

The Standard Bearer

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The Deception of Strong Drink

Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging: and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise.

Proverbs 20:1

Drunkennes has been a problem of major proportion throughout history. It was a problem in Bible times both in the pagan community and in the church. The first recorded incident of drunkenness involved Noah, who walked with God. Drunkenness abounds in our own society and is a terrible scourge. It is a major contributor to failed marriages, broken homes, ruined lives, and early death. The sin of drunkenness is also a problem in today's church.

That brings us to the proverb we consider for this meditation. It speaks of a number of things. The proverb speaks of wine and strong drink. It also speaks of drunkenness that leads one to fly into a rage. It speaks of wine and strong drink mocking the drunkard as they deceive him in his drinking. Finally, the text speaks of wisdom. To be deceived by wine and strong drink is not wise but foolish.

As we meditate on these things, we must ask ourselves

whether we are wise or foolish with respect to the use of alcohol. We must be instructed to be wise and not fools.



Wine and strong drink!

These are alcoholic beverages made through fermentation. All fruits and grain, if allowed to ferment, will produce alcohol. Wine refers to fermented grapes or other fruits. Strong drink refers to fermented grain, such as beer.

This is to be distinguished from alcohol made by distilling and known as liquor or spirits. The process of distilling was not discovered until after Bible times. Alcoholic drink made by distilling has a higher alcohol content than drink made from fermentation. Wine and beer have at most 15% alcohol level, because this is all that fermentation can produce. But liquor made by distilling has a 20% or higher alcohol level. Much of the alcohol consumed today is much more potent than what was available in Bible times.

Contrary to the thinking of many, alcohol is not condemned in Scripture but considered a good gift of God.

In Titus 1:15 we are taught that to the pure all things are pure; but to them that are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure. Every creation of God is pure, unde-

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filed with sin. It is a good gift of God. When the pure in Christ use these good gifts to serve and glorify God, they remain pure. However, when the unbeliever who is defiled with sin uses God's good gifts, he uses it to sin and thereby defiles it.

The same is true with alcohol.

Judges 9:13 speaks of "wine, which cheereth God and man." Alcohol, when used in moderation, brings cheer to man's soul. Psalm 104:15 indicates that wine makes the heart of man glad. It also cheered God when it was added to the burnt offering and presented as a drink offering to the Lord. This was a sign of Israel's gratitude and devotion.

Alcohol also has medicinal qualities. In Bible times, it was used to revive those that were weary (II Sam. 16:2), to dress wounds (Luke 10:34), to alleviate stomach problems (I Tim. 5:23), and to be a sedative and anesthetic. Proverbs 31:6 instructs, "Give strong drink unto him that is ready to perish, and wine unto those that be of heavy hearts." Even today, alcohol is used medicinally. It is an ingredient in many over-the-counter products.

In keeping with all this, wine and strong drink were used daily by young and old in Bible times. This was due in part to the fact that good water was not easily accessible to all. This was also due to the fact that without bottling or freezing (both of which were not available in Bible time) all fruit drink will naturally ferment and have an alcohol content.



But many are deceived!

Wine and strong drink were often abused, so that drunkenness became a problem.

There are numerous instances cited in Scripture of individuals being drunk. This includes Noah (Gen. 9:21), Lot (Gen. 19:33, 35), Nabal (I Sam. 25:36), Uriah (made drunk by David, II Sam. 11:13), Amnon (II Sam. 13:28), Elah (king of Israel, I Kings 16:9), and Benhadad (king of Syria, along with his confederates, I Kings 20:16).

Nor was drunkenness limited to isolated individuals in Bible times. The prophet Amos speaks of the rulers of Samaria "that drink wine in [large] bowls" (Amos 6:6), and the wealthy ladies who press their husbands to join them in drinking (4:1). Isaiah speaks of the same. "Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that

they may follow strong drink; that continue until night, till wine inflame them" (Is. 5:11). There was a problem of drunkenness in the church of Corinth. In the context of the Lord's Supper, Paul writes in I Corinthians 11:21: "For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken." The prevalence of drunkenness in the New Testament church is evident from the list of qualifications for elders and deacons—"not given to much wine."

The proverb we are considering emphasizes how wine and strong drink deceive us and then mock us.

How easily we can be deceived by alcohol! The word used here has the basic idea of leading astray by deception. Alcohol presents itself as the key to the good life, the key to joy and happiness. It is necessary to have a good time socially, necessary to be included in the fun crowd. It pretends to be the answer to depression and anxiety. You only go around once in life. To make the best of it, you need a certain kind of beer. The claims of alcohol are many.

But those who are convinced of these claims soon find that alcohol brings disaster. As one overindulges in alcohol in pursuit of the good life, the evil passions of the sinful nature soon are uncontrollably inflamed. With inhibitions lowered and judgment skewered, the drinker is lead astray into all sorts of sins. The proverb emphasizes that strong drink brings one to an inner rage so that he becomes an obnoxious, abusive brawler. But there is no sin that is kept from those that are intoxicated. The drunkard kills, commits adultery, steals, lies, profanes God's name, and does whatever else God's law forbids. As the drunkard progresses further into his drinking, alcohol becomes his master and brings ruin to every part of his life. How he has been deceived! What presented itself as the key to the good life has become his ruin.

"Who hath woe? who hath sorrow? who hath contentions? who hath babbling? who hath wounds without cause? who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; they that go to seek mixed wine.... At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder" (Prov. 23:29-32).

And so alcohol also becomes a mocker. Whoever skillfully leads you away to destruction by deception will mock you. He will laugh at how he tricked you. He will snicker at how gullible you are. He will insult you in your

ruin. In like manner do wine and strong drink mock those who are deceived into misusing them and are led to the ruin of drunkenness. "How easily I deceived you," says wine! "How quickly I ruined you! And in your ruin you still live in denial, minimizing the damage I have done in your life and the difficulty of freeing yourself from my clutches!"



Whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise!

We must understand what wisdom is in distinction from folly. Wisdom and folly deal with the practical use of what one knows to be reality. Wisdom is to act in harmony with reality, so that you prosper. Folly is to ignore reality and even act contrary to it, so that you fall into ruin.

It is quite obvious what wisdom and folly are in the use of alcohol.

Folly is to be deceived by wine and strong drink, so that you misuse them and thus fall under their raging powers. Folly is to allow them to take hold of your life and bring you to destruction in this life and, without repentance, to eternal destruction.

Wisdom is, rather, to have a healthy respect for alcohol, especially in our day with high alcohol-content spirits and liquor. Wisdom is to use alcohol only in moderation, so that it becomes a power for good in our lives instead of destruction. Wisdom is complete abstinence for those who have come under alcohol's power. Wisdom is to set examples for others of moderation, especially our children. Wisdom is to be careful not to become a stumbling block to others who have alcohol problems. Wisdom is to avoid those crowds that abuse alcohol. Wisdom is to listen to those who express concern that you are misusing

alcohol and tell you that you need help. If responsible people in your life are expressing concern about your alcohol consumption, you almost certainly have a drinking problem. Wisdom is to help those that have been deceived by alcohol and have fallen into drunkenness. "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1).

Finally, wisdom is not to be drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but to be filled with the Spirit (Eph. 5:18).

This wisdom we have in Jesus Christ.

On account of the Fall, all men are fools. They may have an earthly wisdom that even leads them to use many of God's good gifts in moderation, so that they can prosper in their earthly life. But in foolishness they never use God's good gifts in His service. And often they misuse the good gifts of God, so that these gifts become


a scourge in their lives. This is the case with many when it comes to alcohol. And in their folly they perish.

But in Jesus Christ there is true wisdom. Jesus Christ died for those whom the Father has given Him in order to deliver them from the bondage of sin's folly. In the power of His perfect sacrifice, Christ renews them

by the Holy Spirit to be new creatures, with wisdom to serve the Lord God and use all of His good gifts for His glory.

Let us in Jesus Christ be wise also in the use of God's good gift of wine and strong drink.

To our enjoyment.

To God's glory. 

*Folly is to be deceived
by wine and strong drink,
so that you misuse them and thus
fall under their raging powers.*

*Wisdom is to use alcohol
only in moderation,
so that it becomes a power for good
in our lives instead of destruction.*

What It Means to Be Reformed (12)

Reformed Is Being “Confessional”

As we now pass the 90th anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I remind us that these editorials began as a call to be faithful to our name and our roots. I have been explaining that to be Reformed, a church must be *Covenantal, Calvinistic, Confessional*, and have a proper view of both the *Church* and of the *Christian life*. For the sake of memory, these five essential elements begin with the letter “C.” Elders and ministers (who rule) as well as all the members of churches who identify as “Reformed” may ask themselves, “Are we truly Reformed, or are we Reformed in name only?” And, “How do we know?”

To be Reformed a church must be confessional, or creedal. That is, they officially *adopt, know* and *love, bind* themselves to and *use*, the Reformed confessions. Last time I pointed out that all churches are confessional in one important sense—they all have definite teaching positions. For example, whether women may preach, whether children ought to be baptized, and whether Jesus will return to rule on earth or not. All churches have positions on these subjects, but a truly *confessional* church has these stances in written form that the peo-

ple of God may examine and judge according to the Word of God.

