

# *The Standard Bearer*

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# A Prayer for Turning from Vanity

“Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.”

Psalm 119:37

A new year is again upon us. At year's end many media sources review the so-called highlights of the year gone by. Again there have been amazing accomplishments in science, technology, and medicine. Many of the headlines from 2015 have been tragic, relating calamities, disasters, violence, and horrific acts of terrorism. There are the names and faces of those who have made the news, along with the birth notices and the obituaries. Looking closer to home, we reflect on this last year of our pilgrimage—times of joy and celebration, but also, no doubt, times of pain, sorrow, and distress.

What is your evaluation of the world of 2015? Do we say, “We made it through all right in spite of the obstacles and adversities,” or “Things could have been better, but there is optimism with respect to the new year”?

We must not be satisfied with a superficial evaluation. We must look at things in the light of Scripture. The words of the preacher of Ecclesiastes apply today

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even as they have throughout history. His evaluation is very simple and to the point, “Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher, all is vanity.” Apart from our sovereign God, that is the sad reality! And though we enter a new year, we continue on in the same old world filled with vanities.

Does this grieve you? It should. If we have eyes to see this, we will be sorely troubled. For we will realize that the attraction of this world of vanities is very strong. And 2016 means another year of struggle in this vale of tears. We must acknowledge that we need to be delivered from the vanities of the world. If we are to persevere to the end, we must be quickened constantly! And so we pray with the psalmist, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity; and quicken thou me in thy way.”

## A Fervent Prayer

Who can deny that this world is filled with vanities? Who can ignore the horrible manifestations of sin that we see? Shocking immorality! Gross perversion of God's ordinance of marriage! Unbelievable filth—vanity! Terrible lawlessness and rebellion—vanity! Economic woes and political chaos—vanity. And in much of the church we see bold apostasy and world conformity—vanity! We behold fantastic wealth, luxuries, pleasures, and entertainments—vanity!

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Are you able to say with regard to this world, “All is vanity!”? Unless you can and do, you will never pray this prayer, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” Many would point to man’s accomplishments and insist that all is not vanity. Many, also in the church, contend that if only we all work together, we can solve the problems that beset our land and our world. Especially at the beginning of a new year many maintain hope for a better tomorrow. Do we recognize vanity for what it is?

The term “vanity” comes from a root word that means breath or vapor. Go outside in the frigid temperatures of winter and exhale into the cold air. That puff of vapor is vanity! Vanity is that which has no real substance. It is that which is useless and futile. It does not last. Its existence is fleeting. Apart from the fear of the Lord, all the endeavors of man, in every sphere of life, are vanity. All of his learning and culture, his science and philosophy, his invention and industry, his finance and economics, his recreation and entertainment, his life at home, at work, at play—vanity, all vanity! It is all passing away. Without God, man finds no real joy, no real satisfaction, no true peace.

For sin and the curse of God’s righteous wrath beset this world and all the endeavors of men. We see utter rebellion against all biblical standards of morality and even common decency. And it all ends in the vanity of death and the grave. Almighty God will not be mocked; He will cast the ungodly down into destruction. This is the world of vanity in which we have walked in 2015 and in which we are required to continue walking in 2016.

By God’s grace we pray, yea, we pray fervently, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” By grace we are not one with this world of vanity. Yet we feel the tug, the pull in the direction of the vanities of this world. For we are still plagued by our sinful natures that belong to this world of vanity. We realize the appeal, the attraction, the allurements of this world of vanities. Perhaps especially in our youth—physical appearance, popularity, possessions, money—who can deny the appeal?

And so, by grace alone we express our heartfelt need unto the Lord, “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” We realize that as earthy creatures all of our senses are attracted to these vanities, but especially our sense of sight. That is why our culture of “screens” is so dangerous—from smart phones and tablets to large

screen televisions to theater screens—the whole world of vanities is there to see! And those images are impressed upon our minds, so that we become increasingly hardened and enslaved to the vanities. “O Lord, turn away my eyes!” Is that your plea?

### Seemingly Impossible

But would we not be praying for the impossible? “Turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity.” How can we escape it? Is there anywhere we can go in all this world that our eyes will escape the sight of vanities? Does this mean that we are to withdraw somehow from the world? Should we establish a colony in some remote, isolated corner of the globe?

No, it is evident from Scripture that the Lord Jesus would not have His people to go out of this world, even if it were possible. Jesus prayed, “I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil” (John 17:15). So our prayer is not that of one who would flee the world, finding seclusion in some cave or monastery. History shows plainly that those who have tried this take along with them the very vanities they had endeavored to leave behind.

Rather, Scripture points to our calling to be *in* the world, though not *of* it! Our calling is to live antithetically, seeking that which is good and rejecting the evil. And this makes obvious the fact that if we are to realize our calling, there is no way we can escape seeing the vanities. Our prayer is exactly the prayer of the saints of God who live and walk in the midst of this world and who soberly observe its vanities. This implies that we are to recognize these vanities as vanities! And by grace, we, according to the new life within us, have no desire for those vanities. Yea, those vanities must cause us to be filled with disgust, with revulsion.

At the same time we realize that we have but a small beginning of the new obedience, and that often the eyes of our flesh are attracted to these vanities. So really, our prayer is, “Cause my eyes more and more to be aware of the vanity of these vanities! And set my heart and all my affections on those things which are above—the things of Thy kingdom, the things that have abiding value!”

This is especially emphasized in the last part of this prayer, “and quicken thou me in thy way.” Literally, we read, “in Thy ways cause me to live.” And the way of

Jehovah God is the way of His statutes, His good commandments of which almost every verse in this psalm speaks. Our sincere desire must be to have our whole life directed by the Word of our God. Is that your resolve as you begin the new year? Or, do you want to go your own way—the way of vanity? Eat, drink, and be merry! Make no mistake, the way of vanity is the way that perishes!

This is precisely the point of the Preacher in Ecclesiastes 12:13, “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.” In this world of vanity we are to live in God’s ways, fearing Him. This means that we will follow Christ, for He is the way, the truth, and the life. This is the whole duty of man. This is the reason we are here—not to be a success, not to become wealthy, not to make a name for ourselves, not to indulge in pleasure! No, our prayer must be, “Quicken thou me in thy way!”

### The Realization

Yes, that is the key—prayer! In the way of prayer we shall be victorious! For we have a faithful heavenly Father who hearkens unto the cries of His children. He hears and answers prayer. He will supply our need. The realization of our petition is to be found in God alone! Only Jehovah God can turn our eyes from vanity. “Turn thou me and I shall be turned”! Only God can impart the life and strength that enable us to live in His ways! “Quicken thou me according to thy word”!

Oh, how we need this prayer as this year of vanity

comes to a close and we enter the new year of vanity! We must be able to look beyond the vanities of this world. This world is passing away with its vanities. As we continue our pilgrim way in the new year, let us be found to be people of prayer—whatever our age and circumstances. From day to day let us pray this prayer as we go about our work, our studies, our recreation, our family life, our life in the midst of the congregation, in our single life or in marriage, as the Lord brings life into this world and as He takes life out of this world of vanity.

Do not foolishly resolve to go it alone, relying upon your own strength to withstand the allurements of vanity. Trusting in the flesh, we will surely fall. But our victory is in this prayer of faith!

May the Lord give us grace to look not at the things which are seen (vanities), but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (II Cor. 4:18). For then our portion shall be glory that transcends all the vanities of this present time.

May this song be in our hearts and upon our lips throughout 2016, yea, all our days:

Turn Thou my eyes from vanity,  
And cause me in Thy ways to tread;  
O let Thy servant prove Thy word  
And thus to godly fear be led.”

Psalter # 325, stanza 3

### *God Our Help and Hope*

O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.  
Under the shadow of Thy throne Thy saints have dwelt secure;  
Sufficient is Thine arm alone, and our defense is sure.  
Time, like an ever-rolling stream, bears all its sons away;  
They fly forgotten, as a dream dies at the opening day.  
O God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,  
Be Thou our guard while troubles last, and our eternal home.

Psalter # 247 stanzas 1, 2, 5, 6



# The Sword and the Cause of Christ: Christian Jihadists?

“...the cause of Christ is never, ever advanced by the sword.”

The conviction above is expressed in the November 1, 2015 issue of the *Standard Bearer*, in the editorial “Learning from the Medieval Church’s History.” As I penned that, I was fully aware that many today have a different view of the relationship of the sword and the cause of Christ. At least one reader of the *SB* took exception to it. Mr. Archie P. Jones sent us a very cordial letter with a lengthy response to that statement. He acknowledged that it was “eight times too long for a letter” for the *SB*, but he expressed the hope that “it will be useful in some way.”

Let me say that I appreciate him taking the time to write a lengthy response and sending it to us. It gave opportunity to consider another point of view. It is my intent to set out some of what Mr. Jones wrote, and respond publicly. It is not my desire to answer all his arguments here, for as he noted, his writing is too long for me to cover all the aspects. I will do my best to represent his main points fairly and honestly, and then give my response, which I believe can be helpful to other readers as well.

