

The Standard Bearer

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Cast Thy Burden Upon Jehovah

“Cast thy burden upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee: he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved.”

Psalm 55: 22

Bearing a burden is a part of living in a sin-cursed world. Burden-bearing is especially the lot of God's people. David knew burdens. The burden he has in mind when he writes this Psalm is that of being betrayed by his son, Absalom, along with his friend, Ahithophel.

The natural way in which our sinful natures react to a burden is to fly away from them (6, 7). But God would have us respond to the burden that He is pleased to put upon us by casting it back to Him. God uses David's experience to teach us the right way to deal with our burdens. Cast them upon Jehovah by means of prayer.

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

Our Given Burdens

God is pleased, in His infinite wisdom, to give burdens to all of His beloved children as long as they live in this sin-cursed world with their old man of sin. Paul informed the newly established church on his first missionary journey that “we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22).

We have physical burdens. We experience the physical burdens of every kind of disease and illness, all aches and pains in joints and muscles, the “sorrow” of child-bearing, and the burden of becoming increasingly weak and feeble as we advance in years. And there is a part of the burden of dying that is physical.

We have mental and emotional burdens. There are anxieties, worries, mental infirmities, and the improper handling of circumstances that bring on stresses and frustrations. We can have heavy concerns about work and about income when the economy slows. There are often concerns about high Christian school tuition obligations.

There are relationship burdens. Sometimes it is the burden of child-rearing, especially with children who have special needs. There is marriage strife. There is the

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burden of being given by God parents who are weak and sinful. Every child of God has sins committed against him. There can be the fervent but unfulfilled (as yet) desire for a mate. There is the burden of a mate who is experiencing various levels of dementia. And there is the burden of the death of a loved one.

There are sin burdens—my own sins. And there is my sinfulness, that is, my corrupt nature against which I have to struggle all my life long or that depravity that cleaves to me (Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 56 and 126). There is the realization that every burden is due to our willful fall into sin with our first father, Adam.

This Psalm describes David's way as filled with such a burden that he mourns and cries aloud. He speaks of an enemy (3) as someone who wickedly casts iniquity and hatred upon him. David's enemy spoke evil of him (9), and others exercised themselves with violence and strife against him (11). It is very likely that David was thinking of the many in the nation who joined Absalom's rebellion.

What made David's burden extra heavy was that he was betrayed by one who was formerly a dear friend (12-14). The hurts occasioned by fellow saints are often more painful than those brought upon us by the ungodly.

But what made David's burden especially heavy was the fact that he knew that this rebellion by Absalom was a direct consequence of his sins with Bathsheba and Uriah. God declared that He would "raise up evil against thee out of thine own house" (cf. II Sam. 12:10, 11). This weighed heavily on David!

It is most important to note that the Hebrew word David was inspired to use for "burden" emphasizes two things. One, the burden is heavy, of a crushing weight. And, two, the burden is my lot, that is, a gift given to me. It is an appointed weight given to me by my heavenly Father. It is not a chance event or some fate. The idea is that the burden fits me. It is measured out for me by God to fit my personality and character. Each and every burden that comes my way in this life is ordained specifically for me at that time. My wise and loving Father is gifting me with each burden. It is a given burden! In all thy ways acknowledge Him!

Our Casting Prayers

Our sinful natures can react to the presence of burdens in so many wrong ways. Often believers try to handle

the burden with their will-power, with mental or physical strength. They think they can handle it! Or they try to avoid the burden by flying away (cf. 6, 7). Sometimes they fly away by means of distracting pleasures. Sometimes they fly away by using alcohol or drugs. Sometimes they even fly away by killing themselves. Other times they "stuff it" inside their souls, or refuse to admit that the burden is there. Either way, they eventually end up being crushed.

God uses David's experience to teach us how to respond correctly to our given burden. Our heavenly Father gifts us with burdens exactly so that we will cast them on Him. The ability to bear a burden arises from simply casting our burden on Jehovah.

To "cast" is to throw or hurl something. The point of emphasis is that this is an aggressive action that we carry out with urgency. Over against our holding it or dealing with it slowly or hesitantly, we are called to exercise ourselves with diligence to give it to our God.

To cast is the constant activity of praying. David implies this by speaking of his activity of praying in the Psalm. "Give ear to my prayer, O God; and hide not thyself from my supplication. Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint and make a noise" (1, 2). "I will call upon God" (16). "Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud; and he shall hear my voice" (17). Praying is an activity of faith that looks up to our heavenly Father. Prayer makes us look away from ourselves. What needless pain we bear because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Casting prayer makes us look to "Jehovah," the sovereign I Am. The One who is the Giver of the burden is the One who has established the most intimate relationship with us. And this relationship of love is completely because of His good pleasure to create it. He had no need to have such a wonderful relationship with us, but this relationship exists because He chose to establish it. Just knowing that the burden is a divinely appointed gift from Him, who loves us so much that He gave His only begotten Son for us, greatly helps in bearing the burden.

We greatly ease the burden by taking it up cheerfully and joyfully. Instead of allowing the burden to distract us from loving our God with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength, we are to find the burdens as God-given opportunities for us to see them as His good and wise

will, so that we take them up. So often we forget that our chief duty is to love our Father with our all. We are to acknowledge Him as the wise Giver, to trust His wisdom and to remain confident of His love for us personally. Realize that He is exceedingly able to do abundant good through each and every burden. This is the way that we consciously return the gift to God.

God's Sure Answer

Jehovah always answers our burden-bearing prayers. "He shall sustain thee" is His promise, that is, He will support us, hold or bear us up, and provide for us. This tells us that God does not always remove the burden, but supports us in the bearing of it. He sustains us by reminding us that He is faithful in His love for us in Christ (I Cor. 10:13). No matter what the burden, we re-learn that of much greater weight is the greatest gift, namely, His attitude of undeserved love for us in His Son. His grace (mighty power) is sufficient. That grace ought to suffice us.

When we look at the Giver of the burden and cast

the burden upon Him, then we realize that He is faithful to view us as "the righteous." While our consciences will accuse us of our sin and sinfulness, He declares that He has justified us! We are righteous not only because our sins are taken away, but also because we are perfect in His judgment, for He has granted and imputed to us the perfect righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ. Though we still sin and carry burdens, we "shall never... be moved." We are never moved from election, from the blood of the cross, and from the presence of the Holy Spirit.

It is in this way that we commit ourselves to trusting Him: "I will trust in thee" (23). We trust Him to be doing all things right—exactly right! This trust is not a passive state of mind, but a vigorous act of the soul by which we lay hold on the promises of God and cling to them despite the adversity that at times seems to overwhelm us. We vigorously cling to His promises of unconditional love and wisdom. And we cling to His declaration that His great purpose in gifting us with a burden is so we realize that He is refining us for our place in glory. ☞

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

What It Means To Be Reformed (6)

CALVINISTIC: Implications (1)

Introduction

Since summarizing what it means to be Reformed is really summarizing what it means to be Christian, we are necessarily brief in this series of editorials. So far, we have said that to be Reformed is 1) to embrace the beautiful truth of God's gracious *covenant* of friend-

ship, and 2) that this covenant is to be understood *Calvinistically*. That is, the "doctrines of grace," or the "Five Points of Calvinism," and the "Five Solas" of the Reformation

are the necessary and controlling biblical framework for understanding the covenant.

In this article, I want to point out the implications of this Calvinistic understanding of the covenant, and start with how Calvinism is misunderstood.

What Calvinism does not imply

Foes of Calvinism portray a very negative image of Calvinism. For them, some pretty ugly stuff tags

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COVENANTAL
CALVINISTIC
Implications (1)
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Previous article in this series: April 15, 2015, p. 317.

along with being Calvinistic.¹ What is some of that ugly stuff?

Calvinism is anti-missions.

This is an old charge, tied especially to Calvinism's teaching of unconditional, double predestination and limited atonement. If you believe that God has chosen only some who will infallibly be saved, and rejected others who cannot be saved; and if Jesus has died only for these elect—so the charge goes—there is no sense in doing missions. It's a theological *Que sera, sera*.

The charge is not legitimate; not historically; not theologically. Faithful Calvinists have always done missions. Calvinists are still busy doing missions, always striving to be more faithful, of course. Rather than hindering missions, Calvinism itself drives Calvinist missions. Exactly *because* they believe that God's elect are in the world and in darkness, Calvinists send missionaries. And exactly *because* they believe that these elect are brought to saving faith by preaching, Calvinists want gospel-preaching central and primary in missions. That is, "word" may not take a backseat to

"deeds" as the main tool in missions. Calvinists are not motivated by horror that some may go lost for whom Christ died—Arminianism; but by the eagerness to be used by God to gather His elect. It's not the drive to save as many as possibly can be saved by appealing to their free wills—Arminianism; but the commitment to be what God wills believers to be—the witnesses whom the Holy Spirit uses irresistibly to draw His elect.