—WIMTBR—
COVENANTAL
CALVINISTIC
CHURCH
CONFESSIONAL
CHRISTIAN LIFE

And a *Reformed* church has *Reformed* creeds. Without Reformed creeds, a church may lay claim to the name *Calvinist* (in the limited sense of maintaining the “Five Points”), but not to the name *Reformed*. So, as much as one may appreciate some of the teachings of the Pipers, Mohlers, and MacArthurs in Christianity, these Baptists are not Reformed. In their covenant theology, their view of baptism, and their doctrine of the church, these men stand in the line of the Anabaptists, not the Reformed. Their churches do not hold to the Reformed creeds.

Adopt, Bind, Know, Love, Use

To act on a commitment to be confessional, one starts with the *official adoption* of the Reformed creeds. Thus, the By-Laws of the Protestant Reformed Churches declare, with regard to the “Doctrinal Basis” of these churches, that the Three Forms of Unity (Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism,

and Canons of Dordt) are “the true expression of their faith...” and “in all respects agree with the Word of God...” The church’s By-Laws are the legal and official statement of her position.

Second, a Reformed church *binds* her officebearers and members to these creeds. In the By-Laws’ “Governmental Basis,” the PRC declare that the Church Order of Dordt rules in these churches. The Church Order requires all rulers in the churches to “subscribe to the three formulas of unity.” And when the Church Order demands that access to the Lord’s table be granted only to those who “confess the Reformed religion” (Art. 61), the required confession is a public, professed loyalty to the Reformed creeds—the Three Forms of Unity. So in a Reformed church, both the rulers and those ruled are bound with a solemn oath to believe and uphold the Reformed creeds.

But only to the extent that a church truly *knows, loves, and uses* these creeds, can they with integrity call themselves Reformed. Without this knowledge, love, and use, these churches may have a form of “reformed-ness,” but they deny the power of it. Especially elders are under obligation to know, love, and use the creeds. Elders ought to know the creeds as they know their own occupation. This “ought” may

Previous article in this series: December 1, 2015, p. 101.

be a call for classes to instruct elders in the creeds, for elders to make it their responsibility regularly to study the creeds, and to read good books explaining them. As to the common member, we teach the Heidelberg Catechism to our youth, preach it every Lord's Day, for which God may be thanked. Here is a reminder to elders and pastors to maintain classes on the creeds—the Canons and Belgic Confession, the Church Order and the other minor creeds. Beyond that, what knowledge do the people of God have of them, to say nothing of *love* and *use*? We all have plenty of reason to examine ourselves regularly as to our own faithfulness to the name Reformed.

As for the Protestant Reformed Churches, this is what they are and aspire to be, more and more: Reformed, genuinely. This aspiration explains our theological task at the seminary—to instill in the students a love for the creeds, an understanding of the historical basis for our faith and life, and a deep appreciation for the Holy Spirit's work in the church of the past.

When someone asks you, therefore, what it means to be Reformed, you may tell them many things, but do not fail to say, "We are confessional churches."

Confessional does not mean a "Paper Pope"

Charles G. Finney, a renegade Presbyterian lawyer-turned-revivalist of the 1800s, derided his own church's creed (the Westminster standards) as a "Paper Pope."¹ Giv-

ing creeds the status of "standards," Finney claimed, Reformed churches were as guilty as the Roman Catholic Church of creating an authority *above* the Scripture. Instead of a Pope, Reformed churches had creeds. Thus, a "Paper Pope." If Finney were on social media today, his criticisms would get some "likes."

Unlike the Roman Catholics with the pope, the Reformed never claimed infallibility for creeds. And unlike papal decrees, neither are creeds unchangeable. Holding creeds, therefore, does not deny the sole and ultimate authority of the Word of God. Being confessional does not undermine our Calvinistic motto *sola Scriptura*, that is, Scripture alone is the church's ultimate standard for faith and ethic. The creeds say as much. Read carefully the Belgic Confession's Article 7.

How being "confessional" fits with another motto that has Reformed pedigree—"Always Reforming"—is an important question. But that requires an entire article, the next editorial. For now, reflect on the great benefits of adopting, binding ourselves to, knowing, loving, and using the Reformed creeds.²

to Finney, "elevated their confession and catechism to the Papal throne and into the place of the Holy Ghost." They "embalmed their own creed, and preserved it as the Pope of all generations.... [They] have adopted the most obnoxious principle of Popery." In Finney's *Systematic Theology*, Abridged edition (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1976), xii.

² For more in-depth description of some of these benefits, see my "A Confessional Ministry" in the July and August 2013 issues of the *Standard Bearer*.

Doctrine

What useful tools to define what the churches believe and confess! Almost every important teaching of the Bible is contained there: what we believe and how we ought to live; the proper way to worship and the right manner to govern the church. You never appreciate the breadth of the confessions until you read them, including the Church Order and the liturgical forms. Creeds are the church's *standard*, that is, the flag we fly to identify both to friend and foe who we are and whose cause we represent.

The confessions make plain what the minister of the Word may and may not teach the people of God. No surprises from him with creeds binding him! The confessions give substance to the faith we confess when we join the church as members in full standing. And since the prophet says that two cannot walk together unless they are agreed (Amos 3:3), when we hear a confession of faith, we know who our companions may be.

Teaching the creeds from the pulpit and in the catechism room also instills into the consciousness of God's people that the church is governed by the Word rather than by feelings, that it's not beauty but truth that directs her. In these days when post-modernism instills in her students that there is no truth, having creeds is most valuable.

Charles Finney got carried away with himself in his criticism of creeds, and said that he preferred a living pope rather than a dead pope. He would rather a man declare truth (and a different one every new

generation) than old yellowed documents. Reading his theology, you do not have to wonder what man he would have chosen to declare that proper understanding of the Bible. Give us creeds! We prefer the collective wisdom of hundreds of theologians, assembled in God's church over the ages, setting down in brilliant documents what the Spirit has led the church to confess is biblical truth.

The old Dutch proverb is as important today as ever: *Elke ketter heeft zijn letter* ("Every heretic has his text.") Let us be safe from the heretics by embracing the creeds.

History

How often the Bible calls the church to remember, not to forget, to ask for the old paths, to learn from history's light, and to hold fast the traditions! Being confessional is the church's way to obey those commands.

We are not revolutionaries. Che Guevara is not our hero. A Mar's Hill-desire always to hear "some new thing" is not what characterizes us. Reformed Christians are happy—and blessed, too—with stability, and the confessions give stability. When post-modernism arrogantly dismiss-

es history, Reformed churches praise it. Having creeds is, as one man put it, an antidote to arrogance, the arrogance that claims, "Our ability to understand the Bible does not depend on anyone else's!" C.S. Lewis called it "chronological snobbery."

A good way to test ourselves is to ask whether we are characterized by faith, obedience, and remembrance of God's works in the past, or by unbelief, disobedience, and forgetfulness.

Warfare

The church's creeds, most of them, came out of the crucible of warfare for the truth. They were written on the battlefield against heresy. Some of them were penned, as it were, with the blood of their authors. So the creeds teach us, both directly (by what they say in opposition to heresy) and indirectly (by their important backgrounds) to be militant for truth.

This doctrine, and *not* that! This way of life, and *not* that way! The Reformed creeds teach us to live and think *antithetically*, a word fundamental to Christianity from the very beginning, when God said, "These trees, and *not* that one!"³


³ For a fine explanation of this important part of the Christian life, follow Rev.

Worship

Finally, creeds have a very important purpose in worship. They not only tell us how to worship, they become a part of worship. They both describe the proper manner of giving God praise, and they themselves give us the voice by which we give that praise.

This is the earliest origin of creeds. The Apostles' Creed is the content of many church's confession of faith on a Sabbath evening. When children recite the Heidelberg Catechism's answer to its 129 questions, they may know that this is worship!

If worship is confessing and extolling God's great name, and the creeds are faithful expositions of that name, then confessions serve the church's worship. At the heart of worship is preaching, where truth (God's name!) is spoken. God is praised by that truth-speaking!

Reformed churches are confessional, at bottom, for the worship of our good God. 

Brian Huizinga's articles in this magazine, entitled, "To Teach Them War" (beginning with volume 90, May 15, 2014).

LETTERS

Falling Out of the Covenant

In your article on Domestic missions [in the] December 15 issue of the *SB* you stated that "The unchurched are those who in their generations belonged to the church but have fallen out of the covenant." Can you please explain exactly how one "falls out of the covenant"? In my years in the PRC this has never been a phrase embraced

by the church. It is, in my mind, a direct contradiction of 1953. Words have meaning.

Jeff Andringa,
Hull Iowa

RESPONSE:

I appreciate your question. It is important that we give accurate expression to the truth.

It is obvious that you are struggling with the idea I set forth of “falling out of the covenant.” You are concerned that the language of my article brings us back to the error that our denomination rejected in 1953. It seems you understand me to say that an individual can belong to God’s covenant and then fall out. This was not what I was trying to convey. Perhaps I can clear this up by rephrasing the sentence. “The unchurched are those who are found in the generations that once belonged to the church but have since fallen out of the sphere of the covenant.”

Let me explain.

