

The Standard Bearer

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Fear Not Ye...for He Is Risen

And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified. He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Matthew 28:5-6

If the resurrection is true, as it most certainly is, then we who believe have reason not to fear.

Early Sunday morning a great earthquake shook the ground as an angel of God rolled the stone away and sat upon it. In response, the guards literally shook with fear and became as dead men, passed out on the ground. They were terrified.

Understandably, the women were perplexed when they found the open tomb. And when they saw the angel, they too were afraid. But the angel said to them, "Fear not ye."

Why must the women stop being afraid? Because Jesus is risen!

What fears plague our souls in the midst of this valley of tears? Do we fear an uncertain future? Do we wonder what will happen to our children and grandchildren? Do we fear the persecution coming on the church? Do we

fear God's punishing wrath? Does guilt burden our consciences as we feel the consequences of sin? God speaks to us the same message as He did to the fearing women: "Fear not ye...Jesus is risen."



The guards who watched over Jesus' tomb exhibited one kind of fear on that resurrection morning. These guards may have been the very band that had been appointed to the task of crucifying Jesus, given by Pilate at the direction of the chief priests. If that is so, then some of these guards struck Jesus in the face and called out, "Prophesy, who is it that smote thee?" They might have been the ones who dressed Him in purple, put a crown of thorns upon His head, and then mocked Him saying, "Hail, King of the Jews." These soldiers spit upon Him, hit Him on the head, escorted Him to Calvary, nailed spikes into His hands, and set His cross in place. They parted Jesus' garments among them. They felt the earthquake when Jesus died. One of them pierced Jesus' side with a spear. Whatever the case may have been, these soldiers surely knew at least some of the history surrounding Jesus' trial and crucifixion.

Early Sunday morning the guards suddenly felt another earthquake and found the stone of the tomb removed. They saw a shining messenger of God, and their hearts

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were filled with terror. So intense was their fear, they fell to the ground as dead men.

As soon as they recovered enough strength, they ran back to the Jews and reported what happened. These men witnessed the incontrovertible truth of Jesus' resurrection. They felt the earthquake and saw the angel. We might imagine that they would immediately repent and believe in Jesus Christ. Instead, the soldiers showed the hardness of heart that belongs to unbelievers. Evidence stares them in the face, but they refuse to believe.

These unbelieving soldiers represent all unbelievers. When something dreadful happens, they tremble in fear of death. Though they might utter a prayer in the trenches, when the crisis passes, they continue on their merry way, living life for themselves, pursuing the gods of money, pleasure, entertainment, and sports. In spite of many infallible proofs of Jesus' resurrection, the ungodly refuse to turn to Jesus in repentance and faith.

These do well to be afraid of God's messengers, because the angels are reminders of the coming day of God's wrath. When Jesus comes again to judge the living and the dead, it will be too late. The wicked will be cast into outer darkness. The fear of unbelief is a terror.

Those words "Fear not!" were not directed to the guards. There is no record of any word to them. The angel gives them no message like that heard in many churches today, "Fear not; God loves all men and wants everyone to partake of the resurrection life of His Son." Rather, the angel speaks this message to the women: "Fear not ye."

Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and other women who loved Jesus brought sweet spices to anoint Jesus' body. They intended to preserve His body from the stench of decay.

Of course, if the women had believed Jesus when He had told them He would rise again, they would not have needed any spices. Nor would they have wondered about rolling the stone away because there would not have been a need. Theirs was a problem that often plagues us—a lack of faith. They had not hidden Jesus' words in their hearts and held onto them.

But there is a fundamental difference between the unbelief of the guards and the unbelief of the women. It is true, these women should have known better, just as the rest of the disciples. But their heart was in the right

place. They witnessed the crucifixion as the soldiers probably had. But the women responded differently. Why? Because by God's regenerating grace they believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah. And yet, they did not understand the nature of Christ's kingdom and how the cross was the way into that kingdom. Although Jesus had explained it to them, their understanding was still weak. They believed, but they were plagued by unbelief at the same time. Thus the women came to the tomb in true faith, seeking Jesus whom they loved.

Why then such fear in the presence of God's holy angel? Because they understood they were sinners. They knew that a righteous and holy God cannot look on sin. They knew they deserved to be cast out of God's presence. Yet their fear is not the kind that runs from the tomb and denies the resurrection. Their fear does not keep them from seeking Jesus. The angel acknowledged that: "I know that ye seek Jesus."



Fear not!

Why must the women stop fearing? Why must they set aside their anxiety and grief and confusion? The reason is the most glorious news ever given: "He is not here: for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Fear not! Jesus is not in the grave any more. He is risen!

The evidence was clear and compelling. In the first place, the angel reminds them how Jesus told them that He would rise again: "He is risen, as He said." That is, "Remember how He told you when He was yet in Galilee, that the Son of man must be crucified and that He would rise again the third day?" And they remembered His words.

Secondly, the angel invites them to examine the tomb: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." Why did the angel direct the women to look at the spot where Jesus had been? Evidently, he wanted them to see the grave clothes. They were not unwrapped, as was the case when Lazarus came forth out of the grave. Rather, Jesus' grave clothes lay in the shape of His body; but the body was missing. The only explanation is that Jesus was risen indeed. His body went through the grave clothes and left behind the shell. He went through death and came out on the other side with a glorified body. In that sense, Jesus' resurrection is completely different from all those that rose up be-

fore Him. Jesus received a new heavenly, glorified body.

God would have the women (and us) consider who it was that had been in the grave: “Come see the place where *the Lord* lay. The One who went into the grave is He who deliberately laid down His life that He might take it again. Surely, He was Master over His death, having walked deliberately into Jerusalem and having given Himself over to the wicked Jews. He was Master over His soul so that He committed His spirit into His Father’s hands. So too, Jesus was Master over His life to take it back again. He rules over life and death. He is victor over the grave.



Fear not!

The resurrection of our Lord and Master is the end of all fears. The Lord owns us body and soul.

What fears rush in upon our souls?

Do we fear future uncertainties? The possibility of persecution? Where the next paycheck will come from? What others think of us? What will become of the troubles we experience? Fear not ye! The risen Lord is alive and knows and cares about our circumstances. He prays for us and sends us His Spirit and grace.


Do we fear the frailties of our human bodies? Diseases, heart conditions, chronic pain, old age? Do we fear the valley of the shadow of death? Fear not; the risen Lord is with us to shepherd us all the days of our lives.

Are we afraid of the righteous and holy God? Afraid that He will call us to account for our sins and sinfulness? Do we fear the judgment day? Fear not ye! Jesus is risen. His bodily resurrection is visible proof that God accepted His sacrifice in our place. He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. Surely, our sins have been paid for.

Do we fear that sin might overthrow us? Will temptations get the better of us? Will our corrupt natures sink us spiritually? Fear not ye! Jesus is risen. We have been raised with Christ through faith. And though we sin daily, God will never take His Spirit from us. None can snatch us from His hand.

His resurrection is a sure pledge of our blessed resurrection, the beginning of which life we already enjoy.

Christ the risen Lord is our Refuge and Strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear. Christ the Lord is risen today. Hallelujah!

Fear not! 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

What It Means to Be Reformed (15)

The Reformed Christian Life

The Christian life is the fifth of the five “C”s we have used to summarize what it means to be Reformed. To be Reformed has to do with life as well as with faith, how we conduct ourselves in everyday affairs as well as what we confess to believe. Reformed is a “walk” as well as a “talk.”

There is a good word that liber-

als have misused to pursue their agenda of downplaying doctrine by emphasizing conduct, but the word should not go unused because of that. The word is *orthopraxy*. Orthopraxy refers to correct *conduct*, just as orthodoxy refers to correct *teaching* or, more literally, “straight doctrine” (“ortho” means “straight” as in orthodontist—one who straightens teeth). So orthopraxy refers to straight or correct conduct, biblical practice, living uprightly. To be a Reformed Christian is to *confess*

truth; but it is also to “deal truly” (see Prov. 12:22; Ezek. 18:9).

Last time I said that eight biblical truths can serve as eight satellites, guiding Reformed believers to “live truly,” as GPS satellites direct a driver in a car. We treated two of them. The eight satellites are:

1. THE NORTH STAR: Union with Christ—the Covenant
2. The Law of God as Standard
3. The Glory of God as Goal
4. A Spiritual Attitude: Humility, Willingness, Gratitude

Previous article in this series:
March 15, 2016, p. 269.

5. An Awareness of Space: Existence in both Church and World

6. A Sense of Time: Knowledge of both Past and Future

7. An “all things” Reach

8. A Desire for “more and more”

The “North Star” of these satellites is our union with Christ and covenant fellowship with God in Him. If a believer knows that he is not his own but belongs to Christ, he will “live unto Him” (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1). Second, the Law of God is the *standard* for Christian living. It is also a perfect description of what covenant life with God actually is. A proper, positive, and deep understanding of obedience to the Law of God gives understanding of what life with God is. For this reason Jesus said that He came not to destroy the law, and David could say, “O, how love I thy law!” We can, too.

3. The Goal of God’s Glory

The third Reformed principle to guide the believer’s walk is that all his actions must aim at the glory of God. The Reformation “*sola*” we discussed earlier appears here as well: *Soli Deo Gloria*, “To God alone be the glory.” Since we already described this *sola* carefully, here we may be brief, applying it especially to our Christian life and walk.