The fathers at Dordt were aware of the criticism that "Calvinism is fatalistic about salvation; Calvinism cannot urge churches to preach to all nations; Calvinism relegates preaching to an optional thing because God will surely save whom God elects." So in every head of doctrine, the Canons confess conviction of the importance of promiscuous gospel preaching.²

If Calvinistic (Reformed) churches are missions-lazy, one of two things—and perhaps three—must be true. Either the churches misunderstand Calvinism, turning it into hyper-Calvinism or a kind of fatalism ("God doesn't need our help to save His elect"), or the churches are Calvinists in their brains but not in their hearts. A third, albeit we pray remote, possibility is that they do not take seriously what they read

² See I:1-4, 16; II:5; III/IV:6, 8, 9, 11, 12, 17; V:7, 10, 14, 15; and note carefully how the Canons *begin*. It is a truism to say that this emphasis of the Canons is consistent with the teaching of the Reformed creeds that they intend to explain and expand upon—the Heidelberg (21:54; 25:65; 48:123) and the Belgic Confession (Arts. 2, 24, 31, 33, 35). But the fathers at Dordt made the point to emphasize what the Reformed faith confessed.

in the Canons. Let all Reformed churches examine themselves here.

Calvinism is anti-personal responsibility.

The charge goes like this: If God is sovereign in salvation, drawing His elect in a way they cannot resist, and preserving them so that none of them can ever be lost, well, who will feel any responsibility to struggle toward godliness, to battle the old man, to be godly? After all, if we're going to be saved we're going to be saved. Or, the charge is that too much emphasis is put on God's sovereignty and not enough on man's responsibility. If, as Calvinists teach, man has no free will, how can he be responsible anyway?³ Or, the charge is based on what some *think* Calvinists say: "Since we are saved by grace without works, we must not emphasize works." That is, Calvinists so strongly deny working *for* salvation that they forget about working *after* salvation.

Calvinism is not careless in the matter of man's responsibility. In fact, we are convinced that Calvinism's doctrines of grace promote personal responsibility more biblically and faithfully than any other system of doctrine. Arminianism motivates man by fear—fear that he may go lost, fear that God will reject him because he did not do enough, did not persevere. God gave him grace to be saved; now it is his responsibility to use that grace to become saved and to continue in salvation. If he does not, he will perish. Calvinism is altogether

³ Roger E. Olson says, "I don't give a flip about free will, except...to preserve human responsibility." *Against Calvinism*, 23.

¹ Roger E. Olson's 2014 *Against Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011) is one of these. There are others. Laurence Vance describes the baggage he believes comes with Calvinism: "Nothing will deaden a church or put a young man out of the ministry any more than an adherence to Calvinism. Nothing will foster pride and indifference as will an affection for Calvinism. Nothing will destroy holiness and spirituality as an attachment to Calvinism." *The Other Side of Calvinism* (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 1991, viii). These are charges very similar to those the Synod of Dordt addressed in their "Conclusions."

different. As the Heidelberg Catechism teaches, working responsibly comes *after* we know our gracious salvation, and *because* we know it. First, good works are *inevitable* for one united to Christ. Second, the doctrines of Calvinism promote personal responsibility and godly living most powerfully when they teach the *motive* for it. God's salvation is pure grace, nothing deserved. God loves *me*, a fully corrupt and absolutely undeserving sinner. But He loves me. He always will. And *that* knowledge, not fear, is what drives a Christian to "responsible" and godly living. The mainspring of the Christian life is not fear, but gratitude for covenant-salvation given of mere grace.

If a Calvinistic or Reformed minister fails to preach godly living in obedience to all the commandments, fails to preach the imperatives of the gospel, fails to warn of wrath to come for impenitent sinners, fails to admonish believers unto new obedience—one of three things, and maybe all of them, are true. Either he has lost his balance, over-reacting to works-righteousness, thinking it weak to "preach works"; or he has not understood yet the weight and full significance of God's call, "Be ye holy, for I am holy"; or, God forbid, the preacher has not personally tasted the gracious salvation that drives a saved sinner to say, "I am a friend of God and will give my life to serve my covenant Friend." Let all Reformed preachers examine themselves in the light of Dordt's concluding exhortation to "all their brethren in the gospel." A practical antinomianism

is as deadly as an antinomianism officially adopted. Perhaps more.

Calvinism is a religion for the head, but not for the heart, of doctrine not of love.

If this charge were true, it would be one of the most damning indictments of Calvinism possible. Since Reformed Christianity—and covenant theology—is about the great love and friendship of God, a Calvinism not about love is not Christianity. If it could be shown that Calvinism in some way minimizes God's love or downplays it in order to make a louder sound of God's sovereignty, Calvinism's reputation would deservedly suffer.

This accusation is not new either. A century ago a Scottish Presbyterian criticized Calvin's view of God's sovereignty because in it "love is subordinated to sovereignty, instead of sovereignty to love."⁴ In his *Arminian Theology: Myths and Realities*, Roger E. Olson claims that the "true divide at the heart of the Calvinist-Arminian split is not predestination versus free will but the guiding picture of God: he is primarily viewed as either (1) majestic, powerful, and controlling or (2) loving, good, and merciful."⁵

But a Calvinist refuses to be hung on the horns of that dilemma—viewing God *either* as majestic and controlling *or* loving and merciful. If an opponent of the Reformed faith would judge Calvinism honestly—by her creeds rather than by opinions of selected Reformed au-

thors—he would know better than to say what Olson claims. Read the creeds. See the starting point of the Heidelberg Catechism, with its language of love: faithful Savior, precious blood, not my own, heavenly Father, assurance of eternal life. Then study the Canons' explanation of the Heidelberg Catechism, and notice the same starting point of this official statement of what it means to be Reformed. Immediately after showing that God would have done no injustice to man by leaving all men to perish, the fathers speak of the love of God! "But in this the love of God was manifested, that he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Even the opening article of the Belgic Confession, whose approach is more systematic, concludes with the confession that the one and only God is "good, and the overflowing fountain of all good." And if an Arminian wants to know about the Calvinist's view of God's *power, majesty, and control* (indeed, we emphasize them!) we would urge him to read our beautiful confession of them in Lord's Day 10 of the Heidelberg Catechism, and Article 13 of the Belgic Confession.

What Calvinism implies

But these accusations are also answered by a positive confession of what Calvinism means, and by the genuine life that Calvinists seek to live *because of their Calvinism*.

Humble and reverent worship.

The Calvinist's life starts in the presence of His God and Father

⁴ James Orr (1844-1913), quoted in Olson, *Against Calvinism*, 31.

⁵ Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006, 73.

who *loves* him—the gracious God who saved him from the hell he deserves; the wise Father who cares for him in a fallen world; the merciful God who saved *him*, always the undeserving sinner. In the presence of this God, the worship of his lips has its source in the new heart that was given him, unasked, to replace his natural heart of stone. He casts his crown before God’s throne, giving praise to his covenant Friend-sovereign, “Not unto us, O Lord of heaven, but unto thee be glory given.” Nothing in his worship praises man, or calls attention to man, because God is to be praised in the assembly of the saints. Nothing in his worship is frivolous or petty, because the God whom he worships is the Sovereign of heaven and earth. Everything in his worship aims at that climactic final *sola*, To God Alone Be the Glory.

If one’s Calvinism does not show itself in an eagerness to worship in the presence of God, he must examine his Calvinism. If what bubbles out of a Calvinist is more of a “believe this doctrine, and if you don’t you must not be a Christian,” than a “believe this doctrine to the eternal comfort of your soul and join me in giving glory to our good God,” then his Calvinism is suspect. Genuine Calvinism, as genuine Christianity, loves and lives to give glory to God.

Humble assurance.

Because God is good, He promises never to leave or forsake His people. No one can pluck them out of His hand. Never.

Where the Arminians expressed uncertainty, and still do, Calvinists express confident faith. The fifth

head of the Canons works so masterfully to express this doctrine of preservation, and our assurance of that wonder-work, that one never tires of reading it. I cannot express in words strong enough that Reformed believers ought to master the Canons of Dordt (the Rejection of Errors as well) to the great comfort of their souls and the honor of God.

*If any adherent
of Christianity
should be humble,
it should be
the Calvinist.*

If they do, and believe this truth heartily, this knowledge of preservation will be “the real source of... filial reverence, true piety, patience in every tribulation, fervent prayers, constancy in suffering, and in confessing the truth, and of solid rejoicing in God.” Knowledge of this benefit is “an incentive to the serious and constant practice of gratitude and good works...” (Canons V:12). Assurance of preservation is “so far from...rendering believers carnally secure” (V:12) that in fact it is the real source of godliness. It does not produce in them “licentiousness, or a disregard to piety,” but it “renders them much more careful and solicitous to continue in the ways of the Lord.” (V:13).

Humble living among others.