Mr. Jones objects to the sentiment above, writing,

This is an extraordinary claim... but is neither true to the teachings of Scripture nor to the history of the advancement of the cause of Christ. [F]rom the fact that the power of the sword was often misused—wickedly misused—during the Crusades it does not follow that the power of the sword has never been used to advance the cause of Christ in history, nor that it cannot or should not be so used. This is not a defense of the Charlemagne method of evangelism—Convert or die!—but an introductory defense of the proper use of the sword, a definition of the cause of Christ, and a reminder of the biblical duty of the church.

He insists that

the cause of Christ must be defended in order for it to continue to exist. It must continue to exist in order for it to be able to be advanced, and it can be advanced (humanly speaking) by examples. This is readily discernible biblically, logically, and historically.

Mr. Jones delves into the central issue, namely, “What is the cause of Christ?” His answer:

Certainly it consists in disseminating the Good News of salvation through Christ alone—salvation by God’s grace through faith in Christ and His work on the cross. But certainly also there is more to the cause of Christ than

that. Christians are supposed to take every thought captive to Christ, aren’t we? This necessarily includes every thought, word, and deed; it necessarily includes all areas of life, thought, and action; individual life and corporate life; life in church and life outside of church; life in one nation or among every other people. Unless the cause of Christ is defended in one nation or among one people it cannot spread to other nations and peoples. And the power of the sword is an essential means of defending the cause of Christ.

Let me indicate at the beginning of my answer that my conviction is unchanged. In addition, definitions are extremely important in any fruitful discussion. My definition of the cause of Christ is entirely wrapped up in the church of Jesus Christ. The cause of Jesus Christ is His work of gathering, defending, and preserving His one church from the beginning of the world to the end, out of all nations (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 54). And that church is identical to the kingdom of Christ, in my judgment. I think that Mr. Jones and I have a different view on that, and that he takes a broader view of what constitutes the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

In response to Mr. Jones, I freely acknowledge that God has used the

power of the sword for the good of the church. Negatively, this has occurred in at least two ways. First, God has used the sword to chastise His church. In the old dispensation, when Israel departed from Jehovah, God used the nations around Israel to humble her by military subjection. In the new dispensation, God used conquest of nations where the church existed to cut off the church almost entirely. I think of Augustine and the Christian church in northern Africa in the fifth century, which area was overcome by Muslims shortly after Augustine died, with the result that the church was virtually wiped out in that part of the world.

Second, God also used the sword to allow His church to be left alone. When the nations go to war against each other, their attention is diverted from their desire or even efforts to eradicate the church. A clear example of this is given in David's life recorded in I Samuel 23:26-28. Wicked King Saul was in hot pursuit of David's band, "and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them." Then Scripture records how God used the sword of the Philistines to deliver David from death. "But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines."

This has occurred countless times throughout history. In the time of the Reformation, the Emperor Charles V plotted with the

pope and other Romish rulers to unite in order to take over the predominantly Protestant nations. But God prevented this from ever being decisive, either by conflict breaking out among them, or by an invasion of the Turks in the East.

Those are two negative ways that God has used the sword for His purposes.

But that is not all. God has used the sword in the positive defense of His church. Every Reformed Christian confesses that God rules sovereignly over all people, events, and the creation. He controls expanding economies, drought, wars, earthquakes, and assassinations of rulers. Everything that happens is sovereignly determined and directed by God. Nothing happens by chance, but all things serve His purposes. (Cf. the beautiful Lord's Days 9 and 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism.) And all things that happen serve to accomplish God's goal. Again, every Reformed Christian confesses the biblical truth that God's principal goal is the glory of His name in and through Jesus Christ. On the one hand, God determined the development of sin, leading inevitably to the kingdom of the Antichrist, that God's perfect justice may be revealed in the eternal condemnation of the ungodly. On the other hand, God glorifies Himself in the gathering of the church unto Himself to live in covenant fellowship with her forever. Both of these purposes culminate in the coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven to destroy the kingdom of man and to usher His church into eternal life.

Since God rules in heaven and earth so that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28), it is certain that God has used the *sword* of kings and princes for the good of His church. Indeed, the sword has been a tool God used to defend His church. Constantine (fourth century) decreed the official end of Roman persecution of Christians. Charlemagne's power (and that of many other kings) checked the advance of the Turks so that the church could grow, send out missionaries, and develop doctrine.

The time of the Reformation particularly illustrates this. Prior to the Reformation, God providentially set elector Frederick III in control over the region of Germany that included Wittenberg. God also converted this ruler to the Lutheran faith and inclined him to protect Luther from the murderous power of the pope and his Roman Catholic friends in high places. In this way, Luther was spared the fate of John Hus and many other godly critics of Rome over the centuries. In addition, other rulers of predominantly Protestant states defended themselves against the attacks of the Catholic League—nations predominantly Roman Catholic. In and through these sword-bearing endeavors, God preserved the Reformation.

Take careful note. *Rulers*, in the providence of God, used the sword to defend their *territory* and their *people* from hostile invaders. This is one of the God-ordained purposes of government—using

the sword to defend the country. However, these were not instances of the *church* taking up the sword. Neither were these instances where the sword *advanced* the cause of Christ, i.e., in the gathering, defending and preserving of God's church. And if one notes the Heidelberg Catechism's language "defending and preserving" and wonders whether this might refer to rulers defending and preserving by the sword, let me remind you that the Catechism explains how this is done—"by His Spirit and word." By these *spiritual* instruments, Christ gathers, defends, and preserves His church.

That activity being "the cause of Christ," it is plain to see that the church's calling is as Jesus commanded. Before His ascension Jesus instructed His church (through the disciples):

...All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen (Matt. 28:18-20).

The powerful tool for accomplishing the God-given mission of the church is the preaching of the gospel. To the world, preaching seems very weak, and thus foolish. What will preaching accomplish? The apostle Paul, the great missionary to the Gentiles, was clear and emphatic on this. In his first inspired epistle to the church in Corinth he wrote (chapter 1:17-24),

For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: but we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; but unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.


Preaching is the God-ordained means to gather, defend, and preserve Christ's church. So conscious of this was Paul that he went on to testify to the believers in Corinth,

And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power (I Cor. 2:1-4).

And the main concern of Paul? "That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God (I Cor. 2:5). And, "That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (I Cor. 1:31).

Not the sword of Charlemagne, of Frederick III, or of any other ruler will receive the glory for gathering, defending, and preserving the church. But God alone, who destroys the wisdom of the wise, converts elect sinners, delivers them from the power of darkness, and translates them into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13)—by His Spirit and Word.

And yet more remains to be considered. Mr. Jones insists that "Christians are supposed to take every thought captive to Christ." That needs to be addressed. And therein lies my greatest concern. I fear that this insistence, carried to its logical end (under the title "The Sword and the Cause of Christ"), will impose on the church the calling to carry out physical warfare in the name of Christ. Hence the title. Let us be clear, Mr. Jones nowhere in his gracious letter suggests that this is our calling. Nor do I seek to impose that on him. But that is my fear.

In that connection, and in this day of increasing violence, all Christian churches need the wisdom to distinguish between self-defense under personal attack and submission in persecution. That issue will likewise be addressed in the next editorial, D.V. 

## Medical Missions

...While I highly respect Rev. Richard Smit and wholeheartedly endorse what he says about "The Role of Reformed Literature on the Mission Field," he wrote recently (*SB*, Nov. 15), "the work of missions is not advanced by [among other things]...medical missions. All these things are the outwardly attractive ways of modern missions, and are simply erroneous."

I cannot agree for several reasons:

1) The Lord's and His apostles' ministry was not only preaching the word but also healing the sick, albeit to authenticate their credentials; but those good works complemented and facilitated the preaching and showed they cared for the whole man.

2) Medical missions and the care of widows and orphans have for centuries been at the forefront of and a useful adjunct to the preaching. As James says, it is true religion. The Reformed schools educating the young was basic to literacy and the ability to read the Scriptures, that Reformers like John Knox and John Calvin made an integral part of their labors.

I have a missionary friend in Thailand who is a surgeon, and both he and all the Christian staff at his hospital, alongside drafted in local preachers, have great opportunity to witness to and preach the gospel to those who attend either as outpatients or inpatients. Indeed, by this means many have been added to the church!

"Let us do good unto all men" (Gal. 6:10). Practical ministry complements and facilitates gospel preaching, indeed it is the *only* way certain antagonistic nations will allow the entry of mission workers, i.e., "tent making missionaries" as Paul was! While recognizing and rejoicing in the Lord's use of both Rev. Smit and Rev. Kleyn in the Philippines, I would hope Rev. Smit would amend his pronouncements on this issue, where I believe he has lumped together certain social works that profit little with true biblical-based complementary ministry.

Yours sincerely,  
*Dr. Julian Kennedy,*  
 CPRC, Ballymena.

## RESPONSE

Dr. Kennedy asserts that "medical missions" is a le-

gitimate and subordinate means to the preaching of the Word by which the Lord does add to His church in mission work in developing countries. However, this idea is not correct, and the original criticism against it needs to be received.