In 1953 we contended with those who divorced the covenant from God’s eternal decree of election. According to this view, God’s covenant is an agreement made with all the children of believers, both elect and reprobate alike. In this agreement God at baptism promises salvation to all children of believers. But there is a condition. And the condition is that the child must believe on Jesus as his Savior. Those who meet the condition by believing keep God’s covenant and receive the promised salvation. Those who refuse to believe break the covenant and perish in their unbelief. With this understanding of the covenant, there are many individuals who are truly in the covenant and fall out of the covenant. We properly reject such a view with its general promise of salvation as introducing Arminianism into the covenant.

The proper, biblical view that has prevailed in our churches through the controversy of 1953 and to the present is that God’s covenant is with the elect alone. This covenant is not an agreement with a general, conditional promise. It is an intimate bond of friendship and fellowship that God establishes with His elect in Jesus Christ. Within that covenant God promises His salvation to the elect alone. Because God sovereignly works faith in His elect, the elect are known and identified by their faith in Jesus Christ. God’s particular promise of salvation to the elect believer is to be proclaimed without distinction to all nations with the call to repent and believe. This same promise is also signified and sealed in baptism. With this proper view of the covenant and a particular covenant promise, there is no promise of God that fails and there are no individuals that fall out of the covenant. One cannot have the covenant salvation of God in Christ and lose it.

Now it is true that a reprobate, carnal seed is also

found in the generations of the covenant. But these individuals are not true members of the covenant. Because according to God’s eternal decree and their own willful disobedience they remain in unbelief all their life long, the covenant promises are not for them. Nor do they enjoy the salvation of God that brings His elect into the sweetness of God’s friendship and fellowship. They are only nominal members of the covenant—in name only, but not truly. They are in the *sphere* of the covenant but do not have the *essence* of the covenant. Some have expressed this idea by saying this carnal seed is only outwardly in the covenant, that is, as the covenant comes to outward expression in the world. These usually leave the church visible and wander off into the world.

But, whereas no true member of God’s church and covenant can fall away to perdition, generations can and do. Western civilization is dominated by those whose generations once belonged to the covenant of God but have since fallen out. This too is according to God’s eternal decree of double predestination. We find this happening in churches that slowly drift away from the truth and eventually become apostate. In the process, entire generations go lost. This can also happen in churches that are faithful to God’s Word. Covenant homes with serious weaknesses that are not effectively addressed often find that the children will run where the parents only walked. And within a few generations that family is no longer found in the church and covenant of God. This is what I meant by “those who in their generations belonged to the church but have fallen out of the covenant.”

It also appears that you are uncomfortable with the *language* of “falling out of the covenant.” I suppose that the terminology most often used by us is that the covenant runs dead in generations. I mean nothing else than that. But these are the “unchurched” of which the Domestic Mission Committee’s Constitution speaks as being proper objects of mission work.

And a warning is in place here. As we do mission work, we must be warned to be faithful to the truth of God’s Word both as churches and as families, lest our future generations become part of the “unchurched.” The warning of the apostle Paul in I Corinthians 10:12 is very much to the point: “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.”

Rev. J. Slopsema 

■ Gender Confusion

In Mark 10:16 Jesus says, “But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.” Because our society rejects the authority of Scripture, it is utterly confused about how to identify people. *World* magazine reports on the consequences of this confusion:

At the end of 2015, two human rights commissions over 2,800 miles apart enacted new rules that could be precedent-setting for the gender battle across the nation, including giving people the right to use whichever locker rooms and bathrooms they choose.

The New York City Commission on Human Rights issued guidelines Dec. 21 to clarify what “constitutes gender identity and gender-expression discrimination” under the city’s 2002 Human Rights Law. The new policy addresses discrimination in the areas of employment, public accommodation, and housing.

The guidelines offer several definitions that categorize people according to their self-defined sexual identity, including transgender, gender non-conforming, and inter-sex. Instead of male or female, the identity of “cisgender” is offered as “an adjective denoting or relating to a person whose self-identity conforms with the gender that corresponds to their biological sex, i.e., someone who is not transgender.”

The rules list examples of what the commission considers discriminatory such as repeated failure to use an individual’s preferred name or pronoun. Employers, landlords and businesses serving the public cannot require employees, tenants, or customers to provide legal or medical proof of their gender or name before accommodating their requests.

“For example,” the rules state, “a covered entity may not refuse to call a transgender woman her preferred name, Jane, because her identification says that her first name is John.”

Employers are also forbidden from requiring different male and female dress codes and grooming standards. Companies with male and female uniforms must allow workers to pick which uniform they wear. In addition, companies’ healthcare benefits must now cover “transgen-

der care” the commission considers “medically necessary” and “life-saving” such as hormone-replacement therapy, voice training, and surgery.

Finally, because requiring proof of transgender status is illegal, the rules effectively authorize anyone to utilize any single-sex program or facility of his or her choice, from battered women’s shelters to public locker rooms. For those who are uncomfortable with such an arrangement, the commission recommends companies provide single-occupancy restrooms and private space for anyone who has privacy concerns.”

The commission can impose civil penalties up to \$125,000 for violating the law and up to \$250,000 for violations it considers “willful, wanton or malicious conduct.”

Meanwhile, as of Dec. 26, a new rule created by the Washington State Human Rights Commission requires buildings open to the public to allow transgender people to use restrooms and locker rooms of the gender with which they identify.

The Washington commission began considering the new policy in 2012. At that time, officials at Washington’s Evergreen State College declared the state’s non-discrimination policy prevented the school from stopping a transgendered person from exposing male genitalia in the women’s locker room. Local high school students and swim team clubs with children ages 6-18 shared use of the facility with the college, Christian News Network reported.

According to a police report filed Sep. 2012, a 17-year-old girl reported a person sitting naked in the women’s sauna with exposed male genitalia. The girl’s swim coach investigated and found Colleen Francis sitting “with her legs open and her male genitalia showing.” Upon being asked to leave, Francis claimed discrimination, and school officials agreed.

The college eventually installed curtains in the locker room and announced any girls uncomfortable changing in front of the 45-year-old Francis should change behind them, according to the Alliance Defending Freedom. A local district attorney said the state would not enforce Washington’s indecent exposure statute to protect the girls because the law was “very vague in this area,” the police report noted.

“[The new rule] arguably creates a conflict with the state’s

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indecent exposure law, which otherwise prohibits exposing yourself to others while ‘knowing that such conduct is likely to cause reasonable affront or alarm.’ Or maybe women no longer have the right to be alarmed at the sight of a naked man in the women’s locker room,” blogged Joseph Backholm, executive director for the Family Policy Institute of Washington.

Some organizations in Washington are quickly falling in line with the state’s demands. The YMCA of Pierce and Kitsap Counties promised immediate compliance. YMCA of Tacoma announced a plan to spend over \$1 million to upgrade its locker rooms to “enhance privacy.” In both Washington and New York City, concerns abound over bathroom safety and privacy in wake of the transgender policies enacted last month by unelected officials.

In Washington, lawmakers are already drafting bills to counter the new rules, accusing the state of overstepping its authority when it circumvented the legislature on such a major policy change.

“My concern is the safety side,” Republican State Rep. Graham Hunt told *The Washington Times*. “There are folks who have come forward and reached out to me that have been taken advantage of, put into abusive situations because of somebody who’s been allowed access to private, intimate settings like locker rooms and bathrooms. I don’t really see privacy as a partisan issue.”¹

■ Donald Trump’s Problematic Claim

U.S. presidential candidate Donald Trump emphatically claims that he is a Presbyterian. During a campaign appearance in Iowa he reportedly said, “Can you believe it? Nobody believes I’m Presbyterian. I’m Presbyterian. I’m Presbyterian. I’m Presbyterian.” Mr. Trump makes this claim based on his upbringing in the First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, Queens, New York—denominationally affiliated with the Presbyterian Church (USA). More recently Mr. Trump has been affiliated to some degree with the Marble Collegiate Church in New York. The Marble Collegiate Church is part of the Reformed Church in America. However, Mr. Trump admits that he is not an active member of the congregation, and he

continues to identify himself as a Presbyterian. But there are serious problems with Mr. Trump’s claim to be a Presbyterian.

One problem with his claim is that he does not appear to be a member of any Presbyterian congregation. Some in the PC-USA, unhappy with some of Mr. Trump’s political positions, have called for him to be put on trial and possibly excommunicated from the denomination. Gradye Parsons, Stated Clerk of the denomination, explained that “church judicial action could not be taken against Trump because ‘there is no factual evidence that Mr. Trump currently holds membership in any local congregation.’” Chapter 25 of the Westminster Confession of Faith, one of the official creeds of the PC-USA, requires membership in the “visible” church—a local congregation. By forsaking membership in a local congregation, Mr. Trump removed himself from the church. He is no longer Presbyterian.

Another problem with Mr. Trump’s claim to be a Presbyterian is that he has made statements that demonstrate that he holds beliefs that are contrary to Presbyterian doctrine. Here is an excerpt from a recent interview of Mr. Trump by Jake Tapper that aired on CNN:

TAPPER: Well, let me ask you because one of the potential attack lines has to do with an answer you gave... months ago when you said that you’ve never asked God for forgiveness. Do you regret making that remark?

TRUMP: No, I have great relationship with God. I have great relationship with the evangelicals. In fact nationwide, I’m up by a lot—leading everybody. But I like to be good. I don’t like to have to ask for forgiveness. And I am good. I don’t do a lot of things that are bad. I try and do nothing that’s bad. I live a very different life than probably a lot of people would think....