Calvinists, whose Calvinism has reached their hearts, will live hum-

bly toward others. If any adherent of Christianity should be humble, it should be the Calvinist. God chose him unconditionally. Nothing in him merits God’s love. Christ died for unworthy sinners, of whom he is chief, and will preserve him when he is least deserving of it. So it is impossible that his attitude toward others be condescending. He listens to His Lord who called him to love his enemies, bless them that curse him, do good to them that hate him, and pray for them which despitefully use him and persecute him (Matt. 5:44). As Paul did to unbelieving Agrippa, he expresses a sincere desire that these enemies become Christians (Acts 26:28, 29).

Let the fathers of Dordt guide us again: “...They, to whom so great and so gracious a blessing is communicated...are bound to acknowledge it with humble and grateful hearts, and...not curiously to pry into the severity and justice of God’s judgments displayed to others, to whom this grace is not given” (III/IV:7).

How much damage has been done to the cause of the true gospel by Calvinists living in pride over against non-Christians, or non-Reformed Christians! I am tempted to say, as much damage as the defectors to Arminianism who formerly professed Calvinism; but we let God be judge of that.

Calvinists, true to their theology, learn at the feet of the publican: “God be merciful to me, the sinner.” At the feet of the apostle of grace: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.” And at the feet of Jesus Himself: “Learn of me.” ☞

■ The Ashers Bakery Case

I wonder who might have predicted decades ago that the *homosexual lobby* would be the chief persecutors of Christians in the Western world. Who would have imagined that it would be *homosexual advocacy groups* who would most endanger freedom of speech and religion? And who might have thought that *marriage* would be the battleground, with bakers, florists, and photographers under pressure to conform to this world?

“Gay marriage” (I use inverted commas advisedly, because Christians do not recognise such a thing) is now legal in many nations, and the US Supreme Court will make a ruling on it this summer, although a large number of US states have already legalised it. Closer to my home, England and Wales legalised it in 2013, followed by Scotland in 2014. Of the countries that make up the United Kingdom, only Northern Ireland still does not permit homosexual couples to marry. And even closer to my home, the Republic of Ireland will vote on whether to permit “gay marriage” in a referendum in May, which many expect to pass. The word “permit” is foolish, however, because no jurisdiction can permit an impossibility—not only may two men or two women not marry, they *cannot* marry, and when they make some kind of commitment to one another, it is not marriage, whatever legislation, court rulings, or even revisionist dictionaries might say. Christ Himself defined marriage in Matthew 19, and He was only echoing what God declared in Genesis 2.

Already on the statute books are laws that prohibit discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation in the matter of supplying goods and services, that is, a business may not provide a service to the community that it does not also offer to homosexuals. And many would find such a law reasonable in theory. After all, if a homosexual wants to buy something, why refuse him? Would a mechanic refuse to fix a homosexual man’s car; would a butcher refuse to sell meat to a homosexual; or would a gardener refuse to mow a lesbian’s lawn?

But what if two men or two women enter a business and ask for “wedding invitations” to their “gay wedding”? What if two women ask for floral arrangements for their “lesbian wedding”? What if two men ask a photographer to capture the moments—including the “groom kissing the groom” moment—of their “wedding”? Or what if Mike and Steve ask for a “wedding” cake?

What does a Christian printer, florist, photographer, or baker *do*?

Last week, the famous “Gay Cake Case” reached the courts in Northern Ireland. Last May, Gareth Lee, a volunteer with the gay rights activist group QueerSpace entered Ashers Bakery in Northern Ireland. He requested a cake for a “pro-homosexual marriage” event to mark “International Day Against Homophobia” with the following stipulations: the QueerSpace logo, the Sesame Street characters Bert and Ernie, and the words “Support Gay Marriage” written on the cake.

Ashers, a bakery run by the McArthur family, who are devout Christians, refused the order. The reason was *not* that Mr. Lee was homosexual—Ashers Bakery serves people from every walk of life. If a heterosexual had requested the cake, he/she also would have been refused. But the reason was that the message on the cake conflicts with the McArthurs’ deeply held Christian beliefs, that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Shortly thereafter, the McArthur family received a letter from the Equality Commission of Northern Ireland (ECNI) warning them that they are in breach of equality legislation and demanded that the McArthurs apologize and give assurance that they will not discriminate in the future. When the McArthurs refused, the ECNI, a publicly funded body, advised them that they would pursue the case through the courts on behalf of Mr. Lee.

Many see the case as a watershed for religious liberty in Northern Ireland. If Ashers lose the case, other businesses will be forced by law to provide similar services against their consciences. One human rights lawyer argued that a Muslim printer might be forced to print cartoons of Mohammed, that a Roman Catholic firm might be forced to make a T-shirt with a pro-abortion slogan, or that an atheist web designer might be forced to make a creationist website.

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

Daniel McArthur, the general manager of Ashers Bakery Company, spoke at two events in Belfast organized by the Christian Institute, which is supporting the McArthurs with legal assistance. Daniel, a member of the Reformed Presbyterian Church in Ireland, gave a moving testimony just two days before the beginning of the court case to an overflow crowd at the Waterfront Hall in Belfast—some 3,000 people filled the hall, while at least 1,000 more gathered outside singing hymns and showing solidarity with the McArthurs.¹ Christians can learn from Daniel McArthur: he has been calm, articulate, and gentle throughout the case. He has not engaged in an angry tirade against the ECNI, but urged supporters to pray for their enemies, as Christ commands us (Matt. 5:44). “[Charity] doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil” (I Cor. 13:5).

The case itself lasted three days, longer than originally expected, and it made headline news in Northern Ireland, with the *Belfast Telegraph* offering a running commentary. As of the writing of this article, judgment has been reserved. Many Christians await the judgment with great interest.

There are many cases like Ashers throughout the Western world, especially in America, where the homosexual lobby is extremely militant. A few examples are Baronelle Stutzman, a florist in Washington State; Jack Phillips in Denver, CO; and Melissa Klein in Oregon—each of whom has been sued recently, because they would not provide services for “gay weddings.” Each of them has lost, and has been ordered to pay “damages” to the aggrieved homosexuals. The state is seeking to use anti-discrimination law to force Christians to act against their conscience.

Although these trends are certainly troubling, we must not fear. Jesus never promised us freedom of religion, but He did promise that the gates of hell would not prevail against His church.

■ The Irrelevancy of Rob Bell

Rob Bell, former pastor of Mars Hill Bible Church,

¹ Two short speeches by Daniel McArthur can be found on the Christian Institute website and elsewhere. See <http://www.christian.org.uk/news/watch-ashers-daniel-mcarthur-speaks-to-thousands/> (accessed 31 March 2015) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1OIMviO3eaE> (accessed 31 March 2015).

a mega-church in Grand Rapids, MI, displayed his irrelevancy on a recent episode of Oprah Winfrey’s “Super Soul Sunday,” where he and his wife Kristen discussed spirituality, and, among other things, “gay marriage.”

Bell said, “One of the oldest aches in the bones of humanity is loneliness. Loneliness is not good for the world. Whoever you are, gay or straight, it is totally normal, natural and healthy to want someone to go through life with. It’s central to our humanity. We want someone to go on the journey with.” When asked by Winfrey, when the church might finally accept “gay marriage,” Bell responded, “I think culture is already there and the church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense, when you have in front of you flesh-and-blood people who are your brothers and sisters, and aunts and uncles, and co-workers and neighbors, and they love each other and just want to go through life together.”

Letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense!

One day, Bell, who is now feted by the liberal media, will stand before the God, whose Word he has dismissed as 2,000-year-old letters. On that day, he will know with certainty that the Word of the Lord—and not the word of Bell—endures forever (I Pet. 1:25).

A so-called pastor who dismisses the Word of God as irrelevant is himself irrelevant.

■ PCUSA Adopts Homosexual Marriage

The PCUSA, or Presbyterian Church (USA), which has been apostate even before she expelled J. Gresham Machen in the 1930s, has finally adopted “homosexual marriage.” The largest “Protestant” denomination in the USA agreed on March 17 of this year to change the definition of marriage. A vote by a majority of PCUSA presbyteries changed the definition of marriage found in the PCUSA’s constitution from being between “a man and a woman” to marriage being “a unique relationship between two people, traditionally a man and a woman.”²

One might ask: why end there? Why a relationship between *only two people*?


For on Valentine’s Day in Thailand three homosexual

² The PCUSA must not be confused with the PCA, the Presbyterian Church in America, who issued a statement after the PCUSA’s announcement to clarify their position, which is the biblical position on marriage.

men “married” in the world’s first *three-way* “gay wedding” or “thrupple.” Reportedly, the three young men, called Art, Bell, and Joke—I kid you not!—entered into a relationship in a Buddhist ceremony. Although the relationship is not (yet) recognized under civil law, the three men insist that they love one another.

If marriage can be between two men, or two women, as the so-called “marriage equality” advocates insist, why cannot it also be between three men?

And why would Rob Bell or the PCUSA not recognize *that* as a valid, God-glorifying relationship?

We live in dark days. Iniquity abounds. But our God reigns. 