First, missions is the official proclamation of the Gospel by Christ's church through her ordained and sent preachers in His service for the gathering of His eternally chosen church by His Word and Spirit (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 21, Q&A 54). While "medical missions" may be commonplace terminology in the church world, it is a misnomer.

Secondly, it is historically true that for centuries many foreign missionary endeavours took a three-pronged approach: educational, medical, and ecclesiastical. Nevertheless, is that in harmony with what the Lord pronounced in Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, and II Timothy 4:1-2? The Lord's official mandate for the church is the preaching of His Word. In spite of modern trends in missions in developing countries, "medical missions" is not missions according to the Lord's mandate. The Great Physician is pleased to gather His people unto repentance and faith by the spiritual knife of the Holy Spirit, the preaching of His Word.

Thirdly, it would be a mistake to conclude that since Christ's preaching, miracles, and salvation affected not only men's souls but also their bodies, churches today should establish and operate hospitals, maternity clinics, orphanages, dental clinics, elementary schools, colleges, technical schools, and other similar institutions when needed in poor countries. Certainly, the Reformers were—and we today remain—deeply concerned and burdened for the health and welfare of the poor whom we know in the Lord and among whom we labor (III John 2). Yet, such legitimate concern does not give Reformed congregations and their synods an official mandate from the Lord to establish and to operate medical, educational, and farming facilities in her mission work in developing countries. Our Reformed Church Order, on the basis of Scripture, does not permit parochial schools, parochial orphanages, and parochial hospitals for good reasons.

Fourthly, the passing reference to the apostle Paul's



brief secular job as support for “medical and educational missions” is a misapplication. The apostle made tents because he did not exercise his ministerial right for financial support from the Corinthian congregation (I Cor. 9:15). His sewing job was a means for his own daily bread, but not for access to unreached peoples.

Fifthly, there may be physicians, surgeons, nurses, medical students, dentists, professors, linguists, teachers, farmers, and fire fighters who want and can afford the related expenses, for their training, professional development, or volunteering, to work in developing countries where there may be Reformed missions. They may get involved personally in clinics or educational works at their own expense, but let them in their participation not compromise the Reformed faith and practice, especially the truth that Christ’s kingdom is not of this earth. Moreover, while away from their church home, they must remain faithful in their Lord’s Day attendance of the means of grace under pure, confessionally Reformed, and expository preaching of the Word. They may not presume that they are missionaries with an official ministry from Christ either to preach or to be an officially subordinate adjunct to the preaching and its fruit. They

should also remember that what they witness in their daily life overseas for a brief time is what they already are called to witness as believers in their everyday life back home, in which they are actually far better qualified and much more effective.

Finally, a criticism of “medical missions” does not imply the church does not care about the poor in the sphere of her foreign missions. Proper is a ministry of mercy to the poor by the Lord’s deacons under the oversight of the Lord’s elders through an ordained missionary. The genuine benevolence needs of those whom the mission work brings upon our pathway should be met, not by the establishment of parochial medical and educational facilities, but by the orderly and wise collection and distribution of the means for the daily bread of the poor. This follows the apostolic example regarding the benevolence collections from the Asian and European churches for the Jerusalem deacons and their distribution to their poor (Gal. 2:10; I Cor. 16:1; II Cor. 8:1). According to my experience, this is the example that the Protestant Reformed Churches have desired to follow in its foreign missions.

—Rev. Richard Smit

## ALL AROUND US

## REV. CLAY SPRONK

### ■ John Piper Stirs Up the “Sanctification Debate”

John Piper is a well-known pastor (now retired) and widely thought of as a leader in Reformed circles. Thus, any subtle errors that he teaches are all the more dangerous and in need of exposure. This is even more so when his errors contradict justification by faith alone, one of the cardinal doctrines of Scripture. Those who seek to learn from Piper must be aware that Piper subtly denies the doctrine of justification by faith alone in a way that aligns him with the hardly mentioned but still dangerous heresy of the Federal Vision.

Piper recently created some controversy in a foreword

to *Faith Alone: The Doctrine of Justification* authored by Thomas Schreiner. Piper wrote,

As Tom Schreiner says, the book “tackles one of the fundamental questions of our human condition: how can a person be right with God?”

The stunning Christian answer is: *sola fide*—faith alone. But be sure you hear this carefully and precisely: He says right with God by faith alone, not attain heaven by faith alone. There are other conditions for attaining heaven, but no others for entering a right relationship to God. In fact, one must already be in a right relationship with God by faith alone in order to meet the other conditions.”<sup>1</sup>

We need to have a clear understanding of what Piper is talking about when he distinguishes being “right with

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<sup>1</sup> John Piper in *Faith Alone* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 11.

God” from “attaining heaven.” It is important to remember that he is speaking about the doctrine of justification, even though he avoids using the term. Piper is speaking about what is sometimes referred to as a distinction between ‘initial’ and ‘final’ justification. If Piper used the term ‘justification,’ he would have to admit that he believes an initial justification (being right with God) that is by faith alone but a final justification (attaining heaven) that is by faith *and works*. By speaking of a final justification that is by faith and works, Piper denies justification by faith alone. It really is that simple. Piper’s error is identical to the error of Richard Gaffin and others who have defended and taught the federal vision heresy now for several decades.

The basic error of Piper is that he denies that the ground for being “right with God” is the meritorious work of Jesus Christ alone. In final justification God’s declaration that the sinner is “not guilty” and “righteous” is announced only if he has fulfilled the condition of doing good works. So Piper clearly denies that Christ’s work alone is the ground for final justification.

But even in initial justification Piper’s teaching presents faith as a ground for God’s act of justifying a sinner. In Reformed orthodoxy (cf. HC, LD 23; BC, Art. 23), justification by faith alone does not mean that a sinner is declared right with God *because* he believes. Faith is *not a condition* upon which justification depends. Rather, faith is the only *instrument* by which a sinner appropriates the perfect righteousness of Christ. Therefore, the doctrine of justification by faith alone, properly understood, means that Jesus Christ’s work is the *only ground* for the justification of a sinner, and that faith is the instrument through which the sinner receives Christ’s righteousness.

But Piper speaks of faith as a “condition” for being right with God. He writes, “There are other conditions for attaining heaven, but no others [besides faith] for entering a right relationship to God.” If Piper would see that faith is never the ground for justification but only the way in which a sinner receives the righteousness of Jesus Christ, he would understand that there is no way that works could ever enter into either initial or final justification.<sup>2</sup> Piper’s view that faith is the condition

<sup>2</sup> That Piper sees faith as a ground for justification is confirmed by a statement taken from his website [desiringgod.org](http://desiringgod.org). “God justi-

for being right with God (initial justification) opens the door for him to bring in works as a ground for attaining heaven (final justification).

## ■ Election: Calvinism’s Antidote to Arminianism

Although he does not mention John Piper, Christopher Gordon (pastor of a URC church in Escondido, CA) has written an article that is likely a response to the controversy caused by Piper’s foreword to Schreiner’s book. Gordon’s article is entitled, “How Arminian Has the Sanctification Debate Become?”<sup>3</sup> With this title Gordon suggests that some theologians in Reformed circles have adopted an Arminian view of sanctification. He explains that this is probably a response to what some believe is “an over emphasis on justification and a narrow definition of the gospel” that leads to “antinomianism.” Gordon writes, “Many explicitly fear that the word gospel is being defined too narrowly. So when people communicate that all they need is the gospel, worry is expressed that maybe this does not include sanctification too.” This led some to re-emphasize sanctification and “the necessity of good works for salvation.” In today’s climate of tolerance Gordon’s response to the emphasis on “the necessity of good works for salvation” is refreshingly bold.

Gordon boldly suggests that some teachers within the Reformed camp are guilty of Arminianism! Arminianism is the heresy that was banned from the Reformed camp in 1618-1619 by the great Synod of Dordt. By raising the specter of Arminianism, Gordon is suggesting that there are people within the Reformed camp who need to repent or be excommunicated from the camp.

Gordon’s response is also bold because he responds to those who are worried that an “overemphasis on grace” will lead to antinomianism by appealing to the doctrine

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fies us on the first genuine act of saving faith, but in doing so *he has a view to all subsequent acts of faith* contained, as it were, like a seed in that first act...God does not wait to the end of our lives in order to declare us righteous. In fact, we would not be able to have the assurance and freedom in order to live out the radical demands of Christ unless we could be confident that *because* of our faith we already stand righteous before him (emphasis added). See more at: [www.trinityfoundation.org/horror\\_show.php?id=35](http://www.trinityfoundation.org/horror_show.php?id=35) (April 2005).

<sup>3</sup> This article can be found online at: <http://theaquilareport.com/how-arminian-has-the-sanctification-debate-become/>

of *election*! Gordon quotes Canons I.9 in full and parts of I.7 and I.8. These articles in the Canons explain that God's decree of election "was before any of the fruits we experience, including sanctification, both in order and in time." So Gordon argues, it is not a question for Reformed people whether those who are justified by grace alone will also be sanctified. He writes,


The Lord remains Lord even over our sanctification, its degrees, measures, and our 'good works' that he prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). The intended end was always determined before the means were given! We should be clear in this sanctification debate, Christ completes the work *he* began in us (Phil. 1:6).