TAPPER: Always or just now?

TRUMP: I have a very great relationship with God and I have a very great relationship with evangelicals. And I think that’s why I’m doing so well with Iowa.

TAPPER: The life you have now when you say that you try to do good, that sounds very different from decades of tabloid media coverage in New York in which some of your wilder escapades were—

TRUMP: No, I’m talking about—I’m talking about over the last number of years.


¹ Sarah Padbury, “Boy and girl locker rooms going extinct on U.S. coasts,” *World*, Jan. 14, 2016, http://www.worldmag.com/2016/01/boy_and_girl_locker_rooms_going_extinct_in_states_on_U_S_coasts.

TAPPER: OK.

TRUMP: You know—I mean, I’m leading a very good life. I try to lead a good life....

Mr. Trump’s theology is not Presbyterian. He does not claim that he has never sinned or done “bad” things. But he seems to be claiming that he is able to avoid sin for periods of time, achieving a sort of temporary state of perfection. And if he does sin, he does not see the need for forgiveness from God. This is contrary to Presbyterian doctrine, which teaches that in this life believers are never able to be sinless. The WCF states that the corrupt nature that was handed down to all mankind from Adam and Eve “during this life, doth remain in those that are regenerated: and although it be through Christ pardoned and mortified, yet both itself, and all the motions thereof, are truly and properly sin” (WCF, 6.5). The Heidelberg Catechism, which is also included in the PC-USA’s *Book of Confessions*, asks in Lord’s Day 44, “But can those who are converted to God perfectly keep these commandments?” and answers, “No; but even the holiest

of men, while in this life, have only a small beginning of this obedience.” And because believers continue to sin, both the WCF and the HC teach that it is necessary for believers to ask God daily for the forgiveness of sins for the sake of Jesus Christ (WCF, 11.5; HC, LD 51).

Although members of the PC-USA strongly condemned Mr. Trump for some of his political positions, there is no evidence of a similar outcry against his theologically unsound statements. This is sad but unsurprising, since even the media describes the PC-USA as a “generally liberal Mainline Protestant denomination.” The denomination is more interested in taking political stances supporting “same-sex marriage, comprehensive immigration reform, and the Obama administration’s recent trade deal with Iran” than it is in teaching the truth that men are sinners who need daily forgiveness of sins. Politically, Mr. Trump and his former denomination are at odds with each other; but theologically they seem to have much in common—and in at least one respect Mr. Trump and the PC-USA stand together in perfect unity; neither is truly Presbyterian. 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Upon This Rock (26)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (18)

We ended our last article with the convening of the Council of Jerusalem, which had been called at the request of the church in Antioch, specifically to decide the place of the *Levitical rites* in the calling of the *Gentiles*. The question had not *originated* in that church but had, rather, been *foisted upon* it by Judaizers from Jerusalem, who insisted that “except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). To the calling church for the work of ‘foreign missions,’ that was a matter of no small importance. The two missionaries, Paul and Barnabas, we may be sure, did not waiver for a minute from their insistence that God had spoken decisively on this

matter—first by the giving of His Spirit to the household of Cornelius the centurion, an uncircumcised Gentile, and then by the fruit He gave to their own ministry among the heathen. In their report to the church of Antioch, they would not have allowed for robbing Christ of *any* of His honor in the saving of His people. No room for compromise on *this* issue.

David, as we saw, would have been equally adamant. Bitter experience had taught him that if his *own salvation* depended on anything he could bring in his hand, there would be no hope for *him*. He says as much in Psalm 51, a psalm in which, as we saw, David reaches as it were for the kingdom of *Christ*, in which no place is left for the sacrifices that are strictly required under the law.

How far David was ahead of his time is evident from Acts 15 and the Jerusalem Council.

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And I'm not thinking now of the *Judaizers*.

Recall, if you will, what we witnessed on the housetop of Simon the tanner in Joppa. Peter's "Not so, Lord, for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean" was a kind of visceral clinging to a *shadow*, when the time for shadows was past. But what the Judaizers were bringing to the table at the Council of Jerusalem was a deliberate clinging to... *merit*. And that's something totally different.

As to the heart of Psalm 51:16, Peter and David were on exactly the 'same page.' David looked forward to the 'coming' of the kingdom that Peter was privileged actually to *embrace*. Both saw the same Christ (one from a distance, the other close up), who would accomplish (had accomplished) the reconciliation that the blood of a lamb could only foreshadow. And, like David, Peter had learned by bitter experience the folly of looking, for anything, to *self*. "Though all men shall be offended because of thee, yet will I never be offended" (Matt. 26:33). From the depths of their *souls*, David and Peter could say, "*Nothing* in my hand I bring." They were, I say, on the same page.

The Judaizers were *not*.

Clinging to *shadows*. And clinging to *merit*. Two separate issues really. The latter was the more serious of course, and it was the immediate occasion for the calling of this assembly. But the former, as we shall see, was not overlooked—either in the deliberation or in the adopted 'position paper.' It will be worth our while, I think, to consider briefly those proceedings.

First, the Judaizers. It seems that they were given opportunity at this assembly to state their case, and that some attempts were made initially to answer them. After "much disputing" (15:7), Peter arose to make the decisive case for the gospel of Christ, the truth of salvation by grace *alone*. God *Himself*, Peter argued, had in effect abrogated the Law when He "put no difference between us [the Jews] and them [the Gentiles], purifying their hearts [not by *circumcision* but] by *faith*" (v. 9). To insist now on the necessity of circumcision would be, therefore, a *tempting of God* (v. 10), putting a "yoke" on the neck of the Gentiles that "neither our fathers nor we were able to bear." That's powerful. The "yoke" is, of course, the burden of the *Law*. Which, says Peter, never *could be borne*—either by us or by our fathers. Which is to say, writes Calvin,

that the Law was not given to the fathers so that they might obtain salvation from it, and that the ceremonies were not added so that they might acquire righteousness by observing them, but that the whole Law had one single aim, that, having cast away reliance on works, they might transfer all their hopes to the grace of Christ.

All of the ceremonial laws, in other words, including those concerning circumcision, were intended to serve as *helps* only. In the nature of the case, therefore, they were *temporary*. When, Christ, the reality, came, the ceremonies of the Law, which were but shadows of spiritual realities, must fall away.

Paul and Barnabas then recounted "what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them" (v. 12). Yes, what *God had wrought*. Same emphasis as Peter's. The miracles constituted God's seal of approval, with an exclamation point, on the receiving of the Gentiles into the church of Christ without any regard to Levitical rites.

End of discussion. "They [the delegates to this assembly] held their peace" (v. 13).

Time, therefore, for the chairman to wind things up. After presenting a masterful summary and conclusion (vv. 13-18), James offered what is considered to be a proposed motion for adoption by the assembly. "Wherefore my sentence is," said James, "that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God" (v. 19). Trouble them not—that is, by imposing on them the yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear. Which is exactly what we would expect from this gathering of "apostles and elders" (v. 2), namely, a clear repudiation of the Judaizers. And very likely without a dissenting vote (confer the "one accord" of verse 25). Settled and binding, that matter now is, in the apostolic churches.

But we have not yet considered the whole of the proposed motion. "Trouble not the Gentile converts to Christianity with the *Levitical rites*." That was the first part. Then this: that those Gentile converts "abstain... from things strangled and from blood" (v. 20). Straight out of... *Leviticus*.

That might look on the surface like a compromise. Or a concession of sorts. It was not. Rather, it was the assembly's recognizing, and dealing with, the reality of

that second ‘clinging,’ the clinging to shadows, when the time for shadows was past.

We take for granted that James did not, so to speak, pull this second part of his proposed motion out of the air. It was, rather, a summary statement of a concern he must have heard repeatedly expressed on the floor of this assembly, namely, What about Jewish *sensitivities*? That comes out in the *ground* that James offered for the second part of the motion: “For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day” (v. 25).

“In every city.” Not, you see, just in *Jerusalem*, with its thousands of Jews. But in every city of any importance in the Roman Empire. There was in them all a Jewish presence. And, more often than not, a *synagogue*. Where *Moses* was preached. And where Paul also would preach when he first arrived on the scene of a potential new field of labor. In every newly-organized Christian church in Gentile lands, therefore, there would be a number of *Jewish* converts—Jews whose former church home was the *synagogue*, where they had been religiously instructed in Mosaic *law*. What, then, had they heard read to them from Sabbath to Sabbath? Well, among other things, this: “And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of strangers that sojourn among you, that eateth any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eateth blood, and will cast him off from among his people” (Lev. 17:10). Perhaps because of the central place of blood in what we might call the ‘Christology’ of the Old Testament, this prohibition, among all the food laws, was the most prominent. And it became so also in the minds of the saints of old. It was *ingrained* in their minds, after being part of Jewish life for *centuries*! To the point where the consuming of blood and the eating of things strangled (which would therefore have had the blood yet in them) would be *abhorrent* to them!