This third guiding principle also connects with the first. Because we belong to our covenant Friend and are not our own—our “North Star”—we are to live always *for* Him, for the glory of Him who bought and owns us. This connection between our first and third

principles Scripture itself makes: “Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God....” Because He owns and possesses me both in body and soul, I am called to “glorify God in [my] body, and in [my] spirit, which are God’s” (I Cor. 6:20). God’s glory is the Christian’s aim in even the most humdrum aspects of the Christian life—eating and drinking: “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (I Cor. 10:31).

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But the Christian life is not a humdrum existence. “Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” Jesus asked (Matt. 6:25). The life of the Christian is the most profound existence in the world, and Reformed believers want to exert themselves, using all their God-given gifts, for God’s glory. Although it is not works but faith through which we are saved (Eph. 2:8), God’s eternal plan was that His covenant friends would walk in all good works, for His praise (Eph. 2:10). For God’s glory He elected us: “...to the praise of the glory of his grace” (Eph 1:6). For God’s glory He created us: “unto good works.” Jesus taught: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16).

God’s glory drives a Reformed Christian to defend truth, because

God’s reputation is at stake when truth is confessed or denied. God’s glory also drives a Reformed man to keep his own reputation pure, maintaining a good name, because what Christians do reflects on their Father, as even children in earthly families know.

Our Reformed creed defines a good work in terms of God’s glory. A work is simply not a *good* work—not in God’s eyes—unless it is pointed “to His glory” (HC, Q&A 91), contrary to those who teach common grace. And when Lord’s Day 32 asks why good works are a “must” in the Christian life, the Reformed Christian responds, “That [God] may be praised by us.”

This is the beauty, and the unique delight, of the Christian life: the more we stand in the presence of God, our Friend, the more we will radiate His glory, as Moses did when he returned from the Mount (Ex. 19). If you have seen God’s glory, no one needs to tell you too often to devote your life to making sure others see it too.

4. A Spiritual Attitude: Humility, Willingness, Gratitude

For a Christian to live a “straight” life, a right spirit is required; a proper attitude of heart must reign. Without a proper attitude, a life cannot truly be called Christian. And the Reformed faith emphasizes especially three graces that bring glory to God.

First, *humility*. We want to live in such a way that *we* do not receive praise, but our *Maker*. John the Baptist’s attitude must be mine: “He

must increase; I must decrease.” Do not pay attention to me, but to the One who made me. This is tail of the coin whose head is *Soli Deo Gloria*: “To God alone be the glory.” If glory belongs to God alone, glory is “not unto us!”

When we understand who God is, and who we are by nature, we cannot praise ourselves. When we understand what grace it was that sent Christ “cross-ward” to pay for our sin and cleanse our filth, we grow quiet. On the other hand, if we find ourselves talking too much, putting ourselves in the front of every picture, at the center of every story, and the subject of all the news, well then, we must conclude that we have not been spending time in God’s presence, allowing the light of His holiness to expose the corruption of our old man.

The Reformed confessions excel in this regard. That is, they masterfully call attention to the goodness and grace of God to undeserving sinners. They leave no room for pride. A few examples will give their sense. What am I, but “prone by nature to hate God and the neighbor” (HC, Q&A 5), “wholly incapable of doing any good and inclined to all wickedness” (HC, Q&A 8). Which explains why fellowship with God in prayer requires “that we rightly and thoroughly know our need and misery, that so we may deeply humble ourselves in the presence of His divine majesty” (HC, Q&A 117). According to the Belgic Confession, the proper response to the doctrine of providence is that with “greatest humility and reverence [we] adore the righ-

teous judgments of God, which are hid from us” (Art. 13). The Canons of Dordt teach that the “certainty of perseverance...so far from exciting in believers a spirit of pride...is the real source of humility” (V:12). The grace of God, “piously taught,” serves “to His glory, and the abasement of all pride” (III/IV:17).

This is another reminder why Reformed churches sing the Psalms in worship—to teach humility and foster a spirit that fights natural pride. “O who can his errors discern?” we sing. “From hidden faults, Lord, keep me free; Let pride never reign in my heart, and clear of great sin I shall be” (Ps. #40, st. 5). “No human power delights Him, No earthly pomp or pride; He loves the meek who fear Him and in His love confide” (Ps. #402, st. 4). “Not unto us, O Lord of heaven, but unto Thee be glory given” (Ps. #308, st. 1).

The Reformed believer gives thanks for grace—favor for the undeserving—praying that he may never be proud of his humility, but fully aware of that danger, .

Second, the Reformed faith teaches that *gratitude* drives the Christian life. Gratitude is the mainspring of the Christian life. What motivates Christians? Gratitude for grace.

I am not motivated by terror to live uprightly. The fuel that runs obedience in me is not a mercenary spirit looking for a fat paycheck. It is this: “I cried to Him in deep distress, and now His wondrous grace I bless, for He has set me free!” (Ps. #175).

Such is the Reformed faith. How many things must I know, asks the Heidelberg, for me to live

and die happily? “...the third, how I shall express my *gratitude* for such deliverance” (LD 1). Why must we do good works? asks the same Catechism. “...That we may testify...our *gratitude* to God...” (LD 32). What do we, who have become subjects of God’s grace, owe to God? The fathers at Dordt said, “eternal *gratitude*” (III/IV:15). The genius of the Reformed faith is its placement of works and obedience *after* the reality of God’s gracious salvation. Thankfulness drives obedience.

These Reformed creedal expressions indicate the fathers had a clear understanding of Scripture. Only “by the mercies of God,” already received (as Rom. 1-11 describe), can we be urged to present our bodies a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1). Only then our offering ourselves to God is a “reasonable” service (Rom. 12:1). Anything else is not *logical* (to use the Greek word translated in Romans 12 as “reasonable”). “The great things” of mercy and grace that God does through Jesus are what draws men *to* Jesus—crowds of men (Mark 3:8; see also Ps. 126:2, 3). Those same “great things,” now experienced personally, motivate the believer to devote his *life* to praising Jesus (Mark 5:19, 20). Gratitude makes the adulterous woman “go and sin no more” (John 5:14; 8:11). Thankfulness for deliverance from the bondage of Egypt’s sin—so great a misery—stimulates believers to have no other gods before God, but have Him alone as their dear Friend and Lord. That is, to obey. Also, to pray.

Third, the attitude of a truly Chris-

tian life is *willingness*. Gratitude, humility, also willingness. The Christian's spirit is one of "willingness in the day of His power" (see Ps. 110:3).


Indeed, our weakness as sinners makes us painfully aware that "the will" is not always present with us. There are times in our lives when we must obey merely because we know we must and not because we want to. Our flesh is weak, to be sure; but at times our spirits are also very weak.

But by the power of the Holy Spirit of Christ in us, we indeed are willing

to serve God. According to our new man we want to live as Christians. No mere "must" may drive us to put away gods and serve the living and true God. Our will, set free and renewed in regeneration—our "free will," that is—desires what is good and right.

So the Canons of Dordt describe the will of the Christian with all these terms: Alive, good, obedient, pliable, actuated and strengthened, fruitful, renewed, healed, corrected, bent, restored, and (yes!) free! (III/IV:11-16). The result of all that? "A ready and sincere spiritual

obedience begins to reign" in us (III/IV:16). We are "sincerely willing to live unto him" (HC, Q&A 1). "With love and delight" we live "in all good works" (HC, Q&A 90). "Without murmuring" we obey God's will. The Catechism becomes so bold as to say that the Christian asks for grace—and expects to receive it—to "perform the duties of his station and calling as willingly and faithfully as the angels do in heaven" (Q&A 124).

Ah, what a wonderful Christian life we are able to live! 

ALL AROUND US

REV. MARTYN MC GEOWN

■ Islamophobia: How Offensive is "Grossly" Offensive?

On January 5, 2016, District Judge McNally of Belfast Crown Court, Northern Ireland, delivered his judgment on the now famous (or infamous) Islamophobia case. In a victory for free speech and freedom of religion, Pastor James McConnell who, in a sermon on May 18, 2014 preached that "Islam is heathen, Islam is Satanic, Islam is a doctrine spawned in hell," was *acquitted* of the charge of "sending or causing to be sent by means of a public electronic communications network a message or other matter that was grossly offensive, contrary to section 127(1)(a) of the Communications Act 2003."

To express that in plain speech, while Pastor McConnell's sermon was offensive, it was not criminal speech, and, as such, it is (for now) protected speech. I use the words "for now" advisedly.

While the UK and Europe, unlike the USA, do not have a "First Amendment" as such, freedom of speech and religion is enshrined (to some extent) in British and European Law.

The Communications Act was originally designed to punish those guilty of sending threatening or menacing messages. For example, should a person call a post office with a "bomb scare," or send a threatening e-mail to

another person, such communications would be deemed criminal. In recent years, Facebook posts and Tweets have got various people into legal hot water—one young man in Wales was jailed some years ago for online racial abuse, for example.

District Judge McNally in his judgment outlines his reasoning:

I must ask myself the following questions:

(A) Did Pastor McConnell send a message which was offensive? If "no" I must acquit him.

(B) If "yes" was the message grossly offensive? If "no" I must acquit him.

(C) If "yes" did he intend the message to be grossly offensive to the Muslim community and those who follow the Islamic faith? If "yes" I must convict him of the offence.

(D) If "no" must he have realised there was a risk of grossly offending the Muslim community? If "yes" he is guilty of the offence and if "no" he is not guilty.¹

It would appear that the judge had to differentiate between "offensive" and "grossly offensive;" and—crucially—the judge had to determine intention: Did McConnell *intend* to offend the Muslim community by his remarks?

