ’s Kingdom, and he reigns by his Word alone, will it not be clear to any man that those are lying words by which the Kingdom of Christ is imagined to exist apart from his scepter (that is, his most holy Word)?³

Next time we will demonstrate from Scripture and our Reformed confessions the sole authority of Scripture. And we will make some practical applications on this truth to the life of the believer. 

³ *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 4.2.4; 2:1046.

THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAN

Chapter Five

Premillennialism (9):

Its Explanation of Revelation 20 Refuted

Introduction

Regardless that dispensational premillennialism insists that its expectation of a millennium of earthly power, riches, peace, and glory for Israel does not rest exclusively, or even mainly, on Revelation 20, Revelation 20 is fundamental to this eschatology.

If the premillennial understanding of Revelation 20 is in error, the whole of this doctrine of the last things is shown to be false.

In the immediately preceding articles in this series, I have given the premillennial explanation of Revelation 20:1-10, with some criticism of this explanation.

In this article and the following, I subject the premillennial understanding of Revelation 20 to further, and fuller, criticism.

Incidental Errors

First, a number of incidental errors contribute to the false premillennial understanding and explanation of Revelation 20. “Incidental” does not mean unimportant. These incidental errors are serious. But they are not the main, most obvious error of the premillennial interpretation.

It is an error on the part of premillennialism that it assumes that the events recorded in Revelation 20 follow the events of the second part of Revelation 19 temporally and historically.

According to premillennialism, the millennium of Revelation 20 will follow, in time and history, the appearance of Jesus Christ with the armies of heaven to destroy the kingdom of the beast—Antichrist. Premillennialism reads Revelation 20 as though it were the next chapter in a book of history. And the book of history, on the premillennial reading, is of such a nature that each chapter records events that follow in time the events of the preceding chapter. Premillennialism reads Revelation

Prof. Engelsma is professor emeritus of Dogmatics and Old Testament in the Protestant Reformed Seminary.

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20:1, 2 as though the apostle had written, “After the events recorded at the end of Revelation 19, an angel bound the devil.”

Temporal succession is not the relation between Revelation 19 and Revelation 20, as it is not the relation between other chapters in the book. Repeatedly, the book of Revelation takes the reader to the very end of history, only in the next chapter to survey the same period of the last days of history with regard to other, important developments. For example, Revelation 16 concludes with the end of human history, as is evident from the events themselves that are mentioned in the chapter and as is pronounced by God Himself, “It is done” (Rev. 16:17).

Chapter 17 does not, therefore, record further events in subsequent history. Rather, chapter 17 describes the same last days that are the subject of chapter 16, but now with regard to the judgment of the great whore.

The relation between Revelation 19 and Revelation 20 is not temporal. The events prophesied in Revelation 20 do not succeed the events prophesied in chapter 19.

Rather, Revelation 20:1-10 teaches the truth about the last days, from the ascension of Jesus to His second coming, with regard to the millennium. The truth of the millennium, or thousand years, includes the binding of Satan, the victory of the persecuted church in the millennium, and the final assault of Satan on the saints when the thousand years expire. The attack of Satan’s army upon the camp of the saints in Revelation 20:8, 9 is the same as the beast’s attack upon Christ and His army in Revelation 19:19. The destruction of the Satanic forces in Revelation 20:9 is the same as the destruction of the beast and his followers in Revelation 19:20, 21.

The Binding of Satan

Another error of the premillennial explanation is its notion that the binding of Satan for a thousand years, which is taught in Revelation 20, puts an end to virtually all of his evil activities upon the human race and all of his corrupt influences within humans. This understanding of the binding of Satan allows for the premillennial view of the millennium as a period of history during which all kinds of evils, including human sins and sinfulness, are severely curtailed. Satan’s influence having been thus restricted, a majority of the human race will be saved, sin will not so strongly trouble mankind, and earthly life will

prosper, as could not be the case were Satan on the loose.

The binding of Satan allows for the conversion of much of the world’s population, for the “golden age” of history, and for largely untroubled human life in the “golden age.”