BELIEVING AND CONFESSING

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

Of the Holy Scripture Being the True Word of God (Second Helvetic Confession, Chapter 1, A)

With this article we begin our consideration of the thirty chapters of the Second Helvetic Confession. Considering the length of these chapters, our plan is to write two *Standard Bearer* articles on each chapter. We will quote the individual sections of each chapter; following each section we will give a brief exposition. We intend to use the titles of the chapters of the Confession as the titles for our articles. Although the chapters of the Second Helvetic Confession are quite lengthy, quoting them is necessary if the purpose of familiarity with the creed is going to be achieved. The titles of the sections in each chapter will form the headings of the subsections in each of our articles.

Canonical Scripture

We believe and confess the canonical Scriptures of the holy prophets and apostles of both Testaments to be the true Word of God, and to have sufficient authority of themselves, not of men. For God himself spoke to the

fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.

And in this Holy Scripture, the universal Church of Christ has the most complete exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God; and in this respect it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from the same.

The Second Helvetic Confession begins its exposition of the Reformed faith with the doctrine of Scripture. This is altogether proper. This is necessary. Everything depends on one’s view of Scripture. More than anything else, this is what distinguishes the Reformed faith. What distinguished the Reformed faith at the time of the Reformation was its view of Scripture. This is what set the Reformed apart from the Roman Catholics, on the one hand, and the Anabaptists and enthusiasts, on the other hand. Both Rome and the Anabaptists erred in their view of Scripture. That aberrant view of Scripture affected everything. And as different as they were from each other, both Rome and the Anabaptists were alike in that they denied the *sufficiency* of Scripture, that in Scripture “the Church of Christ has the most complete

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exposition of all that pertains to a saving faith, and also to the framing of a life acceptable to God.” Rome denied the sufficiency of Scripture by adding to Scripture tradition, as an equal authority alongside of Scripture. That tradition consisted of the writings of the church fathers, the decisions of the church councils, and the Apocrypha. The Anabaptists denied the sufficiency of Scripture by adding direct revelations and immediate promptings of the Spirit. The Reformers said, “A plague on both your houses.” And they affirmed the sole authority and complete sufficiency of holy Scripture, with appeal to Revelation 22:18 and 19, where “it is expressly commanded by God that nothing be either added to or taken from” the Word of God.

Still today, this is the issue, and still today this is what distinguishes the Reformed faith—at least the Reformed faith properly understood. Scripture alone is the arbiter of truth. Scripture alone is the authority for faith and life. Scripture alone is determinative in the life of the church, both the local congregation and the broader assemblies. And Scripture is determinative for the walk of the individual believer in the midst of the world. The method employed by Bullinger in the Second Helvetic Confession of beginning with the doctrine of Scripture is the distinctively Reformed method. All the truth that we confess and that is summarized in the confession is revealed in holy Scripture. The Reformed view of Scripture is that it is “the true Word of God.” Fundamental to the Reformed faith is its view of Scripture.

As concerns the origin of Scripture, Scripture is divinely inspired. Where did the Bible come from? How did the church get the Bible? What is the source of everything contained in the Bible? There is one answer to all of these questions, and that one answer is divine inspiration. The Bible has its origin in God, “[f]or God himself spoke to the fathers, prophets, apostles, and still speaks to us through the Holy Scriptures.” Since Scripture is inspired by God, it is “holy,” which Bullinger affirms no less than three times in the opening paragraph of the confession. And since Scripture is inspired by God, it is the “true Word of God.” It is the “true” Word of God in every verse, in every chapter, in every book, in both its testaments. It is “true” from beginning to end, true in its history, true in its prophecies, true in its commandments, true in its instruction, and true in its gospel. Since the Bible is true, it contains no errors, no contradictions, no

inaccuracies, and no mistakes. And since the Bible is true, it must and it can be believed. Still more, since the Bible is true, confession of its doctrine is worth every sacrifice, worth the loss of every earthly possession and privilege, even of life itself, which is exactly the price that many paid throughout Europe and beyond in the days in which the Second Helvetic Confession was written.

Scripture Teaches Fully All Godliness

We judge, therefore, that from these Scriptures are to be derived true wisdom and godliness, the reformation and government of churches; as also instruction in all duties of piety; and, to be short, the confirmation of doctrines, and the rejection of all errors, moreover, all exhortations according to that word of the apostle, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof,” etc. (II Tim. 3:16-17). Again, “I am writing these instructions to you,” says the apostle to Timothy, “so that you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God,” etc. (I Tim. 3:14-15). Scripture is the Word of God. Again, the selfsame apostle to the Thessalonians: “When,” says he, “you received the Word of God,” etc. (I Thess. 2:13). For the Lord himself has said in the Gospel, “It is not you who speak, but the Spirit of my Father speaking through you,” therefore “he who hears you hears me, and he who rejects me rejects him who sent me” (Matt. 10:20; Luke 10:16; John 13:20).

Scripture teaches “fully all” godliness. If that statement is not a redundancy, it is very close to being a redundancy. But so emphatically does the confession teach the sufficiency of holy Scripture. The doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture is practical and has a practical fruit in the life of the Christian who confesses this truth. From the holy Scriptures are “derived true wisdom and godliness” and also “instruction in all duties of piety.” These three, wisdom, godliness, and piety, are closely related. Piety is reverence for God in the heart, joined to godly living. Piety is a Christian virtue, a grace worked in God’s people by the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. True piety consists of “wisdom and godliness.” Wisdom is first. Wisdom is the application of right knowledge, in this case knowledge of the Word of God. That wise application of God’s Word leads to godliness, practical godliness in everyday life.

But the foundation of godliness is doctrine. The Reformed faith emphasizes doctrine. The foundation of

religion is not ritual or superstition, but doctrine—the teaching of the Word of God. The purpose of Scripture is “the confirmation of doctrines.” “Doctrines,” in the plural. *All* the doctrines must be confirmed by Scripture. Nothing is to be taught as doctrine in the church that is not founded in the Word of God.

For this reason, Scripture serves as the source for the “reformation and government of churches.” Reformation is always a return to the truth of the Word of God. This was the case with the Reformation of the sixteenth century. It was a return to the authority of the Word of God and to the great doctrines taught in the Word of God: the absolute sovereignty of God in salvation, the total depravity of the sinner, salvation by grace alone, the finished work of Christ alone, justification by faith alone, and many other great truths. Besides being a return to right doctrine, the Reformation was the recovery of proper church government. Scripture is the source of the proper government of the church. The organization of the church, the offices in the church, as well as the calling of the officebearers, the standard for right and wrong in the church—these are all determined by the Word of God.

And not only is Scripture the source of right doctrine, but on the basis of Scripture error is also to be refuted. The calling of the church is antithetical and polemical. Scripture is not only to be used for “the confirmation of right doctrines,” but Scripture is also to be used for “the rejection of all errors.” Error must be pointed out. The lie must be exposed. And heretics and heresies must be clearly identified and refuted, following the example of Christ and the apostles.

The confession establishes the authority of Scripture by appeal to Scripture itself. Proving that Scripture is the Word of God by appeal to Scripture itself is not circular reasoning, as some contend. Scripture is the Word of God; only God has the right to make that bold claim for Himself. The article appeals to the teaching of the apostle Paul and to the teaching of our Lord. The first passage cited is the classic passage on divine inspiration, II Timothy 3:16, 17, “All Scripture is inspired by God.” The article adds I Timothy 3:14, 15 and I Thessalonians 2:13, as well as Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 10:20, Luke 10:16, and John 13:20.

The Preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God

Wherefore when this Word of God is now preached in the church by preachers lawfully called, we believe that the very Word of God is proclaimed, and received by the faithful; and that neither any other Word of God is to be invented nor is to be expected from heaven: and that now the Word itself which is preached is to be regarded, not the minister that preaches; for even if he be evil and a sinner, nevertheless the Word of God remains still true and good.


Neither do we think that therefore the outward preaching is to be thought as fruitless because the instruction in true religion depends on the inward illumination of the Spirit, or because it is written, “And no longer shall each man teach his neighbor...for they shall all know me” (Jer. 31:34), and “neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth” (I Cor. 3:7). For although “no one can come to Christ unless he be drawn by the Father” (John 6:44), and unless the Holy Spirit inwardly illumines him, yet we know that it is surely the will of God that his Word should be preached outwardly also. God could indeed, by his Holy Spirit, or by the ministry of an angel, without the ministry of St. Peter, have taught Cornelius in the Acts; but, nevertheless, he refers him to Peter, of whom the angel speaking says, “He shall tell you what you ought to do.”

This paragraph of the first chapter of the Second Helvetic Confession makes plain the uniquely Reformed view of preaching. It makes plain what preaching is, as well as the central importance the preaching has in the life of the church. The Reformation was not only a return to the Scriptures, but it was also a return to the centrality of preaching. The Reformation was a recovery of the preaching of gospel as the chief means of grace and salvation in the church. At the time of the Reformation, preaching had all but disappeared in the church. The preaching has been replaced by the sacraments, especially the sacrament of the Mass. What preaching remained in the church was often in a language that the people could not understand. The Reformation was a recovery of the content of the gospel; but it was also a recovery of the preaching of the gospel. The implication of an infallibly inspired Scripture in II Timothy 3, the last part of the chapter, is not in the opening verses of II Timothy 4,

“Read the Word,” but “Preach the Word” (4:2). For this reason, Christ and the apostles preached the Word. The confession calls attention to the apostle Peter’s preaching to Cornelius and his family, as one example of God’s will to work salvation through the preaching of the Word, rather than directly or through the agency of angels. The preaching of the Word is the Word of God.