Although the judge did acquit McConnell, he chides McConnell quite extensively:

¹ The judge's ruling can be read in its entirety online, [http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/en-GB/Judicial Decisions/PublishedByYear/Documents/2016/](http://www.courtsni.gov.uk/en-GB/Judicial%20Decisions/PublishedByYear/Documents/2016/) (scroll down to 5 Jan 2016 date), accessed February 15, 2016. All subsequent citations in this article are from this document. Italics added are mine.

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

For my part I agree entirely with Mr. Russell [of the prosecution, MM] that they are easily capable of being construed as grossly offensive. Pastor McConnell is absolutely entitled to criticise the Islamic faith in a robust and trenchant manner, but entirely absent from this 35 minute sermon is any attempt to set out the doctrines and teachings of the Islamic faith and then to dissect them and set out in a clear and concise way the grounds upon which he takes issue with those beliefs. On the contrary, he has done nothing other than indulge in a bout of name calling. Indeed I struggle to think of anything more offensive to say about another person's sincerely held beliefs than that those beliefs are satanical and "spawned in hell." This is not just an attack on Islamic doctrine. When broken down the message he is getting across is that all those who subscribe to the Islamic faith are disciples of the Devil. This was further illustrated by him when, sandwiched in between his description of Allah as being a heathen, cruel and demon deity and the above description of Islam he preaches "you cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of devils, you cannot be partakers of the Lord's table and of the tables of devils." Indeed his use of the word "spawned" in the context in which he uses it is highly pejorative in that it depicts a sticky, messy and multiple birth.

...Having said that I am satisfied that, on either an objective or subjective test, that, he must have realised that there was a risk of offence being caused and, unfortunately ignored it. Pastor McConnell has honed his skills as a communicator over 60 years and cannot have been unaware that there was such a risk. This finding is further evidenced by his statement at the commencement of his sermon that "he could be misunderstood."

...Having considered all these matters and the particular facts of this case I have come to the conclusion that the words upon which the charges are based, *whilst offensive, do not reach the high threshold required of being "grossly offensive"*...the courts need to be very careful not to criminalise speech which, however contemptible, is no more than offensive. It is not the task of the criminal law to censor offensive utterances. Accordingly I find Pastor McConnell not guilty.

The case is interesting for a number of reasons, and it ought to be interesting to preachers who broadcast sermons online.

First, while the "Islam is satanic" statement grabbed the headlines, the main issue at the trial was Pastor McConnell's broad labeling of the "Muslim community:"

"Now people say that there are good Moslems in Britain. That may be so, but I don't trust them." McConnell appeared to label *all* Muslims as potential terrorists who want to stone infidels to death. Later, he clarified his comments—he only meant Muslims who follow Sharia law. The prosecution argued, "He was characterising the followers of an entire religion in a stereotypical way and that was grossly offensive and not protected by saying it from the pulpit. Nor was it protected by the Convention principles on freedom of expression and freedom of speech." It would appear that if we preachers keep broad-brush generalities and political commentary out of the pulpit, we should be safe.

Second, the judge recognizes a difference between an exegetical, theological critique of an opponent's theological position, on the one hand, and a name-calling rant, on the other. That was exactly my criticism of McConnell's sermon when I first addressed this subject in the September 1, 2014 edition of the *SB* (vol. 90, no. 20). If we preachers stick to exegesis and theology, we should be able to avoid falling foul of the law.

Third, the judge, in the course of the trial, had the entire court *listen to* Pastor McConnell's sermon. This was necessary to ascertain both the content and the context of what was said. If I am ever hauled before the courts, I hope that my sermon will be played in a similar manner, since it would, I hope, be a powerful witness to the truth of the gospel.

Fourth, and finally, the day is coming when a judge will be less favorable than District Judge McNally. No matter how carefully we express the truth, the truth *itself* offends unbelievers. The truth that we are all sinners, that God is holy, and that Jesus is the only Savior is offensive to the flesh. One man's "offensive" is another's "grossly offensive." That the courts decide this is itself a troubling development. A future judge may well say that we have *no right* at all to criticize Islam from the pulpit. A future judge may forbid us from calling certain actions "sin" and certain persons "sinners." A future judge may forbid us to speak at all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18; 5:28).

When that day comes, we must obey God rather than men (Acts 4:19; 5:29); we must be willing to suffer for the sake of Jesus Christ; we must count ourselves blessed for the privilege (Acts 5:41); and, in the meantime, we need to pray for grace to endure (Acts 4:29).

■ Planned Parenthood “Sting Operation” Boomerangs

Last summer, a group called the Center for Medical Progress (CMP) released a series of undercover videos taken at various Planned Parenthood facilities in the USA. Planned Parenthood, founded by Margaret Sanger (1879-1966), is America’s largest provider of “reproductive health care.” By reproductive health care, we should understand especially abortion. Planned Parenthood receives hundreds of millions of dollars from state and federal governments. Despite an attempt by some in the U. S. Congress to defund the abortion giant, that funding continues: tax revenue pays for the murder of unborn children, although that is not unique to America.

The undercover videos shocked many who took the time either to watch them or to read reports concerning them. They expose Planned Parenthood’s harvesting of the body parts of aborted babies. In them, Planned Parenthood officials describe how they could alter the abortion procedure to harvest different types of organs from aborted babies. The *Washington Post* quotes from the first video:

“I’d say a lot of people want liver,” she [a Planned Parenthood official, MM] says in the video, drinking wine and eating salad with anti-abortion activists posing as medical company representatives. Later in the video, she continues: “We’ve been very good at getting heart, lung, liver, because we know that, so I’m not gonna crush that part, I’m gonna basically crush below, I’m gonna crush above, and I’m gonna see if I can get it all intact.”²

According to the *Washington Post*, Cecile Richards, president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America, made two comments about the scandal. First, she apologized *not* for the *content* of the video as such, but for the *casual tone* in which the doctor discussed the issue. It lacked compassion, she said: compassion for the women accessing the abortion facilities. And, second, she “*emphatically defended the organization’s tissue donation program, which she said is purely voluntary for the women and does not yield a profit for Planned Parenthood.*” In other words, the issue for Planned Parenthood is the legality of *selling* babies’ organs, not the moral issue

of *murdering* the babies and harvesting their organs. To murder babies and harvest their organs for medical research is evil, whether or not Planned Parenthood makes a profit in so doing. That, of course, is not how Richards sees it.

The CMP released eleven videos in total, and faced legal battles over the release of others. Planned Parenthood’s defense has been consistent—the organization has done nothing illegal, and the videos are heavily edited to make Planned Parenthood look bad. Besides, they cry, CMP is an evil, anti-choice group, which wants to rob women of “reproductive rights” and “health care choices,” because we live in a world where to murder the unborn is a “healthcare choice,” not a crime.

Finally, in a twisted example of “shoot the messenger,” a grand jury in Harris County, Houston, Texas refused to investigate Planned Parenthood, but instead investigated David Daleiden, the president of the CMP, the company that produced the videos. The grand jury *indicted* Daleiden and his colleague on two counts, a misdemeanor charge of attempting to buy human tissue, and a felony charge of tampering with a government record. The felony charge carries a maximum sentence of *20 years in prison*. The same grand jury brought no charges whatsoever against Planned Parenthood. Daleiden’s felony charge is based on the fact that, in order to infiltrate Planned Parenthood, he used a fake ID. Incredibly, he is charged with attempting to *buy* human tissue, while Planned Parenthood is not charged with attempting to *sell* human tissue. Where there is a buyer, is there not also a *seller*? It is also incredible that buying/selling human tissue is a misdemeanor (the human tissue in question is babies’ organs—livers, hearts, lungs, etc.!), while tampering with a government record is a felony.

While I do not condone lying, justice has surely been turned on its head in this case. What Daleiden has done, if nothing else, is to *expose the humanity of the unborn*, something abortionists are desperate to hide. If they have human organs to harvest, they are human, and not blobs of tissue or mere “fetuses.” If this case ever comes to trial, Planned Parenthood officials may be required to testify under oath (so far Daleiden is refusing a possible plea bargain and is demanding an apology).

As another case in point, during this year’s Superbowl (which, since it was on the Lord’s Day, none of our readers

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/post-nation/wp/2015/07/16/planned-parenthood-head-apologizes-for-tone-of-doctor-in-covert-video/>, accessed February 15, 2016.

should have watched) an advertisement for Doritos aired that featured an unborn child on an ultrasound. The advertisement was rather silly, and the manufacturer of Doritos was not making a political point, but NARAL (The National Abortion Rights Action League) took offense. They tweeted, “#NotBuyingIt—that @Doritos ad using #antichoice tactic of humanizing fetuses & sexist tropes of dads as clueless & moms as uptight. #SB50.”³

³ <http://www.christianpost.com/news/doritos-super-bowl-ad-humanizing-fetus-ultrasound-is-his-own-son-157196>.

NARAL is not happy—the advertisement “humanized the fetus.” In other words, the advertisement dared to make unborn babies look like unborn *human* babies, and *that* is intolerable to the abortion lobby. A baby is only a baby when the mother *wants* it to be a baby. Otherwise, every woman should have the right to kill it right up to the point of birth, and in some cases, beyond birth.

Babylon is drunk with blood. Come quickly, Lord Jesus! ☞

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

REV. THOMAS MIERSMA

Patient in Spirit in Trials

Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart.

Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools.

Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this.