In the interests of the flourishing of his earthly kingdom of God during the millennium, premillennialist Alva J. McClain explains the binding of Satan as resulting in the “total absence of war and...rigid control of disease and death” on earth. In addition,

the binding of Satan will show...the yet unrealized and vast possibilities of human life in physical existence on earth, even where sin still exists in a society composed of both regenerated and unregenerated men.... What this binding of Satan by our Lord will mean to the world has been well stated by Fausset: “A mighty purification will be effected.... Though sin will not be abolished—for men will still be in the flesh (Isa. 65:20)—sin will no longer be a universal power, for the flesh is no longer seduced by Satan. He will not be, as now, ‘the god and prince of the world’; nor will the world ‘lie in the wicked one’: the flesh will be evermore overcome.... The nations in the millennium will be prepared for a higher state, as Adam in Paradise, supposing he had lived in an unfallen state.”¹

The error of this premillennial fantasy is its failure to take note of the text’s explicit description of the one effect of the binding of Satan, as it is the one purpose of Jesus Christ with this binding: “that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled” (Rev. 20:3).

The binding of Satan has nothing to do with the restricting and lessening of his evil influence upon the human race. Humans remain totally depraved, completely under the control of Satan, as they were before his binding. They remain incapable of any good, hostile to the gospel, haters of God and of each other. There is no more openness to the gospel when Satan is bound than there was before he was bound. The expectation of premillennialism, therefore, that a majority of the race will be saved as a result of the binding of Satan is utterly mistaken. Although bound, Satan holds the masses of humanity in spiritual bondage; works to fill the cup of the

¹ Alva J. McClain, *The Greatness of the Kingdom* (Winona Lake, Indiana: BMH Books, 1959), 483.

world's iniquity; instigates persecution of the believers in various countries; raises up heretics within the churches; and causes denominations of churches to apostatize from the truth.

One thing, and one thing only, Satan is restrained from accomplishing: deceiving the nations. During the millennium, Satan is unable to unite all the nations of the world as the kingdom of Antichrist. This divine restraint through the Lord Jesus with regard to a premature rising of the kingdom of Antichrist is the reference of the apostle in II Thessalonians 2:6, 7: "And now ye know what withholdeth that he [the 'man of sin' of verse 3] might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way."

In the Greek original of this passage, "withholdeth" and "letteth" translate the same Greek word meaning 'restrain,' or 'hinder.' Throughout the present age until almost the very end, Someone and something restrain Antichrist from making his appearance and accomplishing the devil's purpose with him, namely, to unite all the world against the church of Christ Jesus. Only when the Restrainer is "taken out of the way" (II Thess. 2:7) will "that Wicked [Antichrist] be revealed" (II Thess. 2:8). Revelation 20 describes this restraint as the binding of Satan.

The purpose of this binding of Satan and "with-

holding," or restraining, of the Antichrist is, mainly, that Christ may gather the elect church out of the nations, something that would be impossible were the antichristian world-power to be established prematurely.

After the thousand years, when Christ has gathered His elect out of the nations, Satan will be loosed a little season (Rev. 20:3). He will then deceive the nations into forming the world-kingdom of the beast (vv. 7, 8).

Of a binding of Satan that virtually eradicates evil from the world, so that there can be a "golden age" for fallen mankind in history, Scripture knows nothing. Certainly, Revelation 20:1-10 predicts no such thing.

The gospel of Revelation 20 is Jesus' gathering of the church throughout history. This great work of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit determines that Satan will marshall his forces for a final, all-out assault on the kingdom of Christ—the church—when, and only when, the Lord Jesus, King and Savior of the church, allows and wills it. Until Jesus' work of gathering the church is completed, "he who now letteth will let" (II Thess. 2:7).

These misunderstandings of Revelation 20 by premillennialism are not insignificant.

But they are not the fundamental error of premillennialism with regard to Revelation 20.

What the fundamental error is, I will point out in the next installment of this series on the millennium.

... to be continued. 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. DANIEL KLEYN

Our Dependence on the Spirit in Missions

We do well to acknowledge that the mission work of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRCA) is the work of the Spirit of our exalted Christ.

The Word of God leaves no room for us to doubt or question this. The Spirit of Christ opens doors for mission labors (Acts 16:6). That same Spirit also closes doors (Acts 16:7). The Spirit is involved in calling and

sending men to be missionaries, which includes convicting a man of the call (Acts 8:29, Acts 13:2). The Spirit also equips a man for his labors, giving him the ability and the boldness needed to preach the Word to all the world (Luke 24:49, Eph. 6:18-20).