This very Council, as we saw, was prepared to give formal recognition to the truth that all of the old Levitical regulations were *dead*. James, however, reflecting the mind of the assembly, understood well that it would take some time for many Jewish Christians to become accustomed to the new state of affairs. Especially that regarding *blood*! With commendable foresight, the Jerusalem Council cautioned the Gentile churches to be careful, in their exercise of what could for them be considered

their *Christian liberty*, not to give unnecessary *offense*. “Commendable foresight,” I say, because Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians (chapters 8 and 10) reveals how easy it is for those who consider themselves to be in possession of a higher level of ‘knowledge’ about such things, to flaunt their liberty. “Take heed,” Paul warned the Corinthians, “lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak” (10:9).

In this second part of the proposed motion at the Council of Jerusalem, the assembly was looking out for the spiritual welfare of the churches.

But... I’m afraid I have digressed. The point is that the time for shadows was past. And it was so hard to let them go!

How hard? And for how long? Just one more example, if I may.

Some years later, Paul returned to Jerusalem, at the conclusion of his third missionary journey. A meeting with James and the elders of the church in Jerusalem was a high priority (21:17-18). After hearing, and surely rejoicing in, the missionary’s report of what “God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry” (v. 19), the elders had some advice for him. The advice itself, which had to do with how Paul might be able to gain the confidence of the church in Jerusalem, is not our concern here. What *is* our concern is the *reason* for it. Listen to the elders: “Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are *all zealous of the law*: and they are informed of *thee*, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to *forsake Moses*...” (vv. 20-21). Zealous of the law. Which means this, that still very much alive and well among the Jews in Jerusalem was a *clinging to the shadows*. And, with it, a *suspicion of Paul*. Our first reaction might be *disbelief*. Can it really be true that they *still* do not have it all straight? However, though their clinging to the Jewish customs cannot be said to be entirely without defect, we must nevertheless not forget the *times*. Herman Hoeksema, in an old *SB* article, explains it thus:

But we must remember that those days were a period of transition from the old dispensation into the new, from the bondage to the law into the liberty of the free sons of God. The child had grown into manhood, but could hardly become accustomed to his new freedom. Already it had required a special revelation to convince the church


that salvation was for the Gentiles as well as for the Jews. But even now, it was not easy completely to break away from the ordinances of the Old Testament, the law of Moses.

We ought also, however, to be clear on exactly what that “defect” in their understanding was. Interestingly, concerning those thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who were zealous for the law, William Smith writes that “their understanding of the gospel had not kept pace with their numbers.” Ah yes, their understanding of the *gospel*. Their zeal for the law was not simply a matter of their wishing to continue, for example, to distinguish between meats, clean vs. unclean, in their diets. They could feel perfectly free to do *that*. It must have gone *beyond* that, to the point where compliance with the old practices was considered to be somehow necessary still for a godly walk. And their suspicion of Paul cannot be said to be simply a matter of *misinformation*. They must have *known* that Paul taught that it was the *coming of Christ* that had put a ‘period’ to the ceremonial laws of the old dispensation. But they could not rid themselves of the

notion that to abandon the Mosaic law was a *defection from* and a *despising of the law*.

So far from despising the law, Paul was in fact *elevating* it, to heights that they did not yet comprehend. What they could not yet get a hold of was that, as Calvin put it, “it is a very different thing from *defection* from the Law, to show its proper *aim*, that, with *figures* coming to an end, the *spiritual truth* may always prevail” (emphasis added).

And I do not think it is too much to say, that it was exactly *that*, that David *was* getting a hold of in Psalm 51. “Thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering” (v. 16). And that is the point here. We need but to think of the many thousands of Jews in Jerusalem who a quarter of a century *after Pentecost* were still struggling with that concept, to see how far David was ahead of his time.

(Not quite finished with this subject. Will return to it, D.V., after Rev. Miersma completes, in our shared rubric, another unit in his excellent series on the book of Ecclesiastes.) 

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES...IN COMMON

REV. WILBUR BRUINSMA

Methods of Local Mission (Evangelism) Work

This is the second article presented by the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) encouraging local churches to be more involved in mission work in the area of their congregations. I was asked by the DMC to write because I have been involved personally in this type of work in our outreach in the Pittsburgh area. In this article I intend to set forth a few suggestions regarding the method of local mission work. Of course, what is suggested is not meant to be the sole way of performing this work. There are, no doubt, other methods that have been used effectively to begin a work in a new area somewhat removed from the local church.

That local missions is a legitimate work is indeed scriptural. When Paul labored in Galatia on his first

missionary journey, he established a number of churches in close proximity to each other. Antioch in Pisidia was 85 miles away from Iconium, then another 30 miles to Lystra and another 30 to Derbe. We cannot claim that it was more than God’s providential guidance that directed Paul to these cities, but, even if this were true, there was not one isolated church that began in this region of Asia Minor. Paul labored immediately to establish several churches in Galatia. The same was true in Macedonia. Paul labored in Thessalonica, Berea, and Philippi. After Paul had established the church in Thessalonica, this church took seriously the call to spread the gospel throughout the region. We read in I Thessalonians 1:8, “For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.” The labors of this congregation extended far beyond the locale, that is, the close proxim-

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ity of their church. In fact, their labors extended beyond the city of Thessalonica itself. When the apostle Paul labored in Ephesus, we find that he used this church as a hub to spread the gospel to Asia. Some scholars say that a number of the churches whom Jesus addressed in Revelation were the result of labors performed by Paul in the area of Asia.

All this only makes sense! Although a church can exist alone in an isolated area of our country, it is far better to have another church or number of churches nearby to share in fellowship and mutual labors with one another. I know the saints in Pittsburgh enjoy such fellowship when a group of saints travel to Pittsburgh to visit and worship with us (such as the young people of Georgetown PRC recently did). How much better to have another congregation of like faith nearby! Besides, it is the *calling* of the local church to sound out the Word of the Lord to places within reach of the church.

That being said, however, we need to examine the “nitty-gritty” question of *how* this can be done. It may sound noble to state *theoretically* that we ought to be involved in such labor. But when it comes right down to it, *how* to perform what we must do is not so easy a matter. Believe me, I know! This is exactly the struggle I have had these past years on the mission field! Yes, it is a given, that the church is called to preach the gospel. But there must be people present who will listen to the preaching. A preacher cannot simply go to a place, rent a building, and then start preaching to four walls. There must be ways to attract people to the preaching. There must be ways to stimulate interest in an area that will eventually bring people under the preaching of the gospel.

What can be done?

First of all, once having chosen a place to labor, the church must be determined to *labor*. We cannot plant a seed in parched ground and expect it to grow with a minimal amount of work, maybe a little water now and then. We need to cultivate the soil, fertilize it, and keep the ground wet—all that in preparation for the seed to grow. Then after it is sprouted, we continue nurturing that plant. A local church cannot expect a mission labor to grow and flourish by putting an ad in a newspaper (a method that has proven ineffective in today’s society) or hanging a few fliers here and there advertizing a lecture. The church needs to target an area with a plan in mind.

The local church through its Evangelism Committee needs to enlist the help of the members of the church, go into a city or community, and say, “Here we are! We are enthused about the gospel we as a church preach and teach, and we want to share it with you.” The church must show a sustained presence in an area. This means that the members of the church should exhibit an interest in the work. They must also learn to interact properly with those who are new to the Reformed faith. There is no need to be timid about the precious truths God has given us by His grace. Yet we must be wise in dealing with others who have little or no knowledge of Scripture.

A suggestion sometimes made is a good one: start with a midweek Bible study group. Paul was involved in much more than public preaching. He explains to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:20, “And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have showed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house.” A mass mailing or two in a certain city or community usually results in attracting a small number of people desirous of a Bible study. This is a good start—but only a start. Advertizing is then needed. Consistent (perhaps daily) radio advertisements, not simply announcing one particular event, but consistent advertizing of the simple truths of Scripture, especially the doctrines of grace. With this, it should be stated that this is sponsored by the church on behalf of the Bible study group that meets in such and such a place.

Social media plays a huge role today. I do not bother my head with it, but I am told I do not because I am old. Perhaps that is true. The younger generation, however, is big into social media. A church website ought to be coordinated with social media, a blog, and search engines targeted toward that particular community in which the church works. The Pittsburgh Fellowship has developed over the years a mailing list that includes only people within reachable distance of Pittsburgh. Quarterly newsletters are sent out informing these contacts of activities and events sponsored by our Fellowship. Correspondence either by mail or email is an effective means of remaining connected with people in the area, even if they do not attend the Bible study.

A midweek Bible study can be used as a springboard to launch other functions in an area. Lectures and seminars ought to follow. Seminars are more personal and give

time for much more interaction than a lecture, but lectures (speeches) do have their place. These lectures must be aimed at the level of those who are unfamiliar with doctrinal truths. The truths may be woven into the fabrics of our lives and other believers, but most people are not familiar with the Bible much less the great doctrines of Scripture. The truth must be made simple, without assuming that the people we are teaching understand all the theological terminology so common to us. The topics of the lectures or seminars must be of interest to the community or the families with whom we already have made contact. They must be distinctively Reformed, but not necessarily controversial. Remember that the goal is to teach the truth of God's Word to people who desire it but do not understand it in all its facets.