Once again in our day preaching has fallen upon hard times. There is widespread disdain for the preaching of the Word. The preaching is regarded as a weak, ineffective means for the salvation of sinners. Less and less time is accorded the preaching in the worship services of the church, until finally only ten or fifteen minutes is given to the sermon. Substitutions are made for the preaching, substitutions that purport to take advantage of the possibilities offered by modern technology, substitutions that are regarded as much more promising than the old-fashioned preaching to which our parents and grandparents listened. But all of this is pretending to be wiser than God, who will today as in every age have His people taught “by the lively preaching of His Word” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q.A. 98). And the reason for this? The rea-

son is that the preaching of the Word of God is the Word of God.

This has practical implications for the people of God. This is the reverence that we must have for the preaching of the Word and for the preaching office in the church—in our own congregation. This is why we must cultivate in our children and in our grandchildren deepest respect for the preaching and the preacher. This is why they must not hear us continually criticizing the preaching and the preacher, always finding fault with what was said or with the way in which it was said. The preaching of the Word is the Word of God. As committed as we are to an infallible Scripture, so committed ought we to be to the preaching and teaching of those Scriptures in the public worship of the church. The question is emphatically not, “Could God save His people by some other means than the preaching?” The question is, “What has God revealed to be His will as regards the salvation of His people?” That is the question. And the answer to that question is that God has made it known that it is His will to save His people, to save them initially and to preserve them in salvation, by means of the preaching of His Word. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

The Covenant Home, God’s Ideal Institution for the Nurture of Children (6)

The Home Prepares Children to Live as Christians in Society

In my last article I addressed the truth that the covenant home must be a sheltered environment. God’s people must be a separate and holy people in the world. They are called to condemn the wickedness of the world and to be consecrated to God in a life of holiness. Our children need to be trained in the sheltered environ-

ment of the covenant family. The goal of this training, however, is not that the family can live in isolation.

That we as God’s people are called to be separate in order to be holy, does not mean that we can leave the world—at least not until the Lord takes us to heavenly glory. God leaves us in the world to be a witness in the world. Our children must be taught in our homes to live in the world and to be a witness of the truth of God in the world; and they must learn to be a testimony and an example of holiness and of good works.

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Among the important lessons the home must teach the children is true love for the neighbor and concern for those around us. Our covenant children must be trained to be members of the communion of saints in the church where the members of this society are called to serve one another. We are not alone in the world so that we can live only for ourselves. The Lord has placed most of us in a community of fellow saints whom we must love and serve.

When God saves us, He joins us to His church. He makes us members of His church. He gives us a place in His church and a calling in His church. God has made the church to be the communion of saints, where the saints of God must dwell together in the unity of faith, in many ways dependent on each other. God has created us all with gifts and talents that we must with ready and cheerful hearts use for the other members of the communion of saints among us. None of us in the communion of saints has all the gifts necessary to be sufficient unto ourselves and to live by ourselves.

We are all by nature self-centered, dreadfully self-centered! This is the sinful nature with which we were all born. Because of this sinful inclination, the world promotes pride, egotism, and glorying in themselves. This creates the wicked tyranny of men over women. It produces such great evils as mothers who murder their own unborn children because they get in the way of their selfish ambitions. It is the evil that causes fathers to be cruel and wicked in the way they treat their own children. The depraved, self-centered nature of man has created a world full of violence and hatred and crimes against humanity that are shocking in wickedness. It creates a situation in which some in the world become powerful, egotistical rulers, who use their power and riches to oppress the poor and the disadvantaged. Men of the world live in greed and lust, thinking only about themselves, gratifying their own passions and glorying in themselves.

In the epistle of James, the inspired apostle admonishes the rich of the world for their greed, for their heaping up treasures only for themselves, and for their defrauding of their workers by keeping back from them the wages that they owe to them. All the while the Judge of all men looks down from heaven on the wickedness of men. He has ordained the day of His final judgment when He will

destroy the wicked men of this world in His just and holy wrath.

Worldly labor unions cannot by their power or violence teach men to care for others. They only seek to use their power to destroy others and gain what they imagine to be their own right. Organizations of business owners—even under the requirement of law—will not become caring, loving, and benevolent for their fellow man, for that is contrary to fallen man's depraved nature.

By the grace and Spirit of God, the Christian home in the midst of this ungodly world is God's ideal institution to teach children not to be selfish and self-centered, but rather to serve God humbly caring for the neighbor. In the home the sins of evil self-centeredness must be driven out of the hearts of our children through daily godly instruction and discipline. Children must be taught from childhood on to love and care for the neighbor. This love must especially be evident in the society of Christians which is the God-given blessing of the communion of saints. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

In the Christian home the mother has the calling from God of servanthood. God gave her that role. He has created her in a special way, suited for this role. She fulfills this calling by caring for her husband and her children, and maintaining her household well. She rises up early and works hard all day giving of herself to others. This is, in the sight of God, a very noble calling. Nothing that the women of the world do can compare to this calling. By fulfilling this calling in the home, the godly mother is a powerful example to her children. This will, by the grace of God, have a profound effect on them and will train them for the whole of their life as Christians in the world. The mother herself will find her personal satisfaction and fulfillment in serving in this role. She will have the honor of her husband and her children, and they will deeply appreciate and love her.

The father in the home, of course, also has to instruct and discipline his children to love and care for the neighbor. And though in a somewhat different way than mother, he too must be an example of a humble servant of the Lord by providing for his family and for the church and the cause of Christ's kingdom in the world. By the grace of God this too will be an example for the children. Father must also be willing to sacrifice himself. Even

when he pursues his earthly career, he must constantly keep others in mind and not have as his goal in life to enrich himself, or to make himself great. While he is called to work hard and much of his time is spent outside of the home, he keeps his wife and family in mind, laboring hard to be able to provide also for the church of Christ and the cause of His kingdom.

When we train and nurture our children in the talents that God has given to them, we do not seek to make them glorious before the world, so that they become the occasion for us to boast in ourselves. Encouraging our children to excel in sports or music or in any other areas of life has a higher, God-centered purpose. This takes a great deal of wisdom, instruction, and discipline. No one but God Himself can enable us to fulfill such a high calling.

In the covenant home children must be trained and nurtured to be willing to serve first of all in the family. Each child must be given his or her task and responsibility to fulfill in the family for serving the other members of the family. The children must be ready to give way to the other members of the family and to help and care for them in daily, practical ways. This training is of utmost importance for the children in their later calling in society.

The covenant home must train the children to love one another as members of the covenant family. God has created a close bond in the family. In the home parents must admonish and teach their children to love each other dearly and fervently. When the ugliness of sibling rivalry is present in the family, this must be rooted out with Christian admonition and discipline.

According to the subject of my last *Standard Bearer* article, there is a sense in which the covenant home must have a closed door. The covenant home must guard the children from the ungodly influences coming from the proud and self-centered philosophy and life style of the world.

In another way, the covenant home must have an open door. The door of the covenant home must be open for

Christian hospitality to others outside of the home. As a center of hospitality the Christian home must invite others to come and enjoy the blessedness of the Christian fellowship of the home and the rich blessing of the Lord.

Hospitality for others is a glorious and blessed Christian virtue. "Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:1, 2).

There are so many in the world and especially also in the covenant community that have special needs. The concern of our children must begin with their own brothers and sisters. Children must learn to have concern for one another and to encourage one another in their own home. When this is real in the daily life of the family, strong family ties are developed.

But there are also many in our society in need: some

are sick, some are lonely, some are in trouble, some are aged and feeble, some are widows and widowers. Parents must be an example in their own lives and teach their children to be sensitive to the need of others. We must train our children to be caring and loving. No other institution in the world is better suited for such training. If the home does not give this training, in most cases the children will be grievously ill-equipped to live their Christian life.