Most significant, however, is the fact that the Spirit of Christ is the One who controls and produces the fruit of mission preaching and teaching. Zechariah 4:6 makes this plain when it states, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts." This brief but powerful statement forcefully reminds us of the

Rev. Kleyn is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.

sovereignty of the Spirit, the weakness of man, and our constant dependence on the Spirit of Christ.

The PRCA, through missions, are involved in a great work. The Spirit gives us this work. It is the work of building the church of Christ. It is the spiritual work of gathering in, from all nations of the world, those ordained to eternal life. This is a most important work. It is far more important than the direction of the stock market, or the success of our nation's ongoing fight against terrorism, or the outcome of the presidential election. For this work is the goal of all history. When this work is completed, Christ will appear on clouds of glory and bring all history to an end (Matt. 24:14).

Many things are needed in order to carry out this work, and we are fully dependent on Christ and His Spirit for all these things. We need men to preach the gospel, and to do so in faithfulness to the Word of God. We need financial resources, so that we are able to carry out the work the Spirit gives us. We need godly wisdom to do all our work in accordance with Scripture, and thus in a way that advances Christ's gospel and cause. We need boldness, so that we do not compromise the truth and dishonor the Name of God. We need carefulness. We need the humility to lean on the experiences and wisdom of others. These are only a few of the things we need. We need the Spirit to give us many other things as well.

When the Spirit sets open doors before us (as He has), and when He provides us with the resources we need (as He does), then we as churches must busy ourselves in this work. And by the power of the Spirit of Christ, we do so.

The PRCA are presently putting many resources and a lot of work into missions. We are laboring hard to bring the Word of God to many around the world who are interested in and hungry for the truths of the gospel and the Reformed faith. We meet as synod and councils and mission committees and sub-committees to oversee and to make important decisions concerning this work. We call and send out missionaries. We visit mission fields. We visit new contacts around the world. We preach to congregations and groups of believers. We instruct both current and future pastors. We teach men concerning their work as elders and deacons. We teach the youth and children. We preach the Word of God. We seek to impart a knowledge and understanding of the Reformed creeds. We explain as clearly as possible the doctrines of

the Reformed faith. We teach groups of believers (often for many, many years) what it means to be truly Reformed in doctrine, in worship, in church government, and in life. We guide churches in forming and in carrying out the work of a denomination. We sell books and distribute literature. And we make sure that the PR churches and members, who send men to do this work, are kept apprised of their work in missions. The Spirit enables us to do all these things. He is in our midst, and keeps us busy in all this work.

But as regards all our labors and efforts, we ought to remind ourselves repeatedly that we are powerless to make our mission work effective. It is the Spirit of Christ, and not we, who causes the work to be fruitful. We ourselves may work very hard in missions (and so we should), but we cannot humble and save one sinner. We cannot regenerate one person who is lost. We cannot sanctify one child of God who is living in sin. We cannot cause one individual anywhere in the world to believe and embrace the truths of God. That is, we cannot build the church. We are helpless in gathering in any of those who are ordained to eternal life.

This does not mean that the Spirit does not use us and what we do. He does. For the Spirit of Christ uses means to accomplish His work of saving the church.

But the point is that the Spirit does not need us. He does not need you, or me, or anyone. He does not need our zeal, our wisdom, our insights, our money, our abilities, or our tireless efforts. For it is not by human might or power that the elect are saved, but by the power of the Spirit Himself.

This is a humbling truth. We need constantly to be humbled by it. For we are often tempted to think that the Spirit does indeed need us. We may become proud of who we are and be inclined to say: "We have the truth, and we hold the line. We are conservative and truly Reformed, while hardly anyone else is. And so, if it were not for us, who would there be in all the world to defend the Reformed faith, and to bring those God-glorifying and precious truths to others? The Spirit needs especially us for the work of missions to be successful in the world. Without our diligent work, the truth might never be proclaimed and the church might never be gathered and built."