Neither ought the local church in her work become discouraged if the attendance at a lecture or seminar, or even the Bible study, is small. We live in the last days. We are not going to attract great crowds of people. Do not try to compensate for small numbers by inviting the whole congregation or several of our churches to attend the lecture. Keep it local and have only a few families from the church attend, in order that those attending for the first time do not feel uncomfortable. Also, avoid the extremes: do not ignore, but do not suffocate those who are visiting for the first time.

It is important that such mission work never come to a standstill. The local church ought always to be looking for opportunities to preach or teach in the community. Perhaps there is a rest home or retirement village that holds chapels. Volunteer to have the church's name on the list and provide speakers for the chapels. Perhaps other study groups can be formed: maybe a Bible study for women in the morning, or a young adults group that could study issues they are struggling with from the point of view of God's control over all things.

Although the social aspect of the work is not essential, nevertheless, it is good to get to know the people with whom we labor. Perhaps a dinner can be planned where all of them attend, or a picnic during the summer months. Maybe a choir of the local church can perform in the area of labor. The choir may be larger than the audience, but that should not deter the church from sponsoring such events on a regular basis. And all the while these events ought to be advertized along with the


normal advertizing of the church's presence. Personal contacts by members of the church and/or the Evangelism Committee are important.

I realize that all of this takes time. Who has the time? We are so busy with our own affairs. The answer to this is already found in the excuse. Maybe we need to take some time out for the things of the kingdom of God. Mission work always takes time. The work can be spread out among members of the church so that it takes less time for each family. But the church truly devoted to this work will take the time to do it. The minister, elders, evangelism committees, and the members ought all be committed to the work. There may come a time when the church needs specialized care of the work. Perhaps the work requires additional ministers or even a missionary. Then it is time to request the aid of the DMC. The DMC and possibly a missionary are ready and willing to help in this regard. This does not mean that the church is now finished with her work. The DMC and/or the missionary will only assist in the church's continued labors. Always the church should be busy in the work of missions.

Finances? Yes, a work of this sort does take money as well. But God's saints are always willing to give to a worthy cause. We see how our schools flourish by the generous giving of people. The causes of God's kingdom in our churches do not languish. If a carefully laid out plan is published to the congregation with the request for financial assistance, the needs of this local mission work can be met.

These are some practical suggestions regarding the methods of carrying out local mission work. There is a warning we need to heed, however. Mission work is not merely a mechanical process. It is not true that after putting all of these suggestions into use, the inevitable result will be a large group of people ready to call a man to preach on the Lord's Day and to organize. If that is what we expect, we set ourselves up for disappointment. This kind of work does not necessarily bring instantaneous results. Neither will it result in a large body of people. It is God, after all, who gives the increase. It is God who calls His people from darkness to light. The church, however, is called by God faithfully to sow the seed. A body of people ready to organize into a church does not drop from the skies into our laps (very often). The point

is: are we faithful as churches in the calling to preach the gospel to all creatures? Are we faithful in sharing what God has given us with others? As my father reminded

me when I was a young man, “You see work? Do it!” God will bless us when we are faithful. 

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (14)

What the Bible Says about the Bible: The New Testament Epistles

Introduction

In our most recent articles we have been considering Scripture’s self-authentication, that is, Scripture’s own testimony to its divine inspiration and infallibility. For centuries the self-witness of Scripture has been the linchpin in the church’s argument for Scripture’s inspiration and authority. If Scripture disavowed all claim to authority or made no claim at all, Christians would have no basis for their contention that Scripture is the Word of God. But since Scripture does make this claim—makes it clearly, pervasively, and forcefully, the Christian church has echoed the claim. Scripture is the Word of God as Scripture itself alleges.

Last time we examined the self-witness of the gospel accounts and the book of Acts. We demonstrated that Jesus viewed the Scriptures as the Word of God. Every part of Scripture and Scripture in its entirety is God’s Word. For Him, Scripture was the ultimate court of appeal. All His instruction, both His positive presentation of the gospel and His polemic against error and false teachers, He grounded in Scripture. What His disciples must believe, as well as what they must reject, is determined by the revelation of God in the sacred Scriptures.

In this article we want to conclude our examination of what the Bible says about itself by considering the testimony of the New Testament epistles. How did Paul and Peter, James and John view Scripture? What does their

use of Scripture reveal about their view of Scripture? What was their attitude towards the Old Testament? And how did they regard their own writings?

Basically, the New Testament epistles fall into two main categories. There are the Pauline epistles, that is, those epistles written by the apostle Paul. Some of these epistles were written to churches as, for example, the epistles to the Corinthians, the Galatians, and the Ephesians. Other of his epistles Paul addressed to individuals, like Philemon. Included in Paul’s epistles addressed to individuals are those addressed to pastors: I and II Timothy and his letter to Titus. These epistles are commonly known as the Pastoral epistles.

In addition to the Pauline epistles, there are the Catholic or General epistles. The later are really all the non-Pauline epistles of the New Testament, most of which were written either by one of Jesus’ disciples or by one of His brothers. The one exception is the epistle to the Hebrews, the human writer of which is unknown to us.¹ Among the General epistles, Peter and John, the human writers of the epistles that bear their names, were both

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

Previous article in this series: June 2015, p. 398.

¹ Interestingly enough, the Belgic Confession of Faith, Article 4 ascribes the Epistle to the Hebrews to Paul. When mentioning the books that belong to the New Testament, the Belgic Confession says: “...the fourteen epistles of the apostle Paul, viz.: one to the Romans, two to the Corinthians, one to the Galatians, one to the Ephesians, one to the Philippians, one to the Colossians, two to the Thessalonians, two to Timothy, one to Titus, one to Philemon, and one to the Hebrews....” Although I happen to believe that a good argument can be made that Paul is the human writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the fact of the matter is that the epistle is anonymous.

disciples of Jesus. James and Jude, the human writers of the two epistles that bear their names, were Jesus' brothers.

Earlier we gave special consideration to the two classic passages of the New Testament that set forth the doctrine of biblical inspiration: II Timothy 3:15-17 and II Peter 1:19-21. The liberals characteristically dismiss the doctrine of divine inspiration with a wave of the hand, alleging that it is based on a couple of outdated "proof-texts," by which they mean the passages in II Timothy 3 and II Peter 1, rather than on the overall testimony of the New Testament. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, the careful reader of Scripture cannot but be impressed with its pervasive testimony to the divine inspiration of the Scriptures. As pervasive as that testimony is throughout Scripture generally, so pervasive is it in the New Testament epistles specifically.

The Testimony of the Epistles with regard to the "Scriptures" of the Old Testament

To begin with, the apostles use the same terms and categories to refer to the Old Testament Scriptures as did Jesus and the Jews of Jesus' day. They refer to the same tripartite division of the Old Testament: "the law, the prophets, and the Psalms." They quote "the Psalms," in such passages as I Corinthians 14:26; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16; James 5:13. They cite "the prophets," in such passages as Romans 1:2; 3:21; 16:26; Ephesians 2:20; Hebrews 1:1; James 5:10; I Peter 1:10; II Peter 3:2. And they appeal to "the law," in such passages as Romans 2:12-27; 3:21; 7:1-9, 12, 14, 16, 21-25; 10:4, 5; 13:8, 10; I Corinthians 7:39; 9:8, 9; Galatians 3:17-19; Hebrews 7:5, 12, 16, 19, 28; James 2:8-12; 4:11. It is true that Paul often takes a negative view of the law, when he is contending against those who trust in their own works of obedience to the law for their righteousness before God. But never once does Paul question whether the law is God's holy Word, the perfect expression of His righteous will. For Paul the law is "holy, and just, and good" (Rom. 7:12). It is holy, just, and good because the law, like the Psalms and the prophets, is the Word of God.

In addition, the apostles refer to "the scriptures" as a final court of appeal and as an ultimate authority. In

Romans 1:2 the apostle Paul refers to the gospel as that which God "had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures." In demonstration of the truth that Abraham was justified not by works but by faith, Paul asks in Romans 4:3, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness." In I Corinthians 15:3 and 4 the apostle teaches that Christ died for our sins and rose again the third day "according to the scriptures." And in Galatians 3:22, Paul says that "the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe." (Confer also such passages as Rom. 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; 16:26; Gal. 3:8, 22; 4:30; I Tim. 5:18; II Tim. 3:16; James 2:8, 23; 4:5; I Pet. 2:6; II Pet. 1:20; 3:16.) Like Jesus, the apostles often introduce their quotations of the Old Testament with phrases that imply its ultimate authority, such as "It is written." Paul does this in Romans 1:17, where he quotes Habakkuk 2:4: "For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith *as it is written*, The just shall live by faith" (emphasis added). He does the same thing in Romans 3:4, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; *as it is written*, That thou mightiest overcome when thou art judged" (emphasis added). Here Paul is quoting Psalm 51:4. The fact that in Psalm 51:4 "it is written" settles the issue in the mind of the apostle. There are many more instances of this same sort of evidence.

A Testimony to the Historicity of the Old Testament

In recognizing the authority of the Old Testament, the New Testament epistles confirm the truthfulness of the history and historical figures that are recorded in the Old Testament. They do not find ways to explain away that history: popular myth; tales of the neighboring nations that gradually became incorporated into Jewish folklore; stories invented to make provocative the truths (lessons) they intend to teach. Nothing of the sort. On the contrary, without embarrassment or apology, the apostles in the New Testament cite persons and events out of the Old Testament in support of or as illustrating particular truths that they are defending. All the while it is presumed that these people really existed, that what is recorded of their history really happened, that therefore they were really real—to speak redundantly.