Ecclesiastes 7:7-10

“**S**urely oppression maketh a wise man mad...” (Eccl. 7:7), in its opening statement, seems at first glance to be a new subject. Solomon, however, is continuing to consider the end of life, our pathway to it and the need to lay it to heart, which he began at the opening of the chapter. The word “surely” in the original is the word “for” and parallels verse 6: “For as the crackling of thorns...” The translators rightly discerned, however, that there is a shift in the thought here, from one form of folly to another, which they indicated by the use of that word “surely.”

Solomon turns from the empty laughter of a fool and the house of feasting, to consider oppression and affliction. The one is vanity; the other is a sober aspect of

life under the sun in a fallen world. In verse 3, the word translated “sorrow” has the root idea of vexation or anger, whether of God or men, which leads to sorrow and grief, and, in God’s judgment on sin, to death. Death is God’s ultimate rebuke to the folly of sin. It is this sorrow or vexation under the sun that he further considers.

“Surely oppression maketh a wise man mad; and a gift destroyeth the heart” (Eccl. 7:7). The text is enigmatic, as it can be understood as referring to the oppressor or to the effect of oppression, to the recipient of gifts and bribes or to the effect of injustice. As the subject is oppression and the gift, it should perhaps be understood as referring to both. Oppression is the way of folly as much as the laughter of the fool. For by it one who is deemed wise, when he turns to oppression, is made a fool, literally made to howl, as when David feigned madness (I Sam. 21). He is brought to grief. The fruit of oppression is grief and vexation of spirit. Similarly, a gift or bribe destroys not simply justice but the heart and understanding of the one who receives it. It works spiritual self-destruction, leaving misery and vexation in its wake. The result is that the way of man bears the fruit of misery under the sun. Man, the sinner, is so often the source of his own misery or that of others, both because of sin and because of God’s judgment on it.

“Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Eccl. 7:8). The word “better” in English brings

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out the comparison intended, though the word itself is one that means “good” or “fitting.” The real outcome of a thing or the pathway of a man and his activity, including its internal principles, is shown by its end—the results and consequences. When man sows the folly of sin, he reaps its consequences. It is at the end that the fruit of a faithful pathway, a course of action, and its impulse is revealed. The beginning of a thing for man is such that the end is unseen as far as man is concerned, since he knows not the future. What afflictions, trials, missteps shall come, are hidden at the beginning of a thing. It is when the end of the path is reached that the way is seen and understood.

The result is that “the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.” The text uses two figurative words, “long” and “high,” or “lifted up.” To be patient in spirit is to be long, in the figurative sense of slow, steadfast, and enduring. Patient endurance in one’s spirit, which keeps the end in view, is the better part. The end is ultimately that which God, and not man, determines: “A man’s heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps” (Prov. 16:9). Being patient in spirit is a work of grace, for it is characterized by humility and a walk by faith that confesses, “...If the Lord will, we shall live and do this, or that” (James 4:15). It also has an eye to the true end before God, “For God will bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil” (Eccl. 12:14). That he speaks of the spirit in man and not simply patience, points to our internal life and to the spiritual principles of our internal activity. Patient in spirit is not simply steadfastness in obtaining an earthly goal. It is a spiritual virtue arising out of our relation to God, waiting upon His will and submitting ourselves to Him.

“Proud in spirit” is the spiritual opposite, rooted in man’s flesh. It is that internal activity by which a man lifts himself up, exalting himself in his determination to do something. In pride he is haughty, as if he were in control and as if it were in his own hand to accomplish his purpose. This is the way of the natural man and of the old man of sin by nature. Proverbs says of him, “Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord: though hand join in hand, he shall not be unpunished” (Prov. 16:5). In like manner, “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall”

(Prov. 16:18). Such pride is self-willed, self-serving, and covetous. It leads to turning to oppression and bribes, to taking shortcuts to obtain a goal, and it leaves misery in its wake. It leads also to anger, frustration, and vexation of spirit when a man’s way is hindered. Its end is destruction.

So Solomon warns, “Be not hasty in thy spirit to be angry: for anger resteth in the bosom of fools” (Eccl. 7:9). The anger or vexation spoken of is not so much that of someone with a short temper, though that is not excluded, but of one who is hindered in his way, quick to be frustrated, vexed and angry when his will is halted by God’s providence. It arises out of self-will and is the fruit also of oppression. When trials and difficulties stand in the way a man desires to go, he is soon angry. While his neighbor is often the immediate object of his anger, it is the hindrance in his way that occasions his vexation. His anger, then, is really directed against God’s hand in his life. He would be in control of his life, and God blocks his way by affliction or trouble. Such anger rests in the bosom of one who is a fool in heart. It is the spiritual disposition of his soul in rebellion against God and striving with him, so that he truly seeks to exalt himself above God.


The result of such vexation is the anger of one who says in his heart, “Why is God doing this to me?” It accuses the Lord of providence and strives with His will, seeking rather to have one’s own way. The warning of the text therefore continues, “Say not thou, What is the cause that former days were better than these?” (Eccl. 7:10). The questioner is really calling God’s government and justice into question and setting himself up as judge of God’s dealings. Such is the outworking of pride in the heart of the man who does not humble himself before God. When things go his way according to his desires, his pride is lifted up and he ascribes his success to himself. But let circumstances turn against him, let afflictions or trials come, and he is quick in anger and vexation to question God’s knowledge, justice, and righteousness. God is at fault, not himself. Such pride is rooted in self-will that considers not his own sin, nor that he is but a creature of the dust.

As we are tempted in the infirmity of the flesh to ask just such questions when we are led in ways of trial, the text not only gives a warning (“Say not thou....”), but also a first answer to the questioner: “For thou dost not inquire wisely concerning this” (Eccl. 7:10). This rebuke arises

in some measure because of injustice and oppression in a wicked world, so that it is difficult to see how the end can be good. Now in the verses that follow a more complete answer is given. But to receive it spiritually there is need first of all to bring to a halt our natural rebellious questioning, which is that of a fool and not wisdom. Questioning God's government is not the way of wisdom; it is not asking "wisely." The question presumes to know the end before it is reached, to discern from outward circumstances the hidden purposes of God and to examine them. It is the way of pride and a spirit hasty to be angry or vexed. It has in it the idea also that I deserve the former days that I esteem better than the present.

Rather, the way of wisdom is that of being "patient in spirit," resting in the will of God from day to day. For His ways are higher than our ways and His wisdom deeper than our finite understanding. The assurance giv-

en us in what follows in the passage is "for he that feareth God shall come forth of them all" (Eccl. 7:18). But that fear of God means, presently, that with a patient and humble spirit we walk through the trials that are sent, when the end is not yet plain and when troubles seem to multiply. It is exactly then that patience is needed, and endurance of faith in hope. It is in such trials that our calling is to walk by faith and not by sight.

Nor is it any different for the end of life's pathway. For the end of earthly life itself, which is in the house of mourning and its sober reality, calls indeed for patience in hope of things not seen as yet. Our calling, therefore, is to walk in the same manner now, in the present trials and troubles of life. This takes a wisdom that spiritually appropriates the fear of God, the reverence of faith in God. Wisdom that is rooted in the fear of God "giveth life to them that have it" (Eccl. 7:12). 

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

The Elder's Ordination (6)

Laying on of Hands: The Practice in Reformed Churches

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery."

I Timothy 4:14

Historically, Reformed churches have followed the practice of laying hands on ministers who are first ordained to their office. After the minister being ordained has been reminded of what the work of his office entails, has publicly professed that he believes himself called to this office, and has promised faithfully to discharge his office, he kneels in front of the congregation. The officiating minister and any other

ministers who are present lay their hands on his head, and the officiating minister says:

God our heavenly Father, who hath called thee to His holy ministry, enlighten thee with His Holy Spirit, strengthen thee with His hand, and so govern thee in thy ministry that thou mayest decently and fruitfully walk therein, to the glory of His name and the propagation of the kingdom of His Son Jesus Christ. Amen.¹

This beautiful and moving part of the ordination ceremony is not merely a prayer for the new minister. Rather, it is a symbol that God gives His Holy Spirit

¹ "Form for Ordination of Ministers of God's Word," in *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), 287. This form was first adopted by the Synod of Hague in 1586; it is not unique to the Protestant Reformed Churches.

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to His pastors, equipping them to minister the Word. In the Old Testament, God's kings were anointed with oil as a picture that God had called them to be king and had equipped them with the Holy Spirit (I Sam. 16:13, I Kings 1:39). When Christ was baptized, the Holy Spirit came upon Him in the form of a dove, making evident to all that Christ was God's anointed (Matt. 3:16). By the laying on of hands, the apostles imparted the Holy Ghost (Acts 8:17). At an ordination ceremony today, the laying on of hands pictures the same reality.

Why, then, do we not follow the same practice regarding the ordination of elders?

The Practice in Reformed Churches

In our last article I demonstrated that the idea of laying hands on elders at their ordination is not novel. Christians from various branches of Protestantism, including Scottish Presbyterianism, have advocated the practice, and no less a Reformed document than the Second Helvetic Confession has encouraged it.

Our Three Forms of Unity, Church Order, and "Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons" make no mention of the practice. Especially because the "Form" makes no provision for the laying on of hands in the ordination ceremony, it has not been the custom of Reformed churches to do so.

And we grant that this practice is not absolutely necessary. The laying on of hands is a sign—a beautiful sign, but nothing more than a sign. Nowhere in Scripture is the use of this sign commanded. Only when Christ commands the use of a sign (as He does in the case of the sacraments) must the church use the sign. Otherwise, she is free to use the sign, or not to use it, as she thinks best.