The reality is that the Spirit of Christ does not need us. The success of the spread of the gospel does not hinge on

our zeal, our resources, our persistence, or our diligent labors. Nor does it depend on our ability to use just the right words and just the right amount of persuasion. We must certainly do our best work. But the church is not built because of human might. And that is how it must be, so God is glorified, and not man.

That in itself is humbling. But what is even more humbling is that the church is built in spite of us. Although He does not need us, the Spirit is pleased to use us. But think a moment of what He is using. The Spirit is using sinners. We are very weak instruments in His hands. We teach others the truths of the Reformed faith, but we ourselves often have little interest in that truth. We call God's people to humble themselves before the Word of God, but we ourselves often remain proud and unwilling to submit to that Word. We teach others about the godly life that follows from and flows out of the truth, but we ourselves fail in so many ways to live that godly life. Yet in spite of our many weaknesses, faults, failures, and sins, which things could easily ruin mission work, the Spirit is still pleased to use us and to give fruit on the work. That is very humbling. Indeed, it is.

In the end, however, the fact that it is the Spirit's work is what encourages us concerning mission work, giving us the confidence that the work will be successful.

We would have no confidence in the work if it depended on us. If it depended at all upon us, none of the elect would be saved. For human power and effort cannot accomplish something that is a divine work.


We have confidence because the Spirit (who alone is

able) takes the preached Word and applies it to the elect of God. The Spirit humbles. The Spirit regenerates. The Spirit works faith. The Spirit justifies and sanctifies and preserves. The Spirit causes our weak efforts to bear fruit.

What we must not forget is that sometimes the fruit is negative. We prefer only positive fruit. But sometimes there are gainsayers and those who reject the truth. Some reject it from the very start. Others are interested for a good while, but only up to a certain point, for they do not want all of the truth. The latter has been our experience in teaching predestination, with everything being agreed on until we taught reprobation. Since then, some have not been seen again.

The Spirit also sovereignly sees to it that sometimes the preaching and teaching of the truth leads to a rejection of that truth and a hardening in unbelief. This is also an integral part of the success of the spread of the gospel, for rejection and hardening are important fruits with a view to the end of time and the return of Christ.

The Lord encourages us. What we are doing as a denomination in the area of mission work may seem small and insignificant in comparison to the great mission endeavors of others. But let us not despise the day of small things (Zech. 4:10). A great work is being accomplished by the Spirit—the greatest work in all of history. And we are privileged to be used by the Spirit in that work.

Thanks be to God for His mighty Spirit and the Spirit's effective work in missions! 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor

The Fruit of the Spirit of Jesus Christ, by Richard J. Smit. Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing, 2012. 155 pages (paper). [Reviewed by Don Doezema.]

A friend of mine told me recently that she was reading, and profiting from, Rev. Smit's little book entitled *The Fruit of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*. She went on to tell me that she planned therefore to share it with an acquaintance of hers, who, because of circumstances in her life, would surely find it as beneficial as she had.

Mr. Doezema is a member of the Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Wyoming, Michigan.

That's high praise. Not, you see, just: "I liked the book," or: "It was well written," or: "I found it interesting," but: "I'm finding the reading of it to be profitable for my spiritual life." And: "So much so, that I intend to urge someone else to read it in order to reap the same benefit."

Little, I think, could be more gratifying to the author, for such response answers to the very purpose for which the book was written. "The primary goal," Rev. Smit declared in the preface to his book, "is that this material may promote faithful piety and godly living among God's saints...." Clearly, it's doing that.

Then there's the rest of that sentence that states his goal. The author hoped that the book would promote faithful piety and godly living "that grow out of the doctrines of God's sovereign, particular grace, while at the same time giving due honor to the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the work of sanctification and preservation of his saints." After a careful reading of the book for the purpose of this review, I can say that, in every chapter of the book, Rev. Smit made good on that implied promise. Perhaps it's his emphasis on the work of the Spirit, *as the Spirit of our risen Lord*, and on the sovereignty of grace by which we are "transformed into the image of Christ so that more and more we look like him and behave like him" (148), that sets this book apart from others on the same subject. Yes, there are indeed others—as Rev. Smit also acknowledges in his preface. *Good* ones too. I have some on my own book shelves. *The Fruit of the Spirit of Jesus Christ*, by Rev. Smit, will not *replace* them—but it will serve as a valuable and much appreciated *addition*.