Gordon knows that this appeal to the doctrine of election will likely lead some in the Reformed camp to cry those dreaded words, "hyper-Calvinism." Twice he speaks of the fact that some fear that pointing to election as the fountain of all the benefits of salvation will lead to "hyper-Calvinism." Gordon does not define what he means by hyper-Calvinism, but he seems to have in mind the view that salvation by grace alone means that justified sinners are free to live careless lives. In other words hyper-Calvinism is the same as antinomianism. To his credit, Gordon does not retreat in the face of the charge of hyper-Calvinism. He maintains that salvation is all God's gift of grace that has its source in eternal election and is therefore not dependent on man in any way. (He even makes mention of the Canons teaching on *reprobation* in I.16, although he does not really explain the doctrine and its relevance to the "sanctification debate").

Despite his explanation of how his view is not guilty of hyper-Calvinism, Gordon will inevitably face the charge. There is a sense in which he ought to welcome such a slanderous charge. Just as teaching that salvation is by God's grace alone inevitably attracts the charge of antinomianism, so also teaching that election is the source of all the benefits of salvation inevitably will lead to the charge of hyper-Calvinism. There may have been a time in the history of Reformed churches when the charge of hyper-Calvinism was legitimately applied to those who abused the doctrines of grace—to those who abused the doctrine of election, for example, to teach that the gospel is to be preached only to the elect. But now the charge of hyper-Calvinism is made against those who merely teach

the Reformed doctrine of election, not because they abuse it. Gordon may soon be charged by men within the Reformed camp with allowing election to govern/dominate sanctification. He may even face the absurd charge that because he has allowed election to govern sanctification that he has virtually made election and sanctification synonymous! In the face of such charges will Gordon maintain his position that election governs sanctification?

And if Gordon will maintain that election governs sanctification, here are some other important questions for him to answer. Does he recognize that the so-called "sanctification debate" is intimately connected to the current debate about the doctrine of the covenant of grace swirling in Reformed Churches? Does he recognize that Arminianism is not only being injected into the doctrines of justification and sanctification but also into the doctrine of the covenant? He writes, "Maybe what this sanctification debate needs to recover is a robust appreciation again for the Reformed doctrine of Predestination." Would he agree that this statement would be equally true if the word "sanctification" were replaced with the word "covenant"? Would he agree that the Canons teach that the decree of election is also the source of the covenant of grace (if you connect I.9 to II.8)? Would he agree that just as it is wrong to charge those who teach that election governs sanctification with hyper-Calvinism, so it is equally wrong to make that charge against those who teach that election governs the covenant?

By these questions I do not mean to antagonize Rev. Gordon. I appreciate his article. My only criticism is that he should be less hesitant to identify and condemn the Arminianism that has spread as a leaven throughout the Reformed lump. But if Gordon wants to get at the source of the Arminian infection he will have to examine how Arminianism has latched on to the doctrine of the covenant within Reformed circles. And then he will have to consider how the Protestant Reformed Churches have rightly connected election and the covenant to counteract that Arminianism—without falling into the error of hyper-Calvinism. 

# Precious

The most precious substance in the universe is the blood of Jesus Christ. The blood of Christ is most precious because it is the only substance in heaven or earth of infinite worth and value (Canons, II.3). You cannot buy it with mountains of gold, or vaults stuffed with cash. Its value surpasses the worth of all the jewels, fine art, business assets, architectural marvels, and national treasures in the entire world. Only the blood of Jesus Christ is truly priceless.

The blood of Jesus Christ is of infinite worth because it alone is intrinsically precious. Preciousness is a derived quality whereby something is considered highly desired and valuable. Ordinarily this value is derived from its utility and scarcity, which therefore places limits on its preciousness. Gold may be precious when the economy fails, but worthless when stranded on a desert isle. Jewels are precious on a fair woman, but disgusting in a pig's snout (Prov. 11:22). And life is only precious until you die. But the blood of Jesus is precious in itself (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 1).


The blood of Christ is precious in itself because it is God's blood (Acts 20:28). It is precious as the blood of the infinitely wise, powerful, good, and glorious God in the only begotten Son, who is of the same eternal and infinite essence (Canons, II.4). Furthermore, it is precious to God because it is the blood of His precious church (Is. 43:4). Every drop of blood He assumed of the Virgin Mary is the blood of precious Zion (Lam. 4:2), and of Adam, Noah, Abraham, and David (Belgic Confession, Art. 18). Our blood is His blood. And being His blood, our death and shedding of our blood is also very precious in His sight (Ps. 72:14; 116:15).

This blood is infinitely precious in itself as the blood of the only perfectly holy man (Canons, II.4). It is the precious blood of the Lamb without spot or blemish (I Pet. 1:19), and the living stone, disallowed of men, but chosen of God and precious, who was truly foreordained before the foundation of the world as God's Christ

(I Pet. 2:4). This adds to its value, because that makes it exceedingly rare—there simply is no holy blood like it in all the universe.

Thirdly, the blood of Christ is most precious because God sacrificed that blood with the infinite sense of His wrath and curse due to us for sin (Canons, II.4). This makes that blood, therefore, precious to us. The redemption of our souls is so precious (Ps. 49:8), and the offense of our sins so great, that God shed His blood instead of ours (Luke 22:20). Not with gold, but with His precious blood He redeemed us (I Pet. 1:19), fully satisfied for all our sins and delivered us from all the power of the devil (Heidelberg Catechism, LD 1). And adding to its value is this—God did not shed His precious blood for everyone. Although abundantly sufficient to expiate the sins of the whole world, it is the sovereign and gracious will of God that the saving power of His most precious death extend only to the elect, to bring them infallibly to salvation (Canons, II.3; II.8).

Therefore, the benefits and means by which we receive that blood are also precious. Precious is God's promise that whosoever believes in this blood shall not perish but have everlasting life (Canons, II.5; II Pet. 1:4). Faith and the trials of our faith are more precious than gold (II Pet. 1:1; I Pet. 1:7), wisdom more precious than rubies (Prov. 3:15), and lips that confess it a precious jewel (Prov. 20:15). By such knowledge a house is filled with precious riches (Prov. 24:4). The thoughts of God are to us precious (Ps. 139:17), His chosen people precious, and His tender love more precious than our life (Psalter #s 329; 164).

What precious blood! Infinite blood, that an innumerable throng can drink unto eternal life as an everlasting fountain, yet limited for those who drink it by faith. Invaluable, powerful, and precious to us, yet considered worthless, ineffectual, and common to many. God's blood, yet ours. Holy blood, yet the blood of sinners. Blood much loved, yet poured out in wrath. Priceless, yet free. And graciously given, His blood never can nor ever will be bought. At any price. Precious! 

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# Of Interpreting the Holy Scripture; and of Fathers, Councils, and Traditions

(Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 2, B)

## Councils

And in the same order also we place the decrees and canons of councils. Wherefore we do not permit ourselves, in controversies about religion or matters of faith, to urge our case with only the opinions of the fathers or decrees of council; much less by received customs, or by the large number of those who share the same opinion, or by the prescription of a long time. Who is the judge? Therefore, we do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided. So we do assent to the judgments of spiritual men which are drawn from the Word of God. Certainly Jeremiah and other prophets vehemently condemned the assemblies of priests which were set up against the law of God; and diligently admonished us that we should not listen to the father, or tread in their path who, walking in their own inventions, swerved from the law of God.

**T**his chapter of the SHC concerns the proper method of interpreting the Holy Scriptures. Granted that the Bible is the infallibly inspired Word of God—God’s Word in the words of men—how is the Bible to be interpreted? That interpretation of Scripture is to be regarded as “orthodox and genuine” that is “gleaned from the Scriptures themselves,” according to the opening paragraph of this second chapter. The second paragraph raised the question of the weight to be given to the interpretations of Scripture by the holy fathers. The interpretations of the fathers are to be received “as far as they agree with the Scriptures; but we modestly dissent from them when they are found to set down things differing from, or altogether contrary to, the Scriptures.”

Two important matters remain to be considered in connection with the proper interpretation of Scripture. The first matter of importance concerns the judgments of ecclesiastical councils in relation to the teaching of Scripture. And the second matter concerns the place of church tradition in its relation to the proper interpretation of Scripture.

On the one hand, the SHC does not discredit the important place of ecclesiastical councils in the life of the

church. Church councils have served a necessary, beneficial, and God-honoring role in the history of the church. Think of the church councils that decided the trinitarian and Christological controversies in the history of the church. Think of the early Reformed synods throughout Europe that shaped the Reformed churches and clearly distinguished the Reformed faith both from the Roman Catholic Church and from the Anabaptists, synods and councils that adopted church orders, organized worship, and regulated the life of the churches. One need only to think of the vital role that the Synod of Dordt played in resolving the Arminian controversy—vindicating the truth and condemning error. In the history of the Protestant Reformed Churches, classes and synods have resolved disputes, serious doctrinal controversies, vindicated appellants and their claims over against unjust judgments rendered by the lower assemblies, and delivered those wrongfully made the objects of Christian discipline.