This brings us to the historical reason why Reformed churches have not followed the practice. Early in the history of Reformed churches, officebearers who made their decisions with a view to God's honor decided that this practice would not edify the church.

This is a godly concern. The inspired apostle Paul reminded the Corinthians that what is lawful is not necessarily edifying (I Cor. 10:23). This might take us aback: how can something be lawful but not edifying? If God commanded it, is it not inherently edifying? But the Greek word translated "lawful" indicates that a thing is permissible because the law does not *forbid* it. Paul is saying

that, when doing what Scripture does not forbid, we must not only ask "may I," but also "will it edify?" And later he admonished the Corinthians that in their worship they were to "let all things be done unto edifying" (I Cor. 14:26).

What could possibly be not edifying about laying hands on elders at their ordination?

For the early Reformed churches, the answer was twofold.

First, Rome had *required* it; but Scripture does not require it. Because the Reformed wanted to distance themselves from Rome as far as possible, within the bounds of Scripture, they would not use the ceremony of laying on of hands.

Second, Rome taught that the laying on of hands had *sacramental* powers; the very act imparts grace to the new officebearers. Rome still teaches this: "The *essential rite* (italics in the original, DJK) of the sacrament of Holy Orders...consists in the bishop's imposition of hands on the head of the ordinand and in the bishop's specific consecratory prayer...."² Not only did our Reformed fathers recognize that Rome's view was seriously wrong; they also recognized that not every Reformed convert from Rome truly understood the Reformed view of the sacraments, and opposed Rome's error. So they considered that to require the laying on of hands would be unedifying—it could perpetrate a wrong idea of the sacraments in the minds of the people.

Best not to do it, then. Certainly not for elders. The Articles of Wesel (1568), to which I referred in the last article, say with regard to the ordination of elders: "in this case also we leave the laying on of hands optional."³ And in DeRidder's translation of the decisions of synods of the Lowlands, one finds no further reference to the laying on of hands in the case of the ordination of elders.

Regarding the practice when ordaining ministers, one finds that the Reformed churches proceeded cautiously. The Church Order approved by the provincial Synod of Dordrecht 1574 declared (regarding the ordination of *ministers*):

² *Catechism of the Catholic Church With Modifications from the "Editio Typica"* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, 1995), 438.

³ "The Articles of Wesel" in *Ecclesiastical Manual Including the Decisions of the Netherlands Synods and Other Significant Matters Relating to the Government of the Churches* (P. Biesterveld and H. H. Kuyper). Translated by Richard R. DeRidder (Grand Rapids: Calvin Theological Seminary, 1982), 31.

In view of the fact that the church is only in its beginning, the laying on of hands may lead to superstition and ridicule by some, the brothers have decided that the laying on of hands shall be left out and only the ministers shall be entrusted to God and the congregation as follows.”⁴

Four years later, a national synod of the churches of the Netherlands, Germany, and Walloon (Belgium) decided that the laying on of hands in the case of the ordination of a minister was permissible “where this can be done with edification or else with the right hand of fellowship.”⁵

And the 1581 General Synod of Middelburg permitted the laying on of hands “if the circumstance of the church allows....”⁶ The National Synod of’s Gravenhage in 1586 made the matter mandatory, with no restrictions: “Finally, in the public ordination in the presence of the congregation which shall be done with...prayer and laying on of hands....”⁷ Thirty-three years later, the Synod of Dordt said essentially the same thing in the Church Order it adopted, which we still use today.

Should we change?

Having seen the reasons why Reformed churches historically did not follow the practice of laying hands on elders at their ordination, we can face the question: should we change? Would Reformed churches be wise to return to this practice?

Arguments can be made on both sides of the issue. I have time in the rest of this article only to present and evaluate the reasons to continue with the *status quo*, that is, not to begin the practice of laying hands on elders and deacons.

The first reason to continue as we are is that this has been the historic practice of Reformed churches, and it is not inherently wrong. This reason is valid, of course. No one can argue that we *must* change, that we have been violating biblical principles, and that to change is necessary to show that we are Reformed and always reforming.

The second reason to continue as we are is to underscore the distinction between the office of minister on the one hand, and that of elder and deacon on the other.

Of course, all three offices are equal in their authority: Christ requires each to be present in the church and works through each. But they are distinct. Obviously, they are distinct in that a different work is assigned to each of them. But Reformed churches have also historically made another distinction between them: ministers serve for life, until retirement, resignation, or deposition, while elders and deacons serve for terms.

This distinction is the reason why Reformed churches have chosen to lay hands on newly ordained ministers, but not on elders or deacons.


In 1990, a reader from the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia wrote a letter to the editorial committee of the *Standard Bearer* asking why in Reformed churches the practice of laying on of hands was not followed in the case of elders and deacons. The editorial committee responded:

Nowhere in the New Testament do we find an explicit instruction that hands must be laid on elders and deacons. In the Reformed tradition this practice was *not* followed because elders and deacons are installed for specific terms (usually three years) of office and not for life. Ministers are called for life.⁸

Seven years earlier, Rev. C. Hanks said essentially the same thing, in response to a question from the Hudsonville Men’s Society:

Since it [the laying on of hands] is a sign of complete dedication to the office, the fathers decided to use it in connection with the ordination of ministers for the first time, but not in ordaining elders and deacons.

Finally, the fact that we follow the practice of term office for elders and deacons, rather than life office, should also bear some weight in deciding whether or not to introduce the practice of the laying on of hands when ordaining elders and deacons.⁹

With this, we may be finished with the matter. But the arguments some have put forward in suggesting that we lay hands on ministers, elders, and deacons are at least worthy of our consideration. To these we will return next time. 

⁴ DeRidder, 64.

⁵ Ibid., 82.

⁶ Ibid., 109.

⁷ Ibid., 141.

⁸ “Concerning Laying On of Hands,” *Standard Bearer* 90, no. 6 (December 15, 1990):129.

⁹ Rev. C. Hanks, “The Laying On of Hands,” *Standard Bearer* 59, no. 8 (January 15, 1983):188.

“To Teach Them War” (9)

Knowing War’s Origin: In Man’s Fall

The Doctrine of Original Sin

In this series on spiritual warfare we proceed methodically, and deliberately so. Before we come to specific details like swords, shields, breastplates, fiery darts, enemies, battle-grounds, and crowns of victory, we need an understanding of some basic doctrines. Fundamental to the idea of holy war is the biblical doctrine of sin. Without the right view of sin, our conception of spiritual warfare either makes no sense, or is erroneous. Especially vital is the truth of Adam’s fall with its consequences for humanity.

We have considered Adam’s fall into sin as a declaration of war against God. Last time we examined the Pelagian doctrine of imitation, as we tried to understand the connection between Adam’s fall and his corrupt posterity. Pelagius taught that there really is no connection between Adam’s fall and the depravity of mankind. He said Adam’s fall did not bring sin and death into the world for all mankind, but the world is full of sin because good people imitate the bad examples of their predecessors. In his fall, Adam merely became a bad example to his children. With Augustine, we found this Pelagian doctrine erroneous and detrimental to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Contrary to the teaching of Pelagius, the fall of Adam *did* have consequences, deadly serious consequences, for all of humanity, including every man, woman, and child on earth today. There is an inseparable connection between Adam’s fall and every man. This brings us to the doctrine of original sin.

Original sin is the doctrinal term we use to refer to Adam’s sin as it is the sin of us all. The sinful state and condition in which all men are conceived and born is derived from Adam as the original root of the human race. Adam sinned when he ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That sin is our sin. On account of that sin

every man is guilty. On account of that sin every man must be punished. On account of that sin every man’s nature is wholly corrupted. That is original sin.

The doctrine of original sin is like a citadel always under assault by enemies throughout history, though from different sides. In the Christian church at present, the major tenets of the theory of evolution are not only tolerated but taught. When Christian theologians accept the theory of evolution, as many do, they then work to harmonize the tenets of it with the opening chapters of Genesis; and the results are devastating for the Christian faith and the gospel of Jesus Christ. First, the doctrine of Scripture itself is denied and the opening chapters of Genesis are no longer considered literal history. Then, necessarily so, the doctrine of creation is denied and Adam is no longer considered a literal, historical figure specially created by God as the first human being. Then, necessarily so, the doctrine of the Fall is denied and with it goes the doctrine of original sin. An *explanation* of the doctrine of original sin is necessary for our understanding of spiritual war. A *defense* of the doctrine of original sin is necessary *in* our spiritual war.¹

Original Pollution

The doctrine of original sin includes two main aspects: original pollution (or corruption) and original

¹ An example of a current denial of the doctrine of original sin can be found in *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Genesis*, by Tremper Longman III (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016). Longman, an influential biblical scholar and seminary professor, argues, “Genesis 3 answers many questions, but the primary question it answers is what is sin and why we sin as well as the question why we die. The answer is that we sin and die, not because of Adam’s sin, but because of our own sin. The Bible never teaches that we sin and die because of Adam” (71). Also he adds, “In short, the idea that we inherit a sin nature, guilt, and death from Adam (and Eve) does not derive from the Old Testament or from Paul, but from the thinking of Augustine” (72).

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Previous article in this series: January 1, 2016, p. 163.

guilt. Original pollution refers to the transmission of Adam's polluted—fallen and depraved—nature to all of his descendants. Adam is the organic head or first father of the human race. He is the root out of which the tree of the human race grows. If you ever tried to draw your family tree, you probably never made it back a half-dozen generations because the tree becomes huge. If you did and kept going, you would find that you are a descendent of Adam and a relative, by blood, of every human being. We all belong to Adam's family tree.