Why? I draw your attention to a few of the book's features that I much appreciated.

As we would expect, every chapter of the book is replete with references to *Scripture*. But, in addition, Rev. Smit quotes also from the Reformed *creeds*, and even from the *Psalter*. How, better, could he conclude the chapter on *peace* than by the words of Psalter #369:1: "How pleasant and how good it is when brethren in the Lord in one another's joy delight and dwell in sweet accord"?

Rev. Smit's emphasis is, in every instance, on the positive manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit in the life of the child of God, but he does not neglect the *contrast*, the *antithesis*, if you will. With respect to *joy*, for example, he writes: "In antithetical contrast to all the sinful and self-centered reasons that the wicked world has for its fleeting joys, the child of God has many good, virtuous, substantial, and lasting reasons" (42). And, to make it clear that the conflict is not simply between *us* (believers) and *them* (those wicked who are out there somewhere), but also *within* us, he writes, in the Introduction: "The Spirit is pleased to work this fruit in us through the way of leading us to crucify 'the flesh with the affections and lusts' (Gal. 5:24)." And he adds that,

in this light we must regard our sinful natures as repulsive and evil. We must not view our lusts as something with

which to play.... Rather, we must flee those works of the flesh like fleeing a plague of death. We must treat these works of the flesh as rotten fruit to be cast away.... We learn by the work of the Spirit in us that fruit-bearing does involve the painful process of being pruned from the works of the flesh unto the production of the fruit of the Spirit (17-19).

"*Being pruned*." That's passive, of course. But Rev. Smit emphasizes repeatedly that, though our sanctification is a process that involves an irresistible work of the Spirit within the heart of God's people, that does not mean that we are simply passive recipients of grace. It happens that at the end of every chapter there are helpful "Questions for Discussion." The very first one is this: "Does the sovereignty of the Spirit of Christ in our salvation and sanctification mean that we are inactive?" Surely Rev. Smit's reference (above) to the "crucifying of the flesh" and "fleeing the works of the flesh" speak to the responsibility of God's people actively to 'cultivate' the gifts of the Spirit in them, but in his "Conclusion," Rev. Smit elaborates on that concept:

It is not to be expected that the production of the fruit of the Spirit is an automatic process in which we are completely inactive and need not expend any energy nor exert any effort. It is not to be expected that below or beyond our consciousness the fruit of the Spirit suddenly appears in our lives.

And, really, the emphasis on this truth is something that recurs throughout the chapters of the book. In holding before us the powerful example of the apostle Paul, who "finished" his course, "fought the good fight," and reached the finish line in the confidence that the Lord would give him in grace a beautiful crown (144), Rev. Smit asks: "Ought not we in holy temperance *pursue* such a crown from the Lord whom we love?" On gentleness, he writes: "Christ commands us to *clothe ourselves*...with the new man in Christ" (96). And, on *gentleness*: "Should we not be seeking by faith in Christ alone to *put on* that virtue of gentleness in word and action?" (94). Regarding *joy*, there's this: "Our true gladness flows out of a true and living faith in the Lord Jesus Christ." Then notice especially this: "It is filled with substantial knowledge of the doctrines of the Reformed faith" (41). What can this mean but, "Get to work and *learn* them!"

How does one do that? By *reading*, of course, and by personal *study*. But Rev. Smit mentions, repeatedly, two other things that come into play in this regard. First, the

means of grace. On *peace*: “Faithful submission to the preaching of the word of the gospel develops and maintains this peace” (64). On *meekness*: “What Christ by his death and resurrection earned for us, a life of humility, he is pleased to work in us by his Spirit through the preaching of the word” (132). And then especially this in the “Conclusion”: “The Holy Spirit is pleased to work his fruit in the heart and life of the regenerated child of God in connection with the preaching of the word of God, also known as the chief means of grace” (151). And then this: “What we see in the mirror of God’s word concerning Christ is exactly what the Lord mysteriously and graciously begins to make to appear in us.”