*When our homes are
the centers of
Christian hospitality,
they provide
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for the nurture
of our children.*

When our homes are the centers of Christian hospitality, they provide a healthy environment for the nurture of our children. With carefully supervised hospitality, covenant life with other Christians outside of the home will be promoted. Friendships will have a beautiful beginning and be nurtured and strengthened, often enduring for life. A covenant home that is a center of Christian hospitality will be a great blessing for the whole church and a great part of her witness in the world. Visitors to the church invited to such a home will often be greatly encouraged, and sometimes even be brought into the membership of the church. Christian hospitality will support the preaching of the gospel in the church and be a testimony to the reality of Christian love in the lives of her members. ❧

Protestant Reformed Missions

Small Beginnings: Mission Methods Established (1925-1931) (2)

It was in the year 1928 that the Protestant Reformed Churches began to advance toward establishing a “Classical Mission Committee” in order to do the work of missions in this small denomination. In the three previous years, organization of churches was not regulated by the classis (combined consistories), but was left, for the most part, in the capable hands of Rev. H. Hoeksema. By the instigation of Fuller Ave. (First PRC of Grand Rapids), a motion was approved by classis to “work toward performing home mission work,” and to “appoint a committee for this matter.”¹ The report of this committee to the next meeting of classis was short and to the point: “Your committee has met and decided there is indeed need for mission work, but how? The committee declares that classis appoint a committee, which will seek contact with places where only a few of our people are living. The committee will consult these people, and if there is occasion to send speakers to these places, they act accordingly.”²

There is a need for mission work! But how? Now *that* was a pertinent question! *How?* The suggestion this committee offered seems to be a reasonable one: the Mission Committee should seek to contact areas where a few of our people live to see if there is any interest in those areas. If so, send speakers to the area and try to muster up some interest. I, for one, think that may have

been a good idea! But the classis did not think so. It decided not to follow the advice of the committee, again, for reasons that were not recorded in the minutes. Now there followed a year of silence in which the Mission Committee did not report. How does one perform home mission work? The fields are white for the harvest. But how do the churches harvest that field? For a year the committee struggled with that question. Finally, on September 18, 1929 the committee came with more concrete proposals. Out of these proposals the classis adopted the following:

Point a. That as soon as there are men available a missionary pastor be chosen.

Point b. That Classis appoint a permanent Mission Committee.

Point c. That the members of the churches feel out as much as possible the ecclesiastical conditions outside of our sphere, in order that those who labor in the field of missions may visit those families who appear to be interested in the truth as we confess it.

Point d. That in the first place we limit our labor mainly to the erring members outside of our churches who plainly err in doctrine and walk. And, moreover, that we labor with the neglected ones whose number is rapidly increasing along with the apostasy of the churches.³

These directives were slowly beginning to shape the work of missions. However, the question still loomed large: how? Yes, encourage members to seek out potential contacts. *How?* Yes, labor among those who may have been taken in by the error of common grace. But,

¹ Minutes of the classis meeting on June 6, 1928. Article 11.

² Supplement 1 of the classis meeting on August 29, 1928. See also the decisions pertaining to it in Articles 6 and 7 of that meeting.

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Previous article in this series: March 15, 2015, p. 280.*

³ Minutes of the classis meeting held September 18, 1929, Article 8.

how? That would be the question that would frustrate the men on the temporary Mission Committee for the next two years.

There are a couple of recommendations of the Mission Committee worthy of note that were *not* adopted by the Classis of September, 1929. The first one is this: "The committee advises that our leaders put forth every effort to instruct our members thoroughly in the basic doctrines and the Confessions, *in order that our members who come in contact with brothers and sisters of other churches may try to win them in the spirit of love for the cause of the Lord* (emphasis added)." We will never be sure of the reasoning behind the decision of classis not to adopt this advice, but the idea of this piece of advice seems to be of utmost value. I will return to this matter when the occasion arises to evaluate the mission work of this period.

The other important recommendation of the committee into which the classis decided not to enter is "that Classis point the leaders and ministers to the fact that also the matter of foreign missions must be held before our churches." This was not a matter voted down by the classis, but a matter the classis decided not to treat at this time in her history. I think the reasoning for such a decision is clear. Our churches were too small to venture into the colossal task of foreign missions.

After another year of searching to find the answer to the question, "how,?" the Mission Committee stumbled upon a possible way to create contacts in certain areas in order to begin a mission work there. The report of the three elders of the Mission Committee to classis in August, 1930 reveals a feeling of inadequacy for the task, but also a fruitful effort to discover a method that would bring results. We quote its report in full.

Esteemed Brethren,

The Mission Committee does not have much to report. That is not because we are not interested in the cause, we have discussed the mission labors from various aspects. The more we consider our work from every point of view, the more we feel that our mission work carries a peculiar character. We should limit ourselves mainly to members of the church from which we departed. In this connection, the Mission Committee comes to Classis with the following.

1. That classis appoint a committee to explain the Three Points concisely and clearly; show in which way

the Three Points are in conflict with Scripture and the Confessions; and point out how error and spiritual degeneration always go hand in hand. The committee advises that classis pay the expenses involved in this work.

2. That classis instruct the committee, that the Mission Committee should consist not only of members of the Grand Rapids churches, but that Iowa, and Chicago, and environs also be represented in the committee.

3. That classis advise the committee that in every congregation a committee be appointed, which will give out books, in case classis decides to have books printed (as is proposed in point 1), in their areas to that person who shows an interest. The committee is of the opinion that there lies our point of contact.

4. Moreover, that classis donate those books to those who show interest by individuals who serve in the local mission committee, in order that these books may find their way into those families of which we can expect they will be read.

5. The committee is of a mind that, if possible, classis should set apart a missionary for this labor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Your Committee⁴

Pamphlet publishing and distribution! That is the "point of contact" the committee discovered in order to muster up a renewed interest in our churches and what we taught. This was the breakthrough we needed to continue an aggressive mission outreach. That, coupled together with the fact that each congregation ought also to establish its own committee for the distribution of these pamphlets to "those families of which we can expect they will be read." Perhaps the three elders of the Mission Committee felt inadequate for the work of missions, but they had discovered a mission method that the classis and the consistories of the Protestant Reformed Churches could embrace with enthusiasm! This was the new plan of action the Mission Committee proposed. The classis needs to authorize the publishing of a brochure that explains concisely the error of the Three Points of Common Grace. Once this brochure is published it must be placed into the hands of the individual congregations who will form committees of their own to distribute the brochure to members of the Christian Reformed Church in order

⁴ Supplement 4 of the August 27, 1930 meeting of the classis of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

to stir up a renewed interest in what happened in 1924. Where interest is shown, we will find places to do mission work.

Although rejecting the idea of a broader constituency on the Mission Committee as well as tabling the recommendation to call a missionary, the classis did latch onto the concept of pamphlet publishing and distribution. The classis, in turn, gave this into the hands of the men of the Mission Committee. What slipped the attention of this classis, however, was that the men of the Mission Committee were frustrated with their work because they felt inadequate to the job. Not quite a year later at the June, 1931 meeting of classis this frustration was vented in the report of the Mission Committee.

The Mission Committee requested that other men more capable of performing the work be appointed to replace the present committee. The classis was sympathetic to their frustrations, since there had been no clear mission mandate for them to follow. It appointed, therefore, a temporary committee to come to the next classis with a "well circumscribed report of the task of the Mission Committee."


The next classis in December, 1931, was abuzz with the excitement of a clear mandate to follow, rooted in the newly published brochure entitled *The Triple Breach*. Hudsonville consistory presented an overture to classis. Evidently, this consistory under the leadership of Rev. G. Vos had done some unsolicited, though careful study on the issue of missions. The advice of this consistory reflected the belief that a mass production and aggressive distribution of the brochure, *The Triple Breach*, would kindle a fire of renewed interest in spreading the gospel.

Under the sought out blessing of the Lord it can be an excellent means toward the growth of our churches, whether that be in places where we already have a church, or to bring about the appearance of new congregations. Moreover, it can under the blessing of the Lord, prove to be an excellent means to arouse the former zeal and to awaken us out of the dreamy state of somnolence, in which we seem to have sunken. Classis need but recall

the printing and free distribution of ten thousand *Standard Bearers* by our Publishing Association, seven years ago, and the amazing results granted us by God. It gave the first incentive for most of us here present to join the fellowship of the Protestant Reformed Churches. And the arm of the Lord is not shortened.⁵

This classis meeting of December 2, 1931 also made a number of important decisions regarding the mission labors of the Protestant Reformed Churches. First, according to the recommendations of the committee of advice authorized by the June, 1931 Classis, the scope of the field of labor was now limited to members of the Christian Reformed Church and the Dutch Reformed churches. Second, that

the publishing of pamphlets be a main focus of the Mission Committee, beginning with the publishing of *The Triple Breach*. Five thousand copies of this brochure were printed in Dutch and another five thousand in the English language. One thousand of these were sent to various contacts in the Netherlands. Third, that under the direction of the officebearers of the various churches, ministers, consistories, and members of each congregation seek to make personal contacts, and if there is interest, to request these contacts kindly to read *The Triple Breach*, urging them to test it in light of Scripture and the confessions. Fourth, the structure of a mission committee capable of handling the work was finally established. It consisted of four men, two ministers and two elders: Reverends W. Verhil and B. Kok, and Elders T. Elhart and A. Poortinga.

With the establishment of a permanent Mission Committee and a goal, a new era of mission work in the Protestant Reformed Churches began. This era lasted until the years prior to the troubles of 1953. We will consider the development of missions during these years in another set of articles. But first we need to turn our attention to an evaluation of missions in this early period of our history. Next time. 

⁵ Supplement 2 of the December 2, 1931 classis meeting of the Protestant Reformed Churches.

...the classis did latch onto
the concept of
pamphlet publishing
and distribution.