As Eve is the mother of all living (Gen. 3:20), so Adam is the father of all mankind. When God divided all the nations of the earth after the great Flood and gave them their land, "He separated the sons of Adam" (Deut. 32:8). That is true because every man in every nation was a son of Adam. All men share one blood (Acts 17:26), exactly because all men proceed from Adam.

The father of us all fell into sin and became polluted or depraved in nature. When Adam, the fountainhead of humanity, fell and became a fountainhead of iniquity, every man who stands in the stream of the human race stands in polluted waters arising from the old fountainhead Adam. Every man is by nature a child of wrath, brought forth dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1-3; first question of our Baptism Form), because every man is brought forth with the depraved nature of his father Adam.

Anticipating the coming of a sinless Messiah-Savior, every believer in the old dispensation lived with one pressing question, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" And the answer was "Not one," (Job 14:4). That was a problem. Which Israelite couple could bring forth a sinless Messiah? Jesus Himself declared, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh," (John 3:6). All humans are infected with the spiritual, moral disease of hatred for God and love for sin. Morally pure children who love God and love righteousness cannot come of Adam's race any more than grapes can come of thorns or figs of thistles. Humans only beget sinners. As fish never produce fowl and chimpanzees never produce humans, so humans never produce saints. The Holy Spirit produces saints. Flesh does not. Adam the root is polluted, and so is the whole tree.

Augustine rightly rejected and refuted the Pelagian doctrine. Sin is not the result of good people imitating

bad examples. Instead, every human being should say with David, as Augustine learned to say, "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Ps. 51:7). David was not imitating bad examples while in his mother's womb. As a descendent of Adam, he was a sinner with a sinful nature from his mother's womb.

The doctrine of original pollution is the doctrine of the Reformed Confessions. Article 15 of the Belgic Confession is entitled "Original Sin" and begins,

We believe that, through the disobedience of Adam, original sin is extended to all mankind, which is a corruption of the whole nature and an hereditary disease, wherewith infants themselves are infected even in their mother's womb....

And the Canons of Dordt III/IV:2 teaches,

Man after the fall begat children in his own likeness. A corrupt stock produced a corrupt offspring. Hence all the posterity of Adam, Christ only excepted, have derived corruption from their original parent, not by imitation, as the Pelagians of old asserted, but by the propagation of a vicious nature."

As important as the doctrine of original pollution is, it raises questions. How is this hereditary disease passed from generation to generation? Is pollution transmitted biologically through, shall we say, the egg and sperm of human reproduction, so that a little baby is conceived in the womb with a polluted body, and then the spiritual soul is contaminated upon contact with that polluted physical body? Some have reasoned along these lines. But is sin really a material substance that can be genetically transmitted from parent to child?

Another question is that of justice. How can it be fair that I suffer for a sin I never committed? How can it be fair that I suffer spiritual contamination unto death because of what some ancient ancestor of mine did to the stream of humanity, not one or two generations ago but several thousand years ago?

In his battle against Pelagius, Augustine emphasized original *pollution*, as did the Reformers over against the Papists of Rome, and as do our Reformed creeds. But the questions we raised indicate that the doctrine of original pollution, though necessary, is not sufficient to explain man's depravity. In His providence, God would guide the church into a deeper understanding of the doctrine of original sin, especially after the Reformation,

as Reformed theologians saw more clearly the importance of Adam not only as an *organic* head but as a *federal* (covenant) head.

Original Guilt

Original sin also includes original *guilt*, which refers to the *imputation* of Adam's sin to all his descendants, making them guilty and the objects of God's just punishment.

Adam was not only the organic head of humanity, but God in His sovereign, good pleasure appointed Adam the *federal* or *representative* head in whom all human beings were legally constituted (Rom. 5:12-21; I Cor. 15:22). Thus, God holds all men responsible for what Adam did. Such representative headship is common among men. For example, when Sihon king of the Ammonites declared war against Israel, all of the Ammonites were responsible for that declaration because Sihon was their representative head. No Ammonite could claim, "I am not at war, I did not consent to this!" All the Ammonites were at war with Israel by virtue of their head's declaration. So also when Adam sinned and declared war against God in alliance with Satan, we sinned and declared war against God in alliance with Satan.

God, the righteous Judge, *imputed* the sin of Adam to all who were in Adam. That is, God *legally transferred* the sin of Adam into the account of all those who were in Adam. The head's sin is our sin. Because Adam's sin was imputed to all men, all men are guilty before God. Because all men are guilty, all men must be punished. How?

When Adam sinned and became guilty, God punished Adam with death (Gen. 2:17). That death was not merely the separation of Adam's body and soul at age 930, but was immediate *spiritual separation* from God unto sin, so that Adam became dead in sin. God punished guilty Adam with the just punishment of a spiritually polluted nature. So also every human being, because he is guilty in Adam, is justly punished by God with death—separation from God and unto sin in a spiritually dead nature. It is perfectly just for God to punish all men with the spiritual death of a corrupt nature, because all men are guilty on account of having the sin of their representative head justly imputed to them.

Original *guilt* explains original *pollution*. Original guilt precedes original pollution. It is important to understand that we are guilty for all the actual sins we commit,

and we are guilty for our sinful natures; but *first of all*, we are guilty for the sin of Adam imputed to us. Man is not guilty first of all because he has a wicked nature and commits many sins; rather, man has a sinful nature and commits many sins because he is guilty. Because we are all legally constituted in Adam, Adam's sin is imputed to our account so that we are guilty and justly punished with the death of a depraved nature.

To put it differently, man is not a sinner because he sins; man sins because he is a sinner, and he is a sinner because he has been punished for his sin in Adam. To put it yet another way, man's legal status (guilt) is not based upon his condition (pollution); but man's condition (pollution) is based upon his legal status (guilt). Biology does not explain our wicked natures; God's just imputation does. The explanation for the depraved nature of every man is that the sin of Adam was imputed to each man. The explanation for the sinless nature of Christ, born of the Virgin, is that no sin was imputed to His Divine Person as the Son of God.


The inspired apostle Paul teaches this doctrine of imputation in Romans 5:12-21, in order to demonstrate that the doctrine of justification by faith alone, in which the righteousness of Christ the representative Head is imputed to all those in Him, is not a new doctrine. We are not righteous before God because of our holy natures or our holy actions, but because of imputed righteousness. Again, our legal status (innocence) is not based upon our condition (holiness unto good works); but our condition (holiness unto good works) is based upon our legal status (innocence). Who would object to that legal imputation of righteousness as the only way a man can be righteous before God? For God has always dealt with man through a legal head as Romans 5:12-21 demonstrates (as by one man came the offence and death, so by one man [Christ!] came the righteousness and life).

Romans 5:12ff. begins, "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Death did not pass on all men "for that all are *sinful*." By nature we are all sinful, but that is not the reason death came on us. Nor did death pass on all men "for that all *do sin* or *will sin*." All do sin. All will sin. Or do they/will they? Do infants who die in the womb sin? If they do not commit sins, then how can condemnation justly come on them?

Sinfulness and actual sins are not the reason death came on all men. Rather, "...death passed upon all men, for that all *have sinned*." According to its verbal tense, "have sinned" not only refers to a past act but to an act that has been *completed* in the past. When did all men sin as a completed act in the past? In Adam our representative head. Later in the chapter the apostle declares, "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners [legally constituted, or put in the class of sinners], so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous [legally constituted, or put in the class of righteous]" (v. 19). God be thanked for headship and imputation through it, for now we do not have to earn our righteousness, but

grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord!

When the opening chapters of Genesis are no longer regarded as literal history, we lose Adam; losing Adam, we lose original sin; and losing original sin, we lose the imputed righteousness of the second, the last and better Head, Jesus Christ. We lose the gospel. This battle is worth fighting for.

Only the doctrine of original sin can explain the wickedness that prevails among mankind, and this doctrine is necessary for understanding our spiritual warfare. It is God's doctrine, not Augustine's, and we must believe it. 

ALL THY WORKS SHALL PRAISE THEE

MR. JOEL MINDERHOUD

Ozone Depletion and Restoration

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, highly toxic gases, such as ammonia, methyl chloride, and sulfur dioxide, were used as refrigerants. Due to their toxicity and a number of fatalities in connection with leaks of these chemicals, they were replaced by chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs)—laboratory-built compounds composed of carbon, hydrogen, fluorine, and chlorine atoms. In 1928, Thomas Midgley, Jr. from General Motors synthesized the first CFCs. By 1930, Dupont and General Motors were cooperatively producing Freon (Dupont's trademark name for CFCs) in large quantities. Freon was a nontoxic, nonflammable substance that could be used in a number of industries. Soon Freon was widely used as a propellant in spray cans and as a refrigerant coolant. In the 1950s and 1960s Freon paved an inexpensive way to bring air-conditioning to automobiles, homes, and offices.¹

¹ <http://www.esrl.noaa.gov/gmd/hats/publicn/elkins/cfcs.html>, accessed February 2, 2016.

Mr. Minderhoud is a science teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2016, p. 278.