Two things, I said, are emphasized repeatedly by Rev. Smit with respect to what is our calling to grow in grace and knowledge. The second is *prayer*. Concerning the fruit of *gentleness*, he writes: “This is another virtue that we learn to desire and that we *pray that the Spirit of Christ* will work in us more and more by the means of grace and his inner working” (81). And also this on the “robe of gentleness in our daily life”: “For that robe and the faithful wearing of it, we must pray unto our heavenly Father daily. We must seek the Father for the Spirit and grace to wear it and to exercise it” (91). Do we wish, for ourselves, more of the fruit of the Spirit of Christ? Do we desire to look more and more like Him as we make our way through this life? Neglect prayer for it, frequent and fervent, and it will not happen.

More to be desired, it is, than much fine gold! Trouble is, our nature being what it is, we need constantly to be reminded of the beauty of it. And Rev. Smit does that. On *goodness*: “By the miraculous grace of the Holy Spirit, what blessedness it is when we bring forth the fruit of goodness to the glory of God and enjoy its

sweetness in the communion of saints” (113). On *peace*: “What a blessing it is when the Spirit by his grace gives us the opportunities to harvest and taste this fruit in our lives. The taste of peace and unity with the brethren is a great delight!” (66). On *love*: “What a delightful life and privilege it is to be the blessed recipients of the love of Christ and to love one another as he loved us” (32). And in the “Introduction”:

A heavenly and spiritual sweetness and goodness characterize and permeate the whole fruit.... That is the fruit that is delightfully tasty to our Father in heaven and also to our fellow saints upon earth who see and taste this fruit and are consequently delighted by it (16-17).

Note that: “also to our fellow saints on earth.” The fruit of the Spirit is of course important for *my* life, personally. But, as Rev. Smit reminds us repeatedly, fruit-bearing “is vital to the *communion of saints*” (20). Further, by fruit-bearing, “God is glorified.” And, “as the Spirit works the beginning of that fruit-bearing within us in this life, we have blessed hope.”

There appears on the fruit many spots of sin, and there hides in our best works worms of wickedness. But thereby the Spirit makes us long for the day when we shall be planted as living trees by the streams of living water that flow forth from the throne of God. There we shall bring forth abundantly, continuously, and sinlessly the heavenly, wholesome, pleasant, and sweet fruit of the Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ for the honor and glory of our heavenly Father.

All that, from the Introduction. And all concepts that are amply illustrated throughout the book. Read it, and see for yourself. And find it to be, as it was for the young mother mentioned above, for your spiritual profit. ☞

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Minister Activities

Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor at First PRC of Holland, MI, had been considering the call to become the second missionary to the Philip-

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

pines. His response came on Sunday March 20. In his acceptance of this call Rev. Holstege revealed his strong conviction that God had been preparing him, along with his wife and family, for this work for a long time, and that now God commanded him to go to this field of

labor. The acceptance letter read in Doon, IA that day quoted Matthew 10: 37-38: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is

not worthy of me.” We rejoice with the saints in the Metro Manila area, and with Rev. Daniel and Sharon Kleyn as they await the arrival of the Holsteiges on the field. God be praised for making His will known and for sending a man to a field white for harvest! Continue to remember Rev. Holsteige and his wife Leah in prayer, as well as the Doon Council, as they make plans to transition to the field in the coming months. We do not forget to pray for the congregation of First PRC of Holland, MI, as God has led their pastor to leave their midst presently. This rending does not come easily. May God be with them and fulfill their needs now and in the future, as we know He will.

Rev. Aud Spriensma, pastor in Byron Center, MI PRC, traveled to the Philippine mission field in late March/early April to assist in the work there. Rev. Spriensma preached in the Berean PRC on March 27, in Maranatha PRC of Valenzuela on April 3, and in Provident Christian Church of Marikina on April 10. The Spriensmas and Kleyns also traveled to Bacolod City and then to Southern Negros Occidental for the monthly teaching among Reformed believers and pastors there.

Missionary Activities

San Pedro, Laguna is located about 25 miles south of Manila via the South Luzon Expressway. The trip takes one and a half to two hours. Missionary-pastor Daniel Kleyn has for a number of years been in touch with, and visited, a man there named Ray Rodriguez.