To illustrate this point, Jude makes reference to Adam and to Enoch (Jude 14), as well as to Cain (Jude 11), by implication to Noah (Jude 14 and 15), and distinctly to Moses (Jude 9). The apostle Paul makes reference to Adam and to Eve in I Timothy 2:13-15. In II Corinthians 3:13 he speaks of Moses putting a veil over his face because “the children of Israel could not stedfastly look” on his face after he came down from the mount after talking with God face to face. Noah is referred to by the apostle Peter in both of his epistles (I Pet. 3:20, 21; II Pet. 3:5-7). Balaam, the prophet whose ass spoke to him, is mentioned in two different places in the New Testament: Jude 11 and Revelation 2:14. Korah, who along with Dathan and Abiram, were swallowed up whole by the earth that opened up beneath them—they, their wives and children, their livestock, and all their possessions—are mentioned by name in Jude 11. The patriarch Abraham and his wife Sarah are mentioned time after time in the New Testament epistles: Romans 4:1-19; 9:7-9; 11:1; II Corinthians 11:22; Galatians 3:16-29; 4:22-31; James 2:21-23; I Peter 3:6; Hebrews 2:16; 6:13; 7:1-9; 11:8-17. Job is referred to in James 5:11 and Elijah in the same chapter (v. 17). David, the great king and ancestor of the Lord Jesus, is referred to repeatedly, as in Romans 1:3; 4:6; 11:9; II Timothy 2:8; Hebrews 4:7; 11:32; Revelation 3:7; 5:5; 22:16. Nowhere in the epistles is there ever any suspicion cast on the history that is recorded in the Old Testament.

In more than one place the apostles defend the relevance and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures for the instruction of the New Testament church. In Romans 15:4 Paul says, “For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” In I Corinthians 10:11 the apostle calls upon New Testament saints to view the Old Testament people of God as *our* examples, with the result that what happened to them happened for *our* instruction. “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.” Clearly, the apostle’s view of the enduring value of the Old Testament Scriptures rests on the fundamental truth that those Scriptures are inspired of God and therefore are authoritative in every age.

The Apostles’ Testimony Concerning Their Own Writings

Just as the apostles honor the inspiration and authority of the Old Testament Scriptures, so do they recognize the inspiration and authority of their own writings. In Colossians 4:16 Paul requires that his epistle to the Colossians “be read also in the church of the Laodiceans.” It is true that he requires that the non-canonical epistle he wrote to the Laodiceans also be read in the congregation at Colosse. Like the epistle to the Colossians, the epistle to the Laodiceans, though not included in the New Testament Scriptures, was written with apostolic authority. Then, in addition to that, the epistle to the Colossians was also divinely inspired. He requires that his epistle be read “in the church.” Undoubtedly, the reference is to the public, corporate worship of the congregation on the Lord’s Day. Clearly, that the epistle was to be read during a worship service could only be due to the fact that the apostle regarded what he had written to be divinely inspired Scripture. We find a similar injunction in I Thessalonians 5:27, “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.” “All the holy brethren” certainly includes the members of “the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ” (I Thes. 1:1). But “all the holy brethren” would seem to include many more than only the members of the congregation at Thessalonica. At the very least, it would include “all the holy brethren” in Macedonia and Achaia, the region of Greece in which Thessalonica was found.

In the congregation at Corinth there were those who arose during the church’s public worship services claiming to be prophets with messages from God for the congregation. Paul says of them in I Corinthians 14:37, “If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.” No one proclaiming himself to be a prophet sent from God might deliver a message in conflict with what the apostle had written in his epistles. The obvious implication is that Paul regarded what he had written to be the infallibly inspired Word of God.

So convicted was the apostle Paul that he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and that his writings belonged to the authoritative Scriptures, that he even called for the church to discipline those who disregarded or

disobeyed what he wrote. He writes in II Thessalonians 3:14 and 15, “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.” Clearly, the apostle’s instruction to the church here is based on Paul’s conviction that the words that came from his pen were the very Word of God.

And then there is Peter’s commendation of Paul’s writings in II Peter 3:15 and 16:

And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation: even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things,

in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Paul wrote some things “hard to be understood,” to be sure. But that does not take away from the fact that what he has written, he has written “according to the wisdom given unto him” by God, with the result that “all his epistles” are included in the Bible along with “the other scriptures.”

All in all, there can be no doubt that like the Lord Jesus, the apostles regarded both the Old Testament Scriptures and the New Testament Scriptures as the Word of God—the Word of God in the words of men.



BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor

Spiritual Warfare: A Biblical & Balanced Perspective, by Brian Borgman & Rob Ventura (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014). [Reviewed by Bill Leep, Jr.]

We are in a war of the most serious nature. As Reformed Christians, we have a tendency to ignore or downplay this reality, probably due to fear. Not the fear of being caught up in a war—far from it. More often it is the fear of the opposite extreme. That is to say, we may be guilty of the error of ignoring the power of the demonic realm to offset the error of an unhealthy interest in them. This unhealthy interest includes various errors: that of people ‘binding’ or ‘rebuking’ demons; or that of mapping a demon’s physical location; or even that involving those who may have formulas for exorcism. None of these are biblical concepts. But this overly cautious handling of the issue can cause us to take the opposite extreme of ignoring or downplaying the power of the spiritual realm. What we fail to realize is that taking this opposite extreme supports a naturalistic worldview. A worldview that says there is no spiritual realm is a

view that has foundations firmly rooted in evolutionary theory—it says there is no outside force in the universe; what you see is all there is. As balanced Christians, we need to avoid errors of extremes. Martin Luther once noted that we (Christians) are often like a drunk trying to get on his horse. First we fall off one side, only to climb up and fall off the other. On a topic this important we cannot afford to fall off either side.

Spiritual warfare. As soon as I saw that in the title of this book, I was intrigued and wanted to read it, probably due to the type of business that I am in. I have had many opportunities to travel overseas to some very spiritually dark areas of the world. The biggest shock I have found was that there is a tangible difference in the “spiritual atmosphere” of some of the countries I have visited. These countries have much less of a Christian presence than what we are blessed with in my area (West Michigan). Ever since I first experienced that, I have been looking for good writings on this subject. Unfortunately, I have been unable to find good Reformed material, so I was eager to see what this book had to say. I was not disappointed. I found this book to be true to its title, a biblical and balanced perspective on the subject.

The book is primarily a mini-commentary on Ephesians 6:10-20, the main passage in the Bible dealing directly with spiritual warfare. This is where Paul exhorts

Mr. Leep is a member of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

us to put on the armor and “stand against” demonic forces. The most immediate and obvious thing that is pointed out is that in standing against our enemy, we are not to be on the offensive, actively attempting to ‘bind’ demons. Rather, we are to face this real and present danger—a force that is more powerful than we are—by relying on the power of Christ, who is infinitely more powerful than the devil and any number of his hosts. Christ alone provides the protection we need to stand against this onslaught. It is tremendous comfort to know that in His power we can resist. That is the promise, the power to resist, not an imploring to attack.

Paul also reminds us that we have no reason to fear though the attack is certain. I am often mindful of that when witnessing a confession of faith. We would do well to be more intentional in reminding our youth that making this confession will paint a target on their back, at which the devil will shoot flaming arrows. It is a certainty. But they must also be reminded that they will have available to them the power of Christ to stand against any attack! It will be hard work, but as we are told earlier in Ephesians (2:10), once we are in Christ there is work we will need to do, and putting on the armor of Ephesians 6 is part of that work.

You would do well to take the 30 or 40 minutes needed to read the book of Ephesians in its entirety prior to reading this book. The comments in this book on spiritual warfare are firmly rooted in the context of the entire book of Ephesians. In fact, there are so many references to Scripture that I had to pause once to count. I found 27 biblical references on the two pages open before me. There is no doubt that this book has a biblical perspective.

The book is not long, a little over 120 pages. It can be divided into three sections. Once the foundation is laid as summarized above, the middle portion is a good exegetical look at each of the tools we are given to defend ourselves as Christians: truth, righteousness, peace, faith, salvation, and the Word.

One interesting note may be made about the Word as the sword of the Spirit. The sword has a dual purpose. We often think of it as being only an offensive weapon, but in reality a sword is not only offensive but defensive as you parry a blow. Spiritually, we tend to view the sword immediately as offensive—the gospel goes forth as

authoritative proclamation. But in harmony with the rest of this passage, it is to be used by each one personally as a defensive weapon with which we defend ourselves from the devil’s influence through immersion in Scripture.

The last part of this book focuses on the role of prayer and preaching. Prayer is defined not as a seventh piece of armor, but first of all as the means by which each piece of armor is put on. Secondly, by grace it is a source for the power of Christ to “boldly proclaim.” Paul here requests prayers so he can be bold. Paul, the great apostle, coveted these prayers. I must say, I was convicted by that. The authors point to Paul’s making this special request not only in verse 19 but again in verse 20 to ask twice for prayers from the Ephesian Christians as a necessary aid in proclaiming the gospel. Preachers today, like Paul, are men, subject to the same temptations as everyone else, the same spiritual attacks. In fact, they have intentionally put themselves in a more vulnerable and visible position to the enemy. Paul was asking for the congregations to participate in this warfare by praying for his preaching and for his boldness. If the preaching as primary means depends on the power of the Spirit, and the anointing of the Spirit usually depends on prayer, then I have not done nearly enough of what God has here called me to do on behalf of our preachers.