But what has been a blessing throughout so much of her history has also been a bane. How often in the history of the church have not the church’s assemblies been corrupt, rendered unjust judgments, and rather than vindicate that which was right, countenanced error. The SHC mentions “Jeremiah and other prophets [who] vehemently condemned the assemblies of priests which were set up against the law of God.” In Jeremiah 5:31 the prophet rebukes those “priests [that] bear rule by

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their means.” And in Lamentations 4:13 he prophecies the judgment of God on “the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her.” It was the Jewish Sanhedrin that condemned Jesus to death. Roman Catholic Church councils declared in favor of the most grievous errors and condemned Reformed believers to a hundred different deaths. The Roman Catholic Council of Constance (1415) revoked John Huss’ safe conduct and burned him at the stake as a heretic. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) pronounced its anathemas against any who embraced the doctrines of the Reformation. And even in the history of the PRCA, our founding fathers had to contend with hierarchical behavior on the part of the broader assemblies, as well as assemblies that promoted error rather than the truth.

The “decrees of councils” are to be received only when

and in so far as those decrees are in harmony with the Scriptures. No council of the church possesses intrinsic authority over the people of God. “*Who is the judge?*” asks the SHC in this paragraph. Its answer is: “We do not admit any other judge than God himself, who proclaims by the Holy Scriptures what is true, what is false, what is to be followed, or what to be avoided.” The decrees of the councils are not above the Scriptures, but must conform to the Scriptures and agree with the Scriptures. The authority of the church councils is derivative. Their authority over believers and over the church is only to the extent to which their decisions conform to the Scriptures. In the language of the SHC: “So we do assent to the judgments of spiritual men [the men who make up the church’s councils] which are drawn from the Word of God.”

### Traditions of Men

Likewise we reject human traditions, even if they be adorned with high-sounding titles, as though they were divine and apostolical, delivered to the Church by the living voice of the apostles, and, as it were, through the hands of apostolical men to succeeding bishops which, when compared with the Scriptures, disagree with them; and by their disagreement show that they are not apostolic at all. For as the apostles did not contradict themselves in doctrine, so the apostolic men did not set forth things contrary to the apostles. On the contrary, it would be wicked to assert that the apostles by a living voice delivered anything contrary to their writings. Paul affirms expressly that he taught the same things in all churches (I Cor. 4:17). And, again, “For we write you nothing but what you can read and understand” (II Cor. 1:13). Also, in another place, he testifies that he and his disciples—that is, apostolic men—walked in the same way, and jointly by the same Spirit did all things (II Cor. 12:18). Moreover, the Jews in former times had the traditions of their elders; but these traditions were severely rejected by the Lord, indicating that the keeping of them hinders God’s law, and that God is worshipped in vain by such traditions (Matt. 15:1 ff.; Mark 7:1 ff.).

On more than one occasion the Lord Jesus condemned the leaders of the church of His day because they exalted tradition—human tradition—above the authority of the Word of God. The SHC cites Jesus’ dispute with the Jewish leaders recorded in the first part of Matthew 15 and Mark 7. In that passage the leaders found fault with Jesus’ disciples because they ate without first washing their hands. In the minds of the scribes and Pharisees this was sin on the part of the disciples. They accused them of eating with “defiled” hands (Mark 7:2). Their thinking was that in the market, it was possible that some uncircumcised Gentile or ceremonially unclean Jew had touched the piece of fruit, slab of meat, or whatever else they might have purchased. By touching this item thereafter, they were rendered unclean in the sight of God. The only way to remedy that uncleanness was by ritual

washing, washings not required by Old Testament law but added to the Old Testament by Jewish tradition.

In the course of His instruction in this passage, Jesus cited another bit of Jewish tradition. That was their tradition that freed their fellow Jews of the obligation under the fifth commandment to support poor, aged parents by saying that what was needed for their support had been designated as “corban,” that is, a gift for the temple or the priests (Mark 7:10-13). Even if the gift was never given but spent on oneself, if only one said “corban,” they were free from the responsibility to use their savings to care for their parents. Thus, by their human tradition, the Jews made the Word of God “of none effect,” literally “of no authority.”

What was true of the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day was true of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the

Reformation and is true of Rome still today. Rome exalts tradition as an authority alongside of and above the Word of God. That tradition consists of the fifteen apocryphal books that are added to the Old Testament Scripture, the voluminous writings of the church fathers, the decrees of the church councils, and the papal pronouncements. When the Reformers appealed to Scripture and repudiated the errors of the Roman Church from Scripture, Rome defended herself by appeal to tradition. Many of the most prominent doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church, such as purgatory, the priesthood, the mass, transubstantiation, prayers for the dead, indulgences, penance, the worship of Mary, her immaculate conception, her perpetual virginity, her assumption into heaven, the intercession of the saints, the use of images in worship, the celibacy of priests and nuns, the papacy, pilgrimages and fasts, the seven sacraments, and many others besides, are founded not on the authority of the Word of God, but on the traditions of Rome. Rome elevates these traditions above the Word of God. And Rome makes these doctrines and practices binding upon the consciences of her members. These doctrines must be believed and these practices must be carried out for salvation.

The SHC must not be understood to be rejecting tradition *per se*, as though tradition simply by virtue of the fact that it is tradition is to be rejected. Not that. Tradition has an important place in the church and *ought* to have an important place in the church. There are praiseworthy traditions, traditions that have proven their worth to the church over time. These are traditions that ought to be preserved in the church. These are traditions that are derived from solid, biblical principles. Such traditions as going to church twice each Lord's Day, rather than only once; praying before and after our meals; using "Thee" and "Thou" in our prayers; the use of the King James Version of the Bible in our public worship, our Christian schools, and our homes; regular Heidelberg Catechism preaching in our congregations.

We would never condemn those whose tradition is to gather for public worship only once on the Lord's Day, which is the case in certain Reformed and Presbyterian traditions, even though we are convinced of the value of gathering for two public worship services on Sunday. We would never condemn those who pray only before or only after their meals, though we see the value of praying both

before and after meals. We would never condemn those who use "You" and "Your" in their prayers, although we are convinced that there is value in using the preferential (reverential) forms of the second person personal pronouns. We would never condemn those who use another version of the Bible than the KJV, although we are convinced that it is the best translation, based on the best manuscripts. We would never condemn those churches that do not practice regular Heidelberg Catechism preaching, as is the case with our brothers and sisters in the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, though we see the value of such systematic preaching on the fundamental truths of Scripture in the interests of preaching the whole counsel of God.

Tradition has its place in the life of the church. There is value in the church's time-honored traditions. Respect for the Spirit's leading of the church of the past ought to foster a healthy respect for the church's tradition. But tradition must never be elevated above the authority of God's Word. Tradition must never be appealed to in order to displace the authority of God's Word, whether over doctrine or practice. Always the church must reject those traditions "the keeping of which hinders God's law" and that have as their result "that God is worshipped in vain by such traditions," those traditions that "when compared with the Scriptures, disagree with them."


The sole authority of Scripture was a very practical matter for Martin Luther. He had been summoned by the emperor to appear before the Diet of Worms in order to give account of his teachings. The Imperial Diet opened on April 17, 1521. On a table in front of the august assembly was a stack of books. Luther was asked two questions by one of the presiding jurists. Were the books his books? And, would he recant what he had written in them? To the first question Luther responded with a barely audible voice in the affirmative. To the second question, in a voice that seemed to waiver, he asked for a day's reprieve promising that on the morrow he would give his answer. One chronicler of the event remarks that it must have appeared to all present that "the wild boar was suddenly like a whimpering pup."<sup>1</sup> Surprised by the request and undoubtedly suspicious that he was stalling for time, the emperor Charles V nevertheless agreed to Luther's request.

<sup>1</sup> R. C. Sproul, *The Holiness of God*, revised and expanded (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 1998), 100.

That night, left to himself in his room, Luther composed one of the most moving prayers that has ever been written. The same writer calls it Luther's "private Gethsemane."<sup>2</sup> In his prayer, Luther staked all that he had written and taught on the clear testimony of God's Word and he called God to bear testimony to that fact. Over against the pope, the decrees of church councils, and ecclesiastical tradition, he clung to the authority of God's holy Word. This was Luther's prayer:

O God, Almighty God everlasting! How dreadful is the world! Behold how its mouth opens to swallow me up, and how small is my faith in thee!... Oh! the weakness of the flesh, and the power of Satan! If I am to depend upon any strength of this world—all is over.... The knell is struck.... Sentence is gone forth.... O God! O God! O thou, my God! help me against all the wisdom of this world. Do this, I beseech thee; thou shouldst do this...by thy own mighty power.... The work is not mine, but thine. I have no business here.... I have nothing to contend for with these great men of the world! I

<sup>2</sup> Sproul, *Holiness of God*, 100.

would gladly pass my days in happiness and peace. But the cause is thine.... And it is righteous and everlasting! O Lord! help me! O faithful and unchangeable God! I lean not upon man. It were vain! Whatever is of man is tottering, whatever proceeds from him must fail. My God! my God! dost thou not hear? My God! art thou no longer living? Nay, thou canst not die. Thou dost but hide thyself. Thou hast chosen me for this work. I know it!... Therefore, O God, accomplish thine own will! Forsake me not, for the sake of thy well-beloved Son, Jesus Christ, my defense, my buckler, and my stronghold. Lord—where art thou?... My God, where art thou?... Come! I pray thee, I am ready.... Behold me prepared to lay down my life for thy truth...suffering like a lamb. For the cause is holy. It is thine own! ...I will not let thee go! no, nor yet for all eternity! And though the world should be thronged with devils—and this body, which is the work of thine hands, should be cast forth, trodden under foot, cut in pieces,...consumed to ashes, my soul is thine. *Yea, I have thine own word to assure me of it.* My soul belongs to thee, and will abide with thee forever! Amen! O God send help! ...Amen!<sup>3</sup> 

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in Sproul, *Holiness of God*, 100-1. Emphasis added.