By Faith Alone: Answering the Challenges to the Doctrine of Justification, ed. Gary L. W. Johnson and Guy P. Waters. Foreword by David F. Wells. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006. Pp. 213. \$17.99 (paper). [Reviewed by David J. Engelsma.]

For the Book: Defense of Justification

There is something to be said for this book: it is a defense of justification by faith alone against the denial of this cardinal truth by the New Perspective on Paul (NPP) and by the Federal Vision (FV).

The book contends that justification in Romans refers to one's legal standing before God the judge, rather than to one's inclusion among the covenant people of God, as N. T. Wright wrongly argues. Justification is the imputation of righteousness, not the divine declaration concerning God's covenant faithfulness. Justification is not only forgiveness of sins; it is also the imputation to the believing sinner of the active obedience of Jesus Christ in the elect believer's stead.

The contribution by C. FitzSimons Allison (several different authors contribute various essays related to the subject of the book's title) is delightful, and perceptive. Allison observes that denial of imputation is possible today (in ostensibly conservative Reformed and Presbyterian circles!) inasmuch as we live in a "climate bereft of biblical awe of God's justice, transcendence, and awesomeness" (110).

The book does not hesitate to name names, or to skewer the enemies of the truth of righteousness by faith alone. In his essay, "Reflection on Auburn Theology," that is, the theology of Christian Reconstruction and the FV, T. David Gordon suggests that "Pastor Steven Schlissel embodies the best and worst of Auburn Theology [that is, the FV—DJE]: a great, bombastic provocateur who may be temperamentally unsuited to be a theologian" (114). Schlissel is the independent, who was long the

darling of the conservative Christian Reformed ministers and members, and whose theology the men of the United Reformed Churches have never forthrightly denounced and repudiated, although shrewd self-interest has moved them to distance themselves from "bombastic, provocateur" Schlissel in public, after using him.

Bolt on HH

Of special interest to the Protestant Reformed reader is the article by Prof. John Bolt, Christian Reformed theologian at Calvin Theological Seminary. Bolt's article is titled, "Why the Covenant of Works is a Necessary Doctrine: Revisiting the Objections to a Venerable Reformed Doctrine" (171-189). Bolt reexamines the covenant with Adam in Paradise in light of the denial by the men of the FV and others that that covenant was a covenant of works. In this reexamination of the nature of the covenant with Adam, Bolt considers Herman Hoeksema's rejection of the doctrine of that covenant as the doctrine was current in his (Christian Reformed) circles in his day.

Although judging Hoeksema to be "wrong about covenant conditionality," which covenant conditionality Hoeksema denied (186), Bolt is appreciative of much of Hoeksema's explanation of the Adamic covenant. "Hoeksema is right about the relational dimension of the Adamic covenant...Hoeksema's theological instincts...are right on target here and reflect some of the profoundest convictions and insights in the Reformed theological and confessional tradition" (186).

The conclusion of Bolt's article is commendation of Hoeksema's understanding of the covenant with Adam:

Hoeksema's brief and cryptic comments in his discussion on the covenant with Adam in creation carry all the more weight. For Hoeksema the covenant relation is not "incidental, a means to an end," but rather "a fundamental relationship in which Adam stood to God by virtue of his creation; [it was] a relation of living fellowship and friendship.... From the very first moment of his existence... Adam stood in that covenant relation to God and was conscious of that living fellowship and friendship which is essential to that relationship.... As God's covenant friend and representative "office-bearer in all creation" Adam was

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

given a task as God's co-worker for which his reward was the Sabbath-like "pure delight of it in the favor of God" (188, 189).

Having quoted Hoeksema's declaration that "all Scripture presents the covenant relation as fundamental and essential.... There can be no doubt that Adam in this state of integrity stood in covenant relation to God," Bolt concludes his piece with a hearty, "Yes. Indeed!" (189)

In light of this approval of Hoeksema's conception of the covenant with Adam, Bolt, despite his disavowal of Hoeksema's repudiation of a conditional covenant with Adam, cannot possibly find himself in agreement with the doctrine that posits that covenant as a conditional contract proposed by God and accepted by Adam sometime after Adam's creation, which was the doctrine of a conditional covenant that Hoeksema was rejecting.

Against the Book: Defense of Justification

There is, however, also something to be said *against* this book: it is a defense of justification by faith alone against the denial of this cardinal truth by the NPP and by the FV.

By the present time, some fourteen years after Norman Shepherd's public proclamation of the theology of the FV in Reformed circles by his publication of the book, *The Call of Grace: How the Covenant Illuminates Salvation and Evangelism*, it ought to be abundantly evident to every Reformed Christian, much more to every Reformed theologian, that such a defense of justification by faith alone against the frontal attack on the Reformed faith by the FV is both desperately inadequate and grievously wrong.

The engine of the FV assault on the heart and core of the Reformed faith, which is the gospel of grace of holy Scripture, is the FV's doctrine of the covenant as a gracious, but *conditional*, relationship with all baptized persons, especially all baptized babies of believing parents, alike. *The* issue in the life and death struggle of Reformed orthodoxy with the theology of the FV is the FV's doctrine of a universal, gracious, saving, but *conditional* covenant of grace in Jesus Christ. (I note that "conditional covenant of grace" is an oxymoron.) The advocates of the FV thus openly advertise their teaching

(see Shepherd's *The Call of Grace*). The name of the theology betrays the covenantal essence of the theology: "federal" means "covenant." Justification in the covenant by faith and by works is only the implication of the more basic false doctrine of a conditional covenant of grace. The source and force of the heresy of the FV is the conditional covenant of saving grace, which covenant is deliberately, openly, and thoroughly cut loose from the eternal decree of election, the sole source and foundation of all salvation that is gracious, that is, of the only salvation there is.

As long as the self-proclaimed adversaries of the FV and self-proclaimed defenders of the Reformed faith in its hour of crisis—and this *is* the hour of its crisis—dance around the issue of the unconditionality or conditionality of the covenant of (saving) grace, the FV remains firmly embedded in the Reformed churches, and will, like every fatal disease that is tolerated in the body, eventually destroy the confession of the truth of salvation by sovereign grace alone. Thus, the FV will destroy the Reformed and Presbyterian churches that tolerate the doctrine of a conditional covenant as energetically spread by the FV.

Mere Dialogue

Second, against the book is that it engages in dialogue with the FV and the NPP. The dialogue is argumentative. But it is mere dialogue. All the contributors to the book respond to the advocates of the FV and of the NPP, as though these heretics were legitimate disputants in the churches. They are not. The Reformed creeds clearly confess justification by faith alone. Just as clearly, and sharply, they condemn the theology of justification by works as heresy, as a teaching officially condemned by and banned from all Reformed churches.

Reformed men must not, indeed *may* not, perpetually debate the proponents of the FV and of the NPP. Whether justification is by faith alone or by faith and works, whether the meaning of Romans and Galatians is the doctrine of salvation (soteriology) or a doctrine of membership in the church (ecclesiology), are not debatable matters in a Reformed church. These issues have been decided. The creeds plainly confess the decisions on these matters.

Theologians must not, indeed *may* not, debate the

heretics within their churches. The churches must discipline the heretics, and then as heretics of the first water—men who deny the gospel of grace at its heart, and who are introducing the false gospel of Rome, Arminius, and Pelagius into the churches of the Reformation.

A book against the FV surfacing in a Reformed church must be very brief, indeed, only one line: “The doctrine of justification by works is condemned by the Reformed creeds, and I, therefore, charge you—the author, preacher, or lecturer advocating the FV—before your consistory with the public sin of heresy.”

Not one of the contributors to *By Faith Alone* appeals to the Reformed confessions, for example, Lord’s Days 23 and 24 of the Heidelberg Catechism. Not one calls for, much less announces, the discipline of the heretics in the Reformed churches.

Cornelis P. Venema explicitly notes that N. T. Wright’s NPP rejects as an “encumbrance” the “traditional formulations and confessional...positions of the sixteenth-century Reformation” (34). Venema then calmly proceeds to debate Wright, rather than condemn the popular, influential heretic as contradicting the Reformed creeds, including the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England (see Articles 11 and 12), and as violating his commitment to uphold his church’s, and all the Reformation’s, confessions.

The impression is left that the controversy with the FV and with the NPP is merely an interesting, largely amiable theological discussion, which enables learned theologians to put their theological acumen on display, and publishing companies to sell one book after another.

Indeed, the churches of most of the contributors to the volume have distinguished themselves either by producing the heretics, or by exonerating the leading teachers of

the FV at their ecclesiastical assemblies, or by harboring and protecting them within their fellowship.

“Nothing Genuinely Evangelical Will Remain”

R. Albert Mohler, Jr. is mistaken when in his “Afterword,” reflecting on the content of the book, he lauds the book as “an arsenal of theological arguments in defense of the gospel” (207). The only theological weapon that will destroy the FV and thus defend the gospel against its attack is missing: proclamation of sovereign, efficacious, particular grace in the covenant.