Lastly, I need to admit that before reading this book, when I read the credentials of the authors, I was a bit skeptical (as is my nature) of how ‘Reformed’ this book could be. As I read through the book with that thought in the back of my mind, I was pleasantly surprised and impressed by repeated references to essential tenets of the Reformed faith. For example, references to election and perseverance are frequent, as well as a strongly worded chapter on the importance of preaching. Reformed doctrines come through very clearly. The book also has some questions at the end of each chapter, which lends it well for use in a group discussion.

This book is a great encouragement in reminding us of the power of Christ, that we have access to that power in Christ, and of our responsibility to use it, in a very balanced way in our spiritual fight. I highly recommend it to any who are curious about, or fearful of, spiritual warfare.



January 13, 2016
Trinity Protestant Reformed Church

Classis East met in regular session on Wednesday, January 13, 2016 at the Trinity PRC. Rev. M. DeVries was the chairman for this session. Each church was represented by two delegates. Three pastors were absent; one was in Northern Ireland, one in Australia, and one in the Philippines.

As is usual for the January classis, voting for delegates to synod and other functionaries was done. Elected as delegates to Synod 2016: **MINISTERS:** *Primi:* G. Eriks, C. Haak, K. Koole, C. Spronk, R. VanOverloop; *Secundi:* A. denHartog, M. DeVries, W. Langerak, R. Smit, A. Spriensma. **ELDERS:** *Primi:* D. Kregel (Grandville), S. Miedema (Byron Center), H. Pastoor (Faith), Ted Pipe (Southeast), J. VanBaren (Hope). *Secundi:* P. Adams (First), D. Bouwkamp (Faith), M. Gritters (Byron Center), C. Kalsbeek (Hope), J. Lanting (Cornerstone).

In other voting, Rev. Koole and Rev. Bleyenbergh were elected to serve three-year terms as delegates *ad examina primus* and *secundus* respectively. Revs. J. Slopsema and R. VanOverloop were elected as church visitors with

Revs. A. denHartog and M. DeVries as alternates. Rev. K. Koole was reappointed to a three-year term on the Classical Committee.

Classis heard the appeal of a brother who maintained that his pastor, in a sermon on John 14:6, was teaching a conditional covenant. He was also appealing his consistory's charge that he was guilty of antinomianism. Classis did not sustain this appeal. Classis maintained that the brother had misrepresented his pastor's sermon and that the charge of teaching antinomianism should stand.

Classis dealt with a request from a consistory to increase censure to the second step for one of its members.

The report of the church visitors, normally presented at the January session of classis, will be presented at the May, 2016 meeting.

In matters of finance, classis approved the 2017 subsidy requests of Kalamazoo PRC for \$22,000 and of Wingham PRC of \$41,000 (CDN). Classis approved expenses for this session in the amount of \$339.02.

Classis will meet next on Wednesday, May 11, 2016 at the Providence PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Congregational Activities

The congregation at Byron Center, MI PRC held a sledding party on Saturday, February 6. Sledding began at 3 p.m. at Byron Christian School east campus with supper at Adams Christian School. In case of no snow, the gym at Adams was open.

Families and friends of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI

enjoyed an afternoon of sledding at the Mines Golf Course on Saturday, January 23. Brats and hot dogs were on the menu. All were requested to bring their sleds and snacks to share, with hot chocolate being provided.

Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI opted for something a bit warmer. Their Activities Committee organized an evening of swimming and pizza at the Zeeland Rec Center on the evening of Friday, January 15. Whichever the activity, we are sure a good time was had with good

fellowship and good food always available—and a bit of fast action as well!

Or with this next one, you would have a warm or cold choice! The Ladies' Circle in Doon, IA plans to host their annual "Pool Party" at the All Seasons Center on the campus of Dordt College later in February. This grand facility boasts not only a large pool with slides and kiddie swim area, but also a regulation ice rink where the Dordt College Blades' hockey team plays its home games. Both were available after

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

supper so that one could swim or skate, or split the time and do a bit of both.

Mark your calendars for the Byron Center PRC Women's Conference March 4 and 5, 2016, to be held at Jamestown Reformed Church in Hudsonville, MI—registration coming soon. Visit the Facebook page of Byron Center PRC Women's Conference or the website <http://bcprcwomensconference.webs.com> for more information.

School Activities

The 8th grade class of the Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, IN hosted a bean bag tournament on Friday, January 29. Anyone from the area high school age and older could sign up their team to support the school fundraiser. We understand each year lots of spirited throwers get their arms loosened up for this event. The money raised is put to good use, such as a class trip or class gift to the school.

Mission Activities

Rev. John Flores and elder Reden Zuniega of the Protestant Reformed Church in Bulacan, Philippines recently visited their mission outreach, the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuera (PRFA), on the Philippine island of Leyte. This occurred in late January and was due to a plague of sorts that ruined the crops in the Albuera area. Both the physical and spiritual status of the group was evaluated, with Rev. Flores preaching in the PRFA on January 31.

In addition, Rev. Flores continues to lead a Bible study via Skype with

a group called Overseas Philippine Workers located in Bahrain. This occurs at midnight Manila time.

Minister Activities

Rev. Jonathan Mahtani, pastor at Cornerstone PRC, IN continued to consider the call to be the second missionary to the Philippines and planned to answer on January 31, D.V. May God grant to Rev. Mahtani the answer to this call, as we are certain He will.

Young People's Activities

Chaperones are needed for the 2016 YP Convention hosted by Grace/Wingham PRCs from August 8-12, 2016 at Lake Williamson in Carlinville, IL. Chaperone applications and medical forms should be submitted online via the convention website at <http://www.prconvention.com/2016/chaperones.cfm>. Please submit your applications soon to participate in this opportunity of service and Christian fellowship! Email any questions to prconventionchaperone@gmail.com.

Many joined together at the Hudsonville, MI Rainbow Grill for breakfast, lunch, dinner, and supper on Wednesday, January 13, for great food and wonderful fellowship with family and friends, the additional purpose being to raise money for the Hudsonville PRC young people to attend the 2016 Young People's Convention.

Denominational Activities

Classis East met in regular session Wednesday, January 13 at Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI with

most of the business deemed routine. Reference the Stated Clerk's official report also in this issue.

Classis West is scheduled to meet next on Wednesday, March 2 at Crete, IL PRC.

Sister Church Activities


When Rev. Nathan Decker traveled with Pete VanDerSchaaf to the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Ballymena, Northern Ireland as a church visitor, he used the opportunity on January 13 to lecture on "God's Beautiful Covenant of Grace."

This announcement appeared in the bulletin of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore on January 10, 2016: "This morning we sing Psalm 150, as versified in Psalter #s 409, 411, and 412. This brings us to the end of the project we began over three years ago of singing consecutively through the Psalms each Sunday. We sang Psalter #1 (Psalm 1) on 2 December 2012, and we now conclude with Psalm 150 on 10 January 2016. At the conclusion of our project, we do what Psalm 150 instructs us: "Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in His sanctuary: praise Him in the firmament of His power.... Let everything that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD." Let us give thanks to God for the gift of the Psalms, and let us continue to grow in our love for these holy songs as we sing them each Lord's Day." The same thing has begun in the congregation at Doon, IA PRC, although they are only up to Psalm 18, expecting to conclude in the year 2018, Lord willing.

Seminary Activities

Following the seminary Interim class (January 4-13), Prof. Ronald Cammenga and all the seminary students traveled to Southern California to attend the Westmin-

ster Seminary Conference. The men stayed the weekend and fellowshiped with the congregation at Hope PRC, in Redlands. The seminary's second semester began classes on January 20.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Pete and Pat Schipper and their family in the death of their father and grandfather,

MR. HAROLD SCHIPPER.

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

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

Teacher Needed

■ Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, IN is seeking applicants for a fulltime teacher in our Achieve (Special Education) Program for the 2016/2017 school year. Applicants should be certified in Special Education. Interested applicants may contact the administrator, Ryan Van Overloop at (219) 558-2660 or ryan.vanoverloop@dyerprcs.org or Barry Boer, the Achieve Committee secretary at (708) 418-2669 or boer3621@comcast.net.

Classis West

■ Classis West will meet in regular session on Wednesday, March 2, 2016, at the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, IL. Delegates who will need housing or transportation may contact Mr. Ed Stouwie, 219-513-9218.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,
Stated Clerk

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (phone: 616 795-8606). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 8, 2016, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

Call to Aspirants to the Ministry

■ All young men desiring to begin studies in the Theological School of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the 2016-2017 academic year should make application at the March 17, 2016 meeting of the Theological School Committee.

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

All applicants must appear before the Theological School Committee for interview before admission is granted. In the event that a student cannot appear at the March 17 meeting, notification of this fact, along with a suggested interview date, must be given to the secretary of the Theological School Committee before this meeting.

All correspondence should be directed to the Theological School Committee,
4949 Ivanrest Avenue SW
Wyoming, MI 49418.

Jon Huiskens, Secretary

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