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. DANIEL KLEYN

## Question Sessions in Mission Work

A significant tool in teaching the truths of the Reformed faith, and thus a significant part of mission work, is to provide opportunity for questions to be asked and answered. We regularly use this tool after lectures, classes, Bible studies, and so forth. We also do it, at times, after Sunday worship services are finished. On other occasions, we devote the whole of a Bible study to answering questions.

These question sessions have been beneficial, under the Lord's blessing, for myself personally, especially because many of the questions arise from the different backgrounds of the saints here. This forces one to consider ideas and perspectives never faced before, which contributes to spiritual growth. At the same time, the

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opportunity to ask questions is helpful for the saints, enabling them to express their thoughts and to raise matters that were not directly addressed in the lectures. This contributes, by God's grace, to spiritual growth in the truth and in its application to the church and to their daily lives.

Another significant benefit of the question periods is that they are a means by which we and those among whom we labor come to a better knowledge and understanding of each other. As we hear the questions, we learn where the saints are currently in their understanding of the truth, are enlightened concerning their struggles with some truths, and are given an insight into their lives and backgrounds. All of this is most helpful in guiding us to teach the truth in such a way that it can be understood, and in being patient in doing so. On the flip



side, as the saints hear our answers, they come to know and appreciate the truth more, see more clearly its biblical basis and its applications, and thus also come to know us and the PRCA denomination better.

From time to time, we have included these questions in our monthly missionary reports to Doon PRC (the calling church) and the Foreign Mission Committee. The members of Doon Council and the FMC have expressed appreciation for this birds-eye view into the mission work. We trust you will also find the questions enlightening for the same reason.



Since a major aspect of our work is instruction in Reformed truth, a good majority of the questions are doctrinal in nature. Usually there is little hesitation to ask questions, which makes for a very lively Q&A period—many hands up at the same time, questions fired in the middle of a lecture, good discussions on various aspects of the truth, and so on. Sometimes we can have up to thirty questions in a session. It is heartwarming to see their excitement. Apart from the challenge of answering the questions, one cannot help but be excited with them.

### Doctrinal Questions

- If the whole Bible is the Word of God, what about the words of the devil and wicked men recorded in it?
- What doctrine of Scripture do those who hold to Federal Vision have?
- Since God created all creatures, is God responsible for what the created beings do?
- If God created all things perfect, including Adam and the devil, where did sin come from?
- If man does not have a free will to choose, then how do we explain the choice of Adam to sin?
- How do we explain the fact that God is sovereign over sin but not responsible for it?
- Looking at Isaiah 45:7, can we say there's a difference between God being the author of sin and God being the creator of sin?
- Is it possible for an over-emphasis on God's sovereignty to lead to fatalism?
- If God's foreknowledge is causal, does that include the deeds of Satan, Judas Iscariot, etc.?
- Since God does not share His communicable attributes with the ungodly, how do we explain the good they do?
- Is it true that there are some things God cannot do, and the reason is God's eternal counsel?
- Is it correct to say that *God* died for us on the cross?
- Do the reprobate go to hell because of their sin, or because of the decree of reprobation?
- Matthew 24:14 mentions that many are called but few are chosen. Why are reprobates called by God?
- How does reprobation serve God's glory?
- Since sheep never change into goats, doesn't that mean that all the children of those who are sheep are also sheep, and all the children of those who are goats are also goats?
- If we believe God has eternally elected, what is the purpose of doing evangelism work?
- Does the preaching of a false gospel count in the worldwide preaching of the gospel?
- After salvation is applied to an individual, does he remain in his depraved condition?
- Do Exodus 32 and Revelation 22, which mention being blotted out of the book of life, imply that it's possible for someone to lose his election and salvation?
- Is it wrong to preach about hell? Is the doctrine of hell part of the gospel?
- Is it proper to distinguish between passive holiness (justification) and active holiness (sanctification)?
- If the law still has a purpose and place in our lives, what about texts (Romans 6:14, Galatians 3:25) that teach we are not under the law, but under grace?
- If you hold to the supralapsarian view, how can it be said that the people of God deserve to go to hell? Wouldn't that only be true if God elected His people out of a fallen human race (cf. infralapsarian view)?
- Abraham Kuyper wrote the book, *Particular Grace*. How could he also adopt and teach common grace?
- Is it correct to say that someone who holds to free will is an enemy of grace and thus also an enemy of God?
- What is the difference between soul and spirit? Is the Reformed view trichotomy, or dichotomy?
- The premillennialists divide history up into seven main dispensations. How do the Reformed divide up history?
- Does Romans 11:25 (which mentions that "blindness in part is happened to Israel") imply a major conversion of the Jews in the future, as the premillennialists teach?
- How does the final judgment before the throne of God (Revelation 20) fit in with the truth of election?



A significant part of our mission work is instruction in Reformed church government. The background for many of the saints here is Independentism. For some, it has been the hierarchical form of church government. Because of this, many aspects of Reformed church government are strikingly new and can at first seem unnecessary or confusing. However, the saints manifest a good interest also in this aspect of the truth. We are grateful for the way in which many of the churches have put these things into practice. It is rewarding to them and to us to observe the peace and good order biblical church government brings to the church.

### Church Government Questions

- Can an ordained minister serve more than one congregation at the same time?
- Is it correct for ministers to apply for positions in vacant churches?
- What factors should a minister consider in order to determine the answer to a call?
- Is street preaching (in markets, on buses, etc.) a good way to do evangelism work?
- Do Reformed churches practice tithing?
- Why is a seminary training necessary if some men are gifted to preach without it?
- What is the role of women in the church if they are not able to teach?
- Why must there be three special offices in a church in order for it to be a church?
- Is a pastor called to his office for life? If so, can he ever retire?
- Is it possible for a local church to establish and start its own seminary?
- Since preaching should contain only the Word of God, may ministers use illustrations in sermons?
- Should only men be deacons? If so, what about Dorcas?
- Can a man be nominated for two offices in the church at the same time, with the congregation determining by vote which one he will occupy?
- Shouldn't an elder have some formal education if he is to be "apt to teach"?
- Since elders do the discipline work in the church, who disciplines erring elders?
- Should baptism be done by immersion, or pouring, or sprinkling?

- What determines how many elders and/or deacons there are in a congregation?
- Since the offices of pastor and elder overlap, is it necessary to have separate offices?
- How can elders determine if a pastor's sermons are correct if the elders haven't received a seminary training?
- Should the deacons also help poor people who are not members of the church? If so, how?
- If the deacons are to care for the poor, what if a deacon himself is poor? Who cares for him?
- If there is a split in a church, is it correct (in light of separation of church and state) to have the courts of the land decide who is the legitimate owner of the property?
- May or should churches have a "sergeant at arms" at their ecclesiastical assemblies?
- Once a church joins a denomination, does the denomination become the owner of the church property?
- Can it be said that the majority vote of an ecclesiastical assembly is the "voice of God"?



As we all know, the truth of God is not only for our heads, but also for our hearts and lives. What stands out, in that regard, is the doctrine of God's sovereignty—a truth that, when clearly understood and embraced, is a constant source of comfort to every believer. The road of growth in the truth includes, therefore, many personal questions about its application. For God's people, learning the truth is not simply an intellectual exercise. We thank the Lord for this, too.

### Personal Questions

- Is knowledge of election a personal thing, so that while you can know it about yourself, you cannot know it about other people?
- How can I know my sins were forgiven some 2,000 year ago? How can I be sure I am elect?
- How can the truth of total depravity be gospel, for it seems only to discourage us?
- When I sometimes have doubts (unbelief), does that mean God's power has failed to make me believe?
- Solomon was the wisest man, but he became foolish later in his life. Can that happen to us?
- Would you say that believing the truth is a miracle?
- How can and should we pray, in light of the fact that God has eternally decreed all things?