However, in 1974 chemists discovered discouraging news regarding CFCs. While the chemical appeared to be harmless at ground levels, its presence in the upper atmosphere told a different story. It was discovered that the CFC molecules played a role in depletion of the ozone layer. (At this point, it should be noted that the issue of ozone depletion is a separate issue from the more popular global-warming or climate-change issue. Sometimes the two are confused or connections between the two are made that ought not be made.) More specifically, it was discovered that ultraviolet (UV) light reacted with CFCs, causing chlorine atoms to be "knocked off" the CFC molecules. This was concerning because some of the freed chlorine atoms reacted with ozone, breaking down the ozone molecules (O₃) into diatomic oxygen gas (O₂) and single oxygen atoms (O), thus gradually depleting the ozone layer that filters harmful UV-B rays. As we noted in our previous article, the unfiltered UV-B can cause many biological problems, particularly in plants and humans (skin cancer).

While it is true that the freed chlorine atoms, released from the CFC molecules, break down the ozone molecules, eventually many of the freed chlorine atoms became inactivated when they combine with other mol-

ecules. Due to this inactivating process, ozone depletion is minimized around the globe, with the exception of the polar regions.

Scientific research has shown that while the source of most CFC molecules is found far from the Antarctic, they are, nevertheless, carried around the globe in the various air currents, and eventually are also found above the Antarctic. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, along with an increase in CFC concentration, a noticeable change to the ozone layer above the Antarctic (70°S to 90°S latitude) was observed. The fact that there is more destruction of ozone in the polar regions than elsewhere around the globe is due to the unique chemical reactions that occur in the atmosphere in these areas. In the polar regions, especially in the southern hemisphere, very cold temperatures during the winter months cause the formation of tiny ice crystals in the atmosphere. On the surface of these ice crystals, various chemical reactions occur which free the “inactivated” chlorine atoms. While on the surface of the ice crystal, the freed chlorine atoms combine to form chlorine gas (Cl_2), which then escapes the ice crystal and collects in the lower stratosphere. While in the chlorine gas form (Cl_2), the chlorine atoms are still inactive. However, at the onset of Spring, when sunlight begins to appear for longer periods each day, the energy from the rays of the sun causes the Cl_2 to split back into individual chlorine atoms. Since the ice crystals, which contain the molecules that would usually trap the free chlorine atoms, have slowly migrated to lower altitudes due to the influence of gravity, the chlorine atoms now react easily with ozone, breaking it down.²

Consequently, ozone depletion happens rapidly and in large amounts during the spring months (September and October) above the Antarctic. By mid-October the ozone hole is at its largest—covering an area the size of North America. By late Spring, the temperature has warmed sufficiently that the polar ice crystals in the atmosphere begin to melt. This has two significant effects. As the ice melts, the chlorine-inactivating compounds that were bound to the ice crystals at lower altitudes are now freed and migrate to higher altitudes, once again reacting with the freed chlorine atoms to form inert compounds. Secondly, since the surface of the ice crystals was

necessary to free the chlorine from its inactivating compounds, with no more ice crystals, chlorine no longer has a way of being released from those compounds. Therefore, due to a lack of free chlorine atoms, the ozone-depletion stops until the coming Spring.

Because ozone depletion occurs to a large degree above the Antarctic in the spring months, those living in locations in the southern hemisphere can be exposed to a higher level of UV-B radiation. Although the inhabited locations of the southern hemisphere are a rather significant distance from the ozone hole above the Antarctic, scientists believe that UV-B penetration extends also to these locations. This is of particular concern for the fair-skinned populations in Australia, who have less natural skin protection to UV-B rays.

Natural Ozone Repair

What is not ordinarily discussed with respect to the thinning of the ozone layer is the fact that there are, in God’s providence, means built into the creation by which ozone is *generated* and will actually *repair* the thinning of the ozone layer.

In the upper stratosphere, diatomic oxygen molecules (O_2) break down into individual oxygen atoms (O) when hit by UV-C rays. Many of these individual oxygen atoms will eventually collide with another oxygen atom to create diatomic oxygen molecules once again. But in the middle to lower stratosphere, there is a higher concentration of diatomic oxygen molecules. In addition, there is a limited amount of UV-C that penetrates to these levels, producing a small number of individual oxygen atoms. Consequently, at lower stratospheric levels, individual oxygen atoms are more likely to collide with diatomic oxygen molecules to create ozone molecules (O_3) than to collide with other individual oxygen atoms to make diatomic oxygen.

During daylight hours, therefore, ozone molecules are constantly being formed in the middle and lower stratosphere. This helps explain why an ozone hole that appears over the Antarctic in Spring not only stops growing but can slowly close through the summer and autumn months. However, what scientific research seems to have shown is that, over the years, the natural rate of ozone restoration lags behind the natural and artificial (CFC-caused) breakdown of ozone during the Spring.

² Colin Baird and Michael Cann. *Environmental Chemistry*, 5th Ed. (New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 2012), 41-45.

Consequently, a large hole in the ozone layer appears for several months each year.

This emphasizes the importance of reducing the release of chemicals that can destroy ozone molecules. In 1987, the Montreal Protocol—an international agreement on reducing CFC emissions—was signed by many nations (including U.S. President R. Reagan in 1988). The Montreal Protocol and subsequent revisions thereof have called for the gradual phasing out of various chlorine-based ozone-depleting substances. Many see the results of this agreement as promising, noting that since “the implementation of the gradual phase-out of ozone-depleting substances, the total tropospheric concentration of chlorine peaked in 1994, and had declined by about 10% by 2007.”³ Therefore, scientists predict that

the Antarctic ozone hole probably will not continue to appear after the middle of the twenty-first century, that is, once the chlorine equivalent concentration is reduced back to the 2 ppb [parts per billion] level it had in the years before the hole began to form [1979].⁴

There are those who have proposed that ozone-hole formation has occurred prior to scientific observations and is part of earth’s natural cycles, not directly the result of any man-made products. However, as it seems was the case in the Dust Bowl in the 1930s, environmental issues are usually the combination of many factors, including man’s use of the creation (unwise farming practices of the 1920s) and the creation’s natural cycles (droughts of the 1930s). Such is likely the case with the ozone also. For example, we know there are man-made chemicals that affect the ozone layer, but we also know there are natural fluctuations in the amount of UV rays that come to the earth from the sun, also affecting the ozone layer.

The point of this article is not to enter into the debates, but to lead us to contemplate two important truths. First, we are to contemplate the truth that the creation groans under the judgments of God, whether through His use of “natural” means or by means of man’s misuse of the creation. Secondly, and very importantly, we are to consider the truth that we are stewards of this

creation and are to be encouraged in a wise and faithful use of it.

Signs of the Times— Groanings of the Creation

As has been demonstrated, misuse of the creation can lead to various consequences. Scientists are aware of a variety of environmental issues for which they seek solutions. What we need to be reminded of is that, though wicked man will try to alleviate the world of these issues, they will not ultimately succeed. God is bringing upon the world His plagues and judgments as we progress to the final end of all things. Wicked man refuses to acknowledge God’s judgments, but rather “blaspheme[s] the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and...repent[s] not to give him glory” (Rev. 16:9). Wicked man in his impenitence tries in vain to stop the running of the four horses, the sounding of the trumpets, the opening of the seals, and the pouring out of the vials of God’s wrath. Without God, he vainly hopes to alleviate all troubles on the earth.

In the efforts of men to remedy the environmental troubles they have brought upon themselves through their wicked use of the creation, we must learn to see an attempt to rebel against the sovereign God who justly pours out the vials of His wrath upon the world. And although the world may make some apparent progress in this regard, especially as the antichristian kingdom develops, God will ultimately destroy this creation, “burning this old world with fire and flame, to cleanse it” (BC, Art. 37). Let us remember that the true and final relief of the curse is found only in the return of Jesus Christ, when all things will be made new in the new heavens and earth (cf. Rev. 21:1-5; Rom. 8:19-23; II Pet. 3:13).

Wise Use of the Creation

Although God is bringing about His just judgments upon the earth, our calling remains to be good stewards of this creation and not to misuse it or purposefully to waste or mistreat it. The fact that the creation will be “dissolved” (II Pet. 3:11) by God does not give us license to misuse or harm the creation. Rather, as this issue of ozone depletion reminds us, we have a calling to care for God’s creation. We must realize that we have an impact on this creation—perhaps not as drastic as some

³ Colin and Cann. *Environmental Chemistry*, 63.

⁴ Ibid.

would have it, but an impact nonetheless. And without responsible use of God's gifts within the creation, there are consequences. In this particular situation, the sudden increase of CFCs released into the atmosphere played a part in the thinning of the ozone layer. With a thinning of the ozone layer, more UV-B rays penetrate to ground-level. This increase in UV-B at ground level may prove to be a major contributor to an increase in skin cancer rates for fair-skinned humans in North America, and more particularly in Australia, which is near the hole in the ozone layer that appears each Spring.

Each generation ought to consider the environmental issues of the day. This can be challenging. Biased media attention, often politically driven, sometimes sensationalizes or elevates a situation to immediate crisis level, often by manipulating the data to attain a desired perspective rather than presenting a fair and accurate description of the situation. This discourages our attention to these issues and creates distrust with regard to it. Also, because of the incredible complexity and interrelatedness of the creation, scientists struggle to determine accurately the

effects of a particular environmental stimulus, further casting doubts in our minds of the validity or reality of an issue. Further, understanding that the apparent solutions to environmental issues may actually trigger an entirely new set of challenges, we nonetheless strive to study environmental issues, be aware of them, and properly engage in dialogue regarding them. We do all these things because we recognize our calling from God to be faithful stewards of all of His good gifts (Gen. 1:26-28; Gen. 2:15).