This man indicated an interest in having the members of the congregation there hear of the Reformed truth as understood and confessed by the PRCA, and also to learn more about our denomination. A conference was held there on March 25 with Rev. Kleyn introducing the PRCA and our mission work, speaking about common vs. particular grace, as well as giving two speeches on double predestination to the 30 in attendance. Sharon Kleyn set up a table for books at the conference and sold about 65. Rev. Kleyn summarized it as “a good day and an encouraging time with these new contacts. They also showed an interest in having us come again sometime.”

Congregation Activities

March 28 was the date. The basement of the Doon, IA PRC was the place. About 35 men of all ages converged for the annual combined Men’s Society meeting of the five Siouxland area churches. Lively discussion was held on I Chronicles 29, surrounding the history of David’s kingship being passed to his son Solomon and the nearing of the building of the temple. Edgerton men introduced the after-recess topic “Are We Too Busy to Redeem the Time?” using a 25-year-old *Standard Bearer* article as the springboard for the conversation. Refreshments followed and all agreed the evening was a profitable one!

Young Adult Activities

The Midwest Young Adults Retreat, hosted by Calvary Prot-

estant Reformed Church in Hull, IA will take place Monday, August 15, 2016 to Thursday, August 18, 2016, D.V. The retreat will be held at the Ingham Okoboji Lutheran Bible Camp in Okoboji, IA which is about a an hour and a half drive from Hull. Rev. Joshua Engelsma, pastor at Doon, IA PRC and Rev. Cory Griess, pastor at Calvary PRC of Hull will be the featured speakers. Registration is now open at <http://www.midwestyaretreat.com>.

The mid-March Young Adult retreat held in Loveland, CO was a great success with over 40 in attendance and a theme entitled “Our Lives of Joy.” Rev. Brian Huizinga spoke on “Our Lives of Joy in Christ: Never Rejected, Always Received,” while Rev. Steven Key’s speech was “My Exceeding Joy—Even in Darkness.” Activities included group devotions and discussions, snowshoeing in the mountains, Bible Trivia competition, singing together, gym nights and bonfires. Those who attended expressed very positive sentiments regarding the conference!

Sister Church Activities

This from the Limerick, Northern Ireland Reformed Fellowship newsletter where Rev. Martyn McGeown labors:

We continue our “Back to Basics” Lecture series in Limerick. The last four lectures were “Why the Cross?,” “The Resurrection,” “What Is Sin?,” and “Our Sin and God’s Justice.” Our next lecture will be “God Is Good” (April 16). The lectures are about 30 minutes long (sometimes I stay within the

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time limit), and are designed to explain fundamental truths to an unbelieving audience. My last two lectures in Wales were "Spiritual Gifts" (November 19, 2015) and "The Love of the World" (February 2, 2016). The next speech

will be on "Christian Wisdom" on May 12, D.V. We are also expecting visitors around the time of the British Reformed Fellowship Conference (July 16-23). Some have already indicated their desire to visit Limerick. We look forward

to that and to an excellent conference with friends old and new, and near and far!

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1916-2016

CELEBRATING THE
100th Anniversary
OF HOPE PROTESTANT REFORMED CHURCH
Walker, MI

1 Peter 2:4-5
"To whom coming as unto a living stone, disallowed of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."

"A Spiritual House Acceptable to God"

The congregation of
Hope Protestant Reformed Church
cordially invites you to attend a
commemorative program and celebrate with us
a century of God's preserving grace.

JUNE 10, 2016, 7:00 P.M.

First Jenison Christian Reformed Church
8360 Cottonwood Dr.

www.hopeprchurch.org

The commemorative program will be live-streamed at www.sermonaudio.com/hopeprc

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanksgiving and praise to our God **VERNON and BARBARA KLAMER** celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on April 5, 2016. We are thankful for the many years God has given them together and for the blessing of their godly example of faithfulness and love. Our prayer is that God will continue to bless and uphold them. Psalm 90:1: "LORD, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations."

✠ Their children,
37 grandchildren,
and 41 great grandchildren

Reformed Witness Hour

May 2016

Date	Topic	Text
May 1	"Antichrist: The Beast from the Earth"	Revelation 13:11-15
May 8	"The Mark of the Beast"	Revelation 13:16-18
May 15	"The Great Tribulation"	Matthew 24:21, 22
May 22	"Jesus Coming in Glory"	Matthew 24:29-31
May 29	"The General Resurrection"	John 5:28, 29