- How do we attain comfort when we are overwhelmed with troubles? How do we comfort others when they are overwhelmed?
- In light of the communion of saints, what kind of relationship may we have with family members who are unbelievers?
- Do the people of God need suffering every day, so that we will be purified every day?
- If suffering is a blessing for the elect, then is it correct to say that suffering is a curse for the wicked?
- If the suffering I experience is a consequence of sin, then is that suffering still a blessing?

- Will we experience sorrow in heaven when we realize that some of our family members, whom we thought were believers, are not there?



We hope these questions (even without the answers) will give you a glimpse into the character of our denomination's mission work in the Philippines as well as into the lives of your fellow believers here. And may that in turn be of help in your prayers for this work and for the Lord's blessing upon it. ☞

## STRENGTH OF YOUTH

## REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA

“To Teach Them War” (8)

# Knowing War's Origin: In Man's Fall

### The Universality of War against God

The universality of sin (and death, for that matter) is undeniable. Wherever man is, moral evil abounds. The Bible declares it (I Kings 8:46; Ps. 14:1-3; Prov. 20:9; Eccl. 7:20; Rom. 3:1-20; Gal. 3:22; I John 1:8, 10). Experience confirms it. Even those who desperately cling to the dream of the essential goodness of man find their own experiences and relationships darkened by sin and sin's consequences.

Sin is wicked war against God and His law. Natural man is not merely *separated* from God. Man is *against* God. Romans 8:7 teaches, “Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Man does not merely rebel against God (an activity), but man is a rebel against God (an identity on account of his nature). Man cannot be subject to the law, but can only rebel against it.

Because sin is universal, and sin is war against God, war against God is universal. Wherever man is, from pole to pole, there you find him actively opposed to his Maker.

*Rev. Huizinga is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.*

*Previous article in this series: October 1, 2015, p. 19.*

The ten events that follow were gleaned from the *Los Angeles Times* over a period of one week during the middle of this past November, and are representative of events commonly reported in the news. Whether these events were portrayed by the journalists reporting them as good or bad, whether they were deemed by the reader to be good or bad, whether they occurred in the world at large, in the country, or locally in southern California, they are all clear expressions of man's spirited warfare against God. Reading the daily newspaper with the spectacles of Scripture, one reads the annals of war:

- Multiple “R” rated movies containing nudity, strong sexuality, language and/or violence debuted and grossed millions of dollars in days.
- The Sabbath of the Lord was observed by 22 NFL football teams performing on the sacred courts of the stadium's turf to the delight of hundreds of thousands of people sanctified unto the NFL.
- A group of university students unhappy with the performance of their university president revolted by “occupying” their campus until their president was ousted.
- An untold number of children across the world are exploited sexually and forced into prostitution.
- An estimated 96,000 “gay weddings” have taken place

nationwide in the four months since the U.S. Supreme Court's highly-celebrated decision legalizing "gay marriage."

- A man was sentenced for "revenge pornography" in which he stole and sold nude photos from a woman's email account.
- ISIS terrorists bragged about their bomb that brought down a Russian airplane over Egypt, killing all 224 people onboard.
- ISIS terrorists claimed responsibility for killing at least 129 people in Paris in one night.
- A judge convicted a man for murdering his boyfriend by chopping off his boyfriend's head and leaving it in a grocery bag along a trail—an act so barbaric, even the judge called it "so depraved."
- A woman was convicted for killing her one-month old daughter whom she had put in a microwave oven for approximately two to five minutes.

That was only a week's worth. "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18).

What if there was a newspaper with an editorial staff that could see what God can see, peering into the inmost recesses of man's heart? What if that staff selected some of these "heart" events for the daily news? The *L.A. Times* reports, for example, that a woman microwaved her infant daughter—a heinous and public sin that vexes your righteous soul. But this same newspaper also reports, for example, what happened in the heart of a toddler in nursery at church on Sunday when his toy was swiped by another child, and how immediately his heart glowed red with the desire for revenge—a private and typically undetectable sin. A mother murdering her baby and a child's desire for revenge, although sins differing in severity on account of their nature, are nonetheless both acts of warfare against God and His law.

If there were a newspaper that could report such "heart" events, the daily news would show us the universality of sin at a whole new level. Any man could make the news. I could. So could you. The whole earth teems with human rebels defying the living God. Even from the sinful flesh that cleaves to the regenerated Christian springs attitudes and actions of hostility toward God. If we could read such a newspaper, then the enmity of which the Bible speaks, and the enmity that God be-

holds from on high day after day would be more plainly revealed to us. War against God is universal.

## Raising the Question

What explains the universality of sin (war against God)?

In laying very carefully the broad theological foundation for a proper understanding of our ongoing spiritual warfare, we have been examining the origin of war in God (studying His determinative counsel and essential holiness), in the angelic realm (sin's first entrance into the creation), and now in man. Before we can examine the origin of *holy* war in us as regenerated believers and the explanation for our battle against sin and for the kingdom of God, we need to understand the origin of *unholy* war in natural man.

Last time we considered the biblical truth of the fall of man. By sinning against God, Adam declared war against God. The last verse of Genesis 3 confirms Adam's fall was war, for we read "And he [God] drove out the man, and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life." God drove man from Eden. Turning around, man saw that God had sent a detachment of angelic soldiers called cherubim and a flaming sword to prevent any re-entry. Those soldiers said it all. This was war.

Now we have two important biblical concepts and realities before us: the fall of man and the universality of sin. Is there any connection between the two? Is there any connection between the sin of Adam and you, between the sin of Adam and your neighbor, between the sin of Adam and the human race?

## The Pelagian Doctrine of Imitation

Pelagius said, "No. Adam's fall injured himself alone, not the human race."

The issues involved in the doctrinal question we have posed occasioned a major controversy between Pelagius and Augustine in the early fifth century of the church. You might remember hearing these two names in a catechism or church history class. Pelagius was a monk of heretical doctrine who likely hailed from Britain. Augustine was a monk earnestly contending for the faith in Hippo, Africa.



Pelagius travelled to Rome and evidently was struck by the prevalence of moral corruption. He explained the abounding iniquity in Rome and throughout the world with his doctrine of imitation. In Article 15, our Belgic Confession closes with these words, “Wherefore we reject the error of the Pelagians, who assert that sin proceeds only from imitation.”

Pelagius (with his disciple Coelestius) denied the sovereign grace of God that originates in eternal predestination, is accomplished in the substitutionary atonement of the crucified Christ for the elect, and is efficaciously worked by the Holy Spirit in the heart of the totally depraved, elect sinner. Instead of teaching an unworthy dead sinner and a sovereign God of grace, Pelagius taught that every human being is born into this world without any inherent sinfulness and grows up with the ability freely to choose evil or good. The more the child wills in a certain direction (toward evil or good), the more the will settles in that direction. Willing good or willing evil can become a habit. What might the child will? What might the child do? Might the child keep or break God’s law? Invariably, the child sins because he is surrounded by so many bad examples—the sins of father and mother, the sins of other boys and girls, the sins he sees on the streets, and so on. He wills to do what they do. Sin is not an inner principle that proceeds from his nature, but an outward act of the will performed in imitation of other people’s morally evil outward acts.

In order to understand a world of iniquity, taught Pelagius, you have to go back to Adam. Adam sinned. He chose to do evil. Then his children freely chose to imitate some of his bad examples, and the grandchildren imitated some of the bad examples they saw, and the great-grandchildren imitated what they saw. As history unfolds, therefore, sin abounds, not because there are bad people doing bad things, but because there are basically good people choosing to follow bad examples.


Pelagius’ explanation of sins such as those of the mother who microwaved her infant daughter or the man who beheaded his male lover would find almost universal acceptance today. People judge that there is nothing morally wrong with those who committed these deeds. Blame is not to be placed at their feet. They were conditioned by their environment. They were surrounded by so many negative influences and bad examples. They are helpless

victims pressured into such unfortunate and even despicable acts by undesirable external circumstances beyond their control.

We ought to point out that as dishonorable as Pelagius and his wicked doctrine were, at least he acknowledged there was a man Adam and that the man Adam sinned. In that respect Pelagius is more honorable than many theologians today. With the widespread acceptance of evolutionary theory as the explanation of origins and with the acceptance of that theory’s theological implications, a modern Pelagian-Augustinian controversy would, pitifully, have to commence by establishing some basic ground rules. Do we agree the opening chapters of Genesis are inspired and record literal history? Do we agree Adam was a historical figure? Do we agree this Adam ate forbidden fruit and fell?

In summary, Pelagius did not ascribe the universality of sin to the fall of Adam and what we know as original sin, but to imitation, teaching that Adam’s sin has no essential effect upon any of his children—Cain, Abel, you or me. Adam was merely a bad example. The devastating consequence of this doctrine of imitation is that it reduces the redemptive work of Jesus Christ to nothing more than the provision of a good example. As man sins by following Adam’s or another’s bad example, so man saves himself by following Christ’s good example. The gospel of Pelagian salvation is “For by works are ye saved through following the example of Jesus, the gift of God to you.”