In addition, the book’s arsenal of weapons does not include the imperious call to exercise Christian discipline against the heretics.

Where discipline is not exercised, heresy inevitably wins the day—and the churches. Where discipline is not exercised, theologians and churches alike show

that they do not take the issue, which is the truth of the gospel, seriously.

An “arsenal” lacking the only two weapons that will defeat the foe and safeguard the kingdom leaves something to be desired.

“By faith alone” is, therefore, doomed in the churches of the defenders of this fundamental truth. The very last word in the book itself is the dreadful warning. In light, not so much of the false doctrine of the FV and of the NPP, as of the fatal weaknesses of the defenders of the truth that Luther rightly described as the article of a standing or falling church, the warning—which the writer intended only as a warning against a possibility—in fact, announces a certainty: “Nothing genuinely evangelical will remain of evangelicalism” (208).

That is, nothing of the genuine gospel will remain of that which claims to be the preaching and confessing of the gospel. ☞

*Theologians must not,
indeed may not,
debate the heretics
within their churches.
The churches must discipline
the heretics....*

Minister Activities

Rev. Richard and Tricia Smit and family, having recently returned from the Philippine mission field in March, and probably feeling a bit chilly at that time, have moved into the parsonage of First PRC, Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. Smit's installation was to take place on April 19, D.V.

On Friday, April 3, the congregation of the Doon, IA PRC voted to extend a call to Rev. Nathan Decker (Trinity PRC, Hudsonville, MI), to be the next missionary to the Republic of the Philippines, replacing Rev. Richard Smit. May the God of His harvest direct Rev. Decker how to answer this call, as he now must determine whether it is God's will for him to accept it, or to remain at work in Trinity PRC.

Congregational Activities

In accord with Church Order Article 67, congregations of the Protestant Reformed Churches in the USA and Canada held worship services on Good Friday evening, April 3, and Easter Sunday, April 5, to commemorate the death of our Lord Jesus and His triumphal resurrection that made secure the salvation of His people of the church of all ages.

The congregation of Hope PRC, Redlands, CA has a Reading Club that meets the last Sunday of each month, except for their summer

recess. Members take turns hosting the club, leading the discussion and providing refreshments. There is an attempt to have a balance between heavier/doctrinal reading and lighter reading materials. As of this writing, the club is discussing the book entitled *Twelve Ordinary Men* written by John MacArthur about Jesus' disciples. Past books include: *Sin and Grace*, *Bound to Join*, *Reformed Worldview*, *Calvin's Calvinism*, and there is a possibility of reading *The Screwtape Letters* in the future. This sounds like an enjoyable activity, and profitable as well!

After the evening service at Cornerstone PRC, Dyer, IN on March 29, a program of audience singing and special numbers performed by the Heritage Christian High School choir took place. Refreshments were available and an offering was taken to benefit the Heritage choir.

The Building Committee of First PRC of Holland, MI organized a church property clean-up the morning of April 4. Members took along rakes and shovels to spruce up the grounds for Spring.

The congregation at the PRC of Doon, IA voted to pave the rest of their church parking lot, a project begun in the summer of 2014.

School Activities

Future Teachers and Ministers: Information for the 2015 PR Scholarship Fund essay competition is now available. Please email pr-scholarship@gmail.com to receive the essay topics and submission

requirements. Completed essays must be submitted by May 30.

From our Faith Christian School Board in Randolph, WI comes the announcement that their school society passed the proposal to start adding high school grades in 2017/2018, with one grade being added each subsequent school year.

Young People's Activities

A Young People's Easter mass meeting took place Sunday, March 29, at Southwest PRC of Wyoming, MI with Rev. Arie den Hartog as the speaker for the event.

Spokane, WA and Lynden, WA PRC Young People are busy organizing another Western Young People's retreat for the first week of July. They expect about 30 young people from Lynden, Loveland, Redlands, Lacombe and Edmonton. Families are also invited to camp for the week with them at Pend O'Reille Bible Camp about an hour north of Spokane. The theme will be "God's Guiding Hand" from Psalm 73:23-24.

Evangelism Activities

On Thursday, March 19, Rev. Angus Stewart, pastor in the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church located at Ballymena, Northern Ireland gave a lecture on "The New Life Within Us" at the Round Chapel in Port Talbot. Rev. Stewart also spoke at the Lurgan Town Hall on "The Threat of Rome to Protestant Churches Today" on Friday, April 10.

The Evangelism Committee of

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

the Edgerton, MN PRC planned a presentation in nearby Chandler, MN on April 15. The theme was "Against Thee Only Have I Sinned." The presentation centered on sin being real and dangerous. All members of the congregation were encouraged to invite friends and to encourage the attendance of others in the area.


Young Adult Activities

There are indications of a possible 2016 young adults' retreat in Northwest Iowa. Keep an ear to the ground as this idea materializes.

Mission Activities

The two Federated churches in the Philippines, as well as Provident Christian Church in Marikina and the Protestant Reformed Church in Maranatha did *not* have a special service on Good Friday, but rather observed Christ's death on Sunday, March 29, as indicated by their Church Order Article 67, which differs from the PRCA article. Their Church Order article states: "The churches shall observe Sunday alone, and shall observe the truth of Christ's birth, His passion and death, His resurrection, His

ascension to heaven, and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit, on the Sunday preceding the day, or on the Sundays these events are commonly observed." The reason for commemorating only on Sundays is to stand apart from the numerous types of week day regular, special, and other working and non-working holidays observed in the Philippines each year (nearly 30 in number).

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The congregation of Southeast PRC expresses their deepest sympathy to Paul and LaRae Kamps, Todd and Kim DeMeester and their families in the passing of their sister-in-law,

KATHY DEMEESTER.

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

Jerry Van Baren, Clerk
Rev. William Langerak, Pastor

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their sympathy to Elmer Van Den Top, Perry and Char Van Egdom, and Phil and Laura Kuiper, along with their children and grandchildren, in the recent passing away of their beloved wife, mother, grandmother, and great-mother,

GRACE VAN DEN TOP.

Our God is "perfectly wise, just, good, and the overflowing fountain of all good," which we confess, even in our sorrow, in accord with Article I of the Belgic Confession. May the family find comfort and strength in the truth of God's Word. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm 34:19)

Rev. J. Englesma, Pres.
Jim Hoogendoorn, Clerk

Senior Retreat

Welcome to the Senior Retreat,
sponsored by Crete PRC

When:

September 22-25, 2015

Where:

Cedar Lake Ministries in Cedar Lake Indiana

Our speakers:

Tuesday

Rev. N. Langerak

Christian Living under the Cross

Wednesday

Rev. C. Haak

Christian Living in this Present World

Thursday

Prof. D. Engelsma

Christian Living and the End of our Life

Registration begins on March 15, 2015.

Registration forms available on line at prccrete.org

To register by mail or by phone call:

Bert Worries, 3622 193rd Place, Lansing, IL 60438
219.718.8732

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The congregation of Southeast PRC expresses deepest sympathy to Audrey Reitsma and Pat DeVries in the death of their brother-in-law

MR. JIM KONING.

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him" (I Corinthians 2:9).

Jerry Van Baren, Clerk
Rev. William Langerak, Pastor

Visit the
RFPa website
www.rfpa.org
and listen to
audio sermons
from the archives of
the PRCA

Wedding Anniversary

April 21, 2015

■ We thank God for the covenant blessings that have come to us through the godly example, guidance, and love that our parents,

ROBERT and DOROTHY NOORMAN,

have shown to us through their marriage of 60 years. As children and grandchildren of faithful parents, we confess with them the words of Isaiah 12:2-3, "Behold, God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid: for the LORD Jehovah is my strength and my song; he also is become my salvation. Therefore with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation."

✠ Rick and Sue Noorman
✠ Gary and Joyce Noorman
✠ Jim and Faith Noorman
✠ Keith and Sara Noorman
17 grand-children and
18 great-grandchildren

Jenison, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hull PRC express their Christian sympathy to Brent and Audrey Meyer and children in the death of her mother and the children's grandmother, and also Minard and Cora VanDenTop in the death of their sister-in-law,

GRACE VAN DEN TOP.

May the Spirit apply the words of Christ to their heart: "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

Rev. Laning, President
Gerald Brummel, clerk of records

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Call to Synod!!

■ Synod 2014 appointed Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan the calling church for the 2015 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2015 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 9, 2015 at 8:30 A.M., in the Faith Protestant Reformed Church, Jenison, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 8 at 7:00 P.M. Rev. Koole, president of the 2014 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Consistory of
Faith Protestant Reformed Church
Doug Dykstra Clerk.

Reformed Witness Hour May 2015

Date	Topic	Text
May 3	"Considering and Provoking One Another"	Hebrews 10:24
May 10	"Our Ever-Living Intercessor"	Hebrews 7:25
May 17	"Why Go to Church?"	Hebrews 10:25
May 24	"The Pouring Out of the Holy Spirit"	Acts 2:1-4
May 31	"The Necessity of Church Membership"	Hebrews 10:25