We care for the creation, not because we expect human life to last forever on this physical earth, or because we are motivated by humanistic reasons, but because we are called by God to care for it. The honor and glory of God and the good of the neighbor motivate us to strive consciously to be faithful in our use of the creation. Our desire is that the creation continue to show forth the beauty and majesty of the Creator (understanding its speech is affected by the curse) and that the creation may serve us so that we may serve God in it, in each of our callings, until Christ returns. May God give us wisdom and bless us in our use of His good gifts. ☞

CLASSIS WEST REPORT

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

March 2, 2016
in PRC of Crete, IL

Crete PRC hosted the Spring meeting of Classis West on Wednesday, March 2. This meeting was the occasion for thirty ministers and elders, traveling from points near and far, to labor for the wellbeing of the fifteen churches of the classis, and to enjoy each other's fellowship.

The stated clerk, classical committee, church visitors, and reading sermon committee all reported routine labors. A particular cause for thanksgiving to God was the church visitors' testimony of seeing "God's work and faithfulness in the churches of Classis West," in whom "unity, peace and love" prevails.

With sorrow, the Classis advised one consistory to proceed to the second step of censure in its labors with a member.

Six churches requested subsidy for 2017 in the total amount of \$266,910. Classis approved these requests and will forward them to synod. These smaller churches are thankful for the willingness of every family in the denomination to help support them. At the same time,

the resolve of these churches to support themselves as much as possible is evident from the fact that their General Fund budgets are usually higher than most other churches. Of the six churches on subsidy in Classis West, the lowest per family/per week General Fund budget is \$73; the average is \$85; the highest is \$112.

An hour or more of the meeting of the March classis is spent voting for various classical functionaries. For terms of three years, Rev. J. Engelsma was appointed to the classical committee, Rev. D. Lee to be a *primus* synodical deputy, and Rev. C. Griess to be a *secundus* synodical deputy. Appointed as church visitors were Revs. S. Key, R. Kleyn, D. Kuiper, and J. Laning, with Revs. A. Brummel and D. Lee as alternates. Appointed to represent the classis at Synod 2016 were Revs. A. Brummel, S. Key, R. Kleyn, D. Kuiper, and J. Laning, with Revs. J. Engelsma, C. Griess, B. Huizinga, D. Lee, and J. Marcus as their alternates. Elder delegates are Keith Bruinsma (Peace), Alvin Bylsma (Calvary), Chester Hunter, Jr. (Edgerton), Lou Regnerus (Randolph) and Brian VanEngen (Hull). Their alternates are George DeJong (Crete), Henry Fer-

guson (Edmonton), Steve Kooima (Hull), Jack Lenting (Crete), and Mike Gritters (Redlands).

The expenses of the meeting totaled \$8,360.47.

Classis is scheduled to meet next on September 28 in Randolph, WI.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Sister Church Activities

We have mentioned before the extensive website of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Ballymena, Northern Ireland. The following quote shows just how God can and does work through technology today!

Greetings in the name of our Lord! Yesterday at our church meeting, I met a man who works on a mission field in Kenya. The mission is conducted under the auspices of a Pentecostal denomination, but the man has become interested in the Reformed faith and so while in Moscow he decided to visit the worship service of our Evangelical Reformed Church. He said what has affected him most in terms of making him gravitate towards Reformed theology were two books— ... Calvin's *Institutes* and ... *Doctrine According to Godliness* by Rev. Ron Hanko! He read the Russian translation that he downloaded from your website! Isn't this something? Praise the Lord! His ways are past finding out!—from Russia.

Missionary Activities

The Classis of the PRC in the Philippines met Thursday, Febru-

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

ary 25. The meeting was chaired by Rev. Vernon Ibe and held in the Maranatha PRC in Valenzuela. Most of the work of classis was routine. The most significant item that classis treated was the request of Rev. Leovino Trinidad (the pastor of the Maranatha PRC) to be examined by the classis according to Article 9 of the Church Order with a view to being declared a minister of the Word and Sacraments in the PRCP. The classis approved his request and scheduled his examination for the next classis meeting. Classis will hold its next meeting on Monday, June 13, the Lord willing.

Young People's Activities

Grace PRC (Standale, MI) and Wingham, Ontario, Canada PRC are hard at work planning the 2016 Young People's Convention. The dates are August 8-12 and the place is Lake Williamson Christian Conference Center located in Carlinville, IL. The theme this year is "Contentment in an Age of Entitlement," with a banquet theme of "Bon Voyage." Speeches are being prepared by Revs. Ryan Barnhill, Rodney Kleyn, and Ronald Van Overloop. The text from which the theme is taken is found in Philippians 4:11: "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therewith to be content."

The Young Calvinists presented a "Talking Points" event for all young people and young adults, with the Young People's Society at Grandville PRC hosting the event. Led by Rev. G. Eriks, the theme for the speech and discussion was "Praying with and for Each Other." Those in attendance considered the basics of prayer in order to encourage us to be praying Christians, while also considering the calling Jesus gives us to pray with each other and for each other.

The Young People's Easter Mass Meeting was held on March 20 at Hudsonville PRC with Rev. G. Eriks the featured speaker. A great time for our young people to fellowship and grow together under God's Word!

The Young People's Society at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN recently had a timely Spring Flower Fundraiser. Those who were interested could order beautiful Easter lilies, tulips, or hyacinths. Ah, Spring has sprung, and gorgeous plants show forth the beauty of our God!

Denominational Activities

Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches met March 2 at Crete, IL PRC. The labors were routine. A particular cause for thanksgiving to God was the

church visitor's testimony of seeing "God's work and faithfulness in the churches of Classis West," in which "unity, peace, and love" prevails. Classis is scheduled to meet next on September 28 in Randolph, WI PRC; the body also voted to convene next March in Hope PRC of Redlands, CA. We give thanks to God for His care over the meeting.

Minister Activities

At a congregational meeting held February 29 the men of the calling church to the Philippine mission field (Doon PRC) voted to extend a call for a second missionary to Rev. Daniel Holstege, pastor of First PRC of Holland, MI. Rev. Holstege has recently visited the field and we pray God's blessing upon him as he now considers this call.

School Activities

Students of the Hull Protestant Reformed Christian School in Hull, IA presented their all-school

program "Singing the Song of the Redeemed," while the school children at Loveland, CO held their all-school program also, using the theme "Creation."

The Covenant Christian High School presented "Taste of Covenant VIII" in March with a delicious dinner. Proceeds assist in providing our children a distinctly Reformed education.

Have you started training for the fifth annual Spring Sprint scheduled for April 30 and planned by our Protestant Reformed Christian School in Dyer, IN? Perhaps you need to order new running shoes. Such was the case with someone we know.


Congregational Activities

The congregation at Doon, IA PRC voted recently to purchase and install a projector and screen in the sanctuary, enabling them to view sermons by that method when no pulpit supply is available. The

elders led such services with reading sermons previously, as some in our churches still do.

"God's Good Gift of Music Night" took place recently in Hope PRC of Redlands, CA. According to testimony from those in attendance, it was "inspiring and thoroughly enjoyable!" Some of the musical selections included piano and organ solos, vocal solos, many instrumental duets, and a male chorus. With the psalmist, we declare God's great name and wondrous works through music! Praise to the King!

Many congregations of the PRC answered a call to worship on March 9 for their annual Prayer Day service.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With gratitude to God, we rejoiced with our parents, **VIRGIL AND GENEVIEVE WARNER**, as they celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary on March 9, 2016. We are thankful for the many years God has given them together and for the example they have set for us. Psalm 48:14, "For this God is our God for ever and ever; he will be our guide even unto death."

✠ Rev. Steve and Ginny Steenstra
✠ Paul and Bev Neerhof
✠ Jack and Kim Warner
✠ Barry and Mary Warner
17 grandchildren
20 great grandchildren

Zeeland, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ On April 15, 2016, D.V., our parents and grandparents, **MORRY and ARLENE DEVRIES**, will celebrate their 50th anniversary. We are thankful to God for the grace that He has given them to instruct and guide us through the years. We pray that the Lord will continue to be with them and bless them with spiritual blessings. Joshua 24:15: "But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

✠ Dave and Amy Regnerus
Jared (fiancée Rachel Smits), Katrina, Alexa, Kenton
✠ Dave and Jody Buiter
Ryan (fiancée Joni VanDenTop), Drew, Nicole
✠ Phil and Pam DeVries
Callie, Courtney, Cydney
✠ Darrell and Joy DeVries
Ivan, Isaac, Wyatt, Tye, Hoyt, Job, Josiah

Randolph, Wisconsin

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"A Spiritual House Acceptable to God"

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."

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.

www.hopeprchurch.org

First Jenison Christian Reformed Church
8360 Cottonwood Dr.

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

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 11, 2016 at the Providence Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 11, 2016.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2016, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Rev. Ron VanOverloop
O-11243 8th Ave. NW
Grand Rapids, MI 49534
(rvanoverloop22@gmail.com)

Reformed Witness Hour April 2016

Date	Topic	Text
April 3	"The Great Falling Away"	II Thessalonians 2:3
April 10	"Last Days' Pleasure Madness"	II Timothy 3:1-5
April 17	"Antichrist: The Man of Sin"	II Thessalonians 2:3, 4
April 24	"Antichrist: The Beast from the Sea"	Revelation 13:1-10

Lecture

Topic

*The Necessity of Membership
in a True Church of Jesus Christ*

Speaker

Prof. David Engelsma

Date/Time

Friday April 22, 2016 at 7:30 P.M.

Place

First Jenison CRC
8360 Cottonwood Dr.
Jenison MI

Sponsor

Reformed Witness Committee
of Hope PRC

Will be lived-streamed on SermonAudio