The explanation for the universality of sin (war against God), including my sin and your sin, cannot be found merely in imitation. The answer must be found in the biblical doctrine of original sin, an explanation of which is forthcoming. For now, we conclude with a few words from the pen of Augustine in the year 412, at the very dawn of the Pelagian controversy:

No doubt all they imitate Adam who by disobedience transgress the commandment of God; but he is one thing as an example to those who sin because they choose; and another thing as the progenitor of all who are born with sin. All His saints, also, imitate Christ in the pursuit of righteousness; whence the same apostle, whom we have already quoted, says, “Be ye imitators of me, as I am also of Christ.” But besides this imitation, His grace works within us our illumination and justification. 

### Denominational Activities

Pastor Carl and Mary Haak (Georgetown PRC, Hudsonville, MI) left on November 11 for a three-week stay (November 11-30) with the PRC of Vellore, India. Deane and Donna Wassink, also from Georgetown PRC, joined them on November 25, and then Rev. Cory Griess and Rev. Doug Kuiper from the Foreign Mission Committee (FMC) arrived on December 1. The Wassinks and the ministers from the FMC returned home on December 14. In all, a five-week stay was scheduled with the saints of God in the PRC of Vellore.

During this time numerous conferences were arranged with area pastors, eight seminars were held, visits were made to three cities plus numerous villages where outreach is done, and visits were conducted at the Grace Foster Home. The delegates also planned to spend time with Pastor Paulraj and his wife Kasthuri to give them encouragement in the work. The purpose of the visit was to get to know the work and the people there to see if and when the Foreign Mission Committee can assist Georgetown PRC in her work in India.

### Congregational Activities

The evening of Thursday, December 3, was reserved by the Council and congregation to celebrate the 40th anniversary of God's

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

faithfulness to the First Protestant Reformed Church of Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. We rejoice with the saints there as we reflect on God's goodness to them as a congregation!

On November 13, girls grade eight and older enjoyed a fun-filled, enriching night at Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. The theme of the evening was "The Road of Life: Walking Together" and the text was taken from I John 1:7. There were devotions, a panel discussion, fellowship, and food. Those in the area were encouraged to invite friends, neighbors, and relatives. Girls and young women through college-age took fun pictures in the photo booth and learned how to live out their walk of faith together. A good and spiritually rewarding activity for the young ladies!

It is noteworthy when one of our churches cancels services. That is exactly what happened at Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA on Sunday, November 22. The prior Tuesday a storm with winds measuring 70-100 mph hit the area. This storm lasted from about 3:00 P.M. until after midnight. Trees were uprooted and others snapped off. The trees took down power lines, fell on houses, and blocked roads. By the next morning more than 200,000 electrical customers had lost power—most of the Spokane population. And it stayed off—for six whole days! According to Rev. Rodney Kleyn, the power company stated that it was the

worst disaster they had ever dealt with as crews and linemen from six states were called in to help. Night-time temperatures fell to about 20 degrees and it was difficult to keep the homes warm. The Kleyns and many others had no electricity, no lights, no furnace, and no hot water. The children had no school for three days, and without power or heat the Sunday services were cancelled. There was joy in Spokane when the electricity came back on the next Tuesday!

The congregation in Loveland, CO PRC was invited to the annual Thanksgiving chapel and delicious turkey dinner held each year the day before Thanksgiving. Many attended, thanking God at the chapel and enjoying His earthly bounties afterward!

### Young Peoples Activities

The Lacombe, Alberta, Canada Young People's Society invited the congregation there and also the Edmonton congregation to attend the soup supper and pie auction they had planned as a fundraiser for the convention. It was held on November 20 at Genesis Protestant Reformed Christian School. All joined together for an evening of great fun, fellowship, and food!

And at Edmonton their annual Remembrance Day car rally was held on November 11. That's always a big hit north of the border!

The annual PR Young People's Thanksgiving Mass Meeting was held at Faith PRC in Jenison, MI on November 22. The meeting was

opened with prayer and Scripture reading from Genesis 33. After the singing of Psalter #7, Rev. Richard Smit was introduced to the audience of young people. He addressed them from Genesis 33:9-11 on the theme "I Have Enough." This passage admonished the young believers to true contentment in our Lord Jesus Christ and called attention to God's blessings through this life and the things of this life by His grace alone. Special numbers were rendered, and after closing prayer the group enjoyed refreshments. A profitable time was enjoyed by the estimated 200 in attendance.

### Young Adult Activities

Loveland, CO PRC plans to host a Young Adult Retreat on March 14-17, 2016, with more exciting details forthcoming.

### School Activities

The Board of Education of

Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA organized the annual Promotional Supper in November. After punch and opening devotions a grand meal was served, followed by a God-glorifying program by Trinity's Senior Choir. The group returned to the fellowship hall for delicious desserts, where an offering was taken to benefit the school. What a blessing God has given in our own Protestant Reformed high schools!


Heritage Christian School Foundation sponsored an "Evening of Praise" at the Grandville, MI High School auditorium on the evening of November 28. A dessert reception followed the concert that included the Heritage Christian School third graders, the Hope Heralds, the PR Student Orchestra, and the Voices of Victory.

### Minister Activities

On November 23 the calling

church for the Philippine mission field voted to extend a call for a second missionary there. From the trio of Rev. Cory Griess (Calvary PRC, Hull, IA), Rev. Brian Huizinga (Hope PRC, Redlands, CA), and Rev. James Laning (Hull, IA PRC) the men at Doon decided to call Rev. James Laning. On December 13, Rev. Laning declined this call.

A delegation from the Contact Committee of the PRCA (Profs. R. Cammenga and R. Dykstra) traveled to the Philippines in December (10-21) to begin work on sister-church relationships with the Protestant Reformed Churches there. Rev. Daniel Holstege and his wife are scheduled to travel there in January to help with the work on the mission field. All if the Lord wills.

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

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The congregation and Council of Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, Alberta express Christian sympathy to Elder Hilgard Goosen and wife Rene and to their children, Dieter, Reinhard, Neil, and Martin in the death of their father and grandfather,

**KOOS SWANEPOEL.**

"For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Romans 14:8, 9).

Rev. Thomas Miersma, President  
John Wierenga, Vice-president

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of the Loveland PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Pam Kooienga and their family in the death of her husband, their father, and grandfather:

**MR. LARRY KOOIENGA.**

Psalm 116:15: "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Rev. Steven Key, President  
Victor Solanyk, Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express our sympathy to Bruce and Cherie Jabaay, the Joel and Lisa Kooienga family, and to Brian Jabaay in the recent passing to glory of their mother and grandmother,

**MRS. LAURA JABAAY.**

It is our prayer that they may take comfort from God's word to us in Psalm 23:4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

Rev. Carl Haak, President  
Gerald Kuiper, Clerk

### Wedding Anniversary

■ We give thanks to God as we celebrate (Lord willing) the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents,

#### DAVE and LORI KUIPER,

on January 10, 2016. We are blessed to be their children and to have received such covenantal blessings through their godly example to us and their love for us. "And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up" (Deuteronomy 6:7).

- \* Jeremy and Jill Thull  
James, Brooke, Isabella, Charlie
- \* Joshua and Sara Lubbers  
Kelly, Jacob, Nicholas, Alaina, Lucas,  
Michael
- \* Kelly Kuiper (in glory)
- \* Joe and Kathleen Kuiper  
Lyla, Jonah, Isaac
- \* Tony and Michelle Gruppen  
Jonathan, Allison, Grace, Emily  
Grandville, Michigan

### Wedding Anniversary

■ The Lord willing,

#### HENRY and HILLIE HOEKSTRA

will celebrate their 60<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary on January 9, 2016. We are thankful for the many years God has given them together and for the blessing of their godly instruction and example to us, their children. Our prayer is that God will continue to uphold and bless them. "The secret of the LORD is with them that fear him; and he will shew them his covenant" (Psalm 25:14).

- \* Jim and Gladys Koole
- \* Brian and Pauline Kroese
- \* Henry and Linda Kamps
- \* Harlan and Lenora Hoekstra
- \* Vernon and Kari Hoekstra
- \* Mark and LaBeth Hoekstra
- \* Jeff and Mary Kalsbeek
- \* Jeff and Rose Andringa
- \* Barry and Patty Pollema  
55 grandchildren  
25 great-grandchildren

Hull, Iowa

### Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Crete PRC on Wednesday, March 2, 2016 at 8:30 A.M., the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 1 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Crete's consistory.

Rev. D. Kuiper,  
Stated Clerk

### Lecture

#### Topic—

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

#### Speaker—

Prof. David Engelsma

#### Date/Time—

Friday April 22, 2016 at 7:30 PM

#### Place—

First Jenison CRC  
8360 Cottonwood Dr.  
Jenison MI

#### Sponsor—

Reformed Witness Committee of Hope PRC

Will be lived-streamed on SermonAudio

### Reformed Witness Hour January 2016

#### Date

January 3  
January 10  
January 17  
January 24  
January 31

#### Topic

"Watching for Christ's Return"  
"Keep Yourselves in Love"  
"Praise to God our Savior"  
"Children of Truth"  
"Healing the Nobleman's Son"

#### Text

I Thessalonians 5:1-6  
Jude:20-23  
Jude:24, 25  
III John:4  
John 4:46-54