

The Standard Bearer

A Reformed Semi-Monthly Magazine • February 1, 2015

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Continuing in Jesus' Word

Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed;

And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:31-32

Jesus was in the temple on the Feast of Tabernacles teaching the people. He emphasized that He is the Light of the world—the world that is sunk in the darkness of ignorance and unbelief. Jesus is One who gives light to those in darkness. It is He who illuminates mankind with knowledge and faith and salvation.

When challenged by the Pharisees, Jesus responded that He had been sent of God the Father and speaks only what the Father had taught Him.

As He spoke these words, many believed on Him.

Jesus emphasized to those that believed on Him that only those who continue in His word are truly His disciples.

And these disciples shall know the truth, and the truth shall set them free.

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

A Blessed Word!

In teaching the people, Jesus had spoken many words during the course of His short earthly ministry.

And Jesus always emphasized that the word He brought was not His own word but the word of His heavenly Father. On this occasion also Jesus emphasized, “he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him.... I do nothing of myself; but as my Father hath taught me, I speak these things” (vv. 26-28).

Notice Jesus' claim. It is the Father who sent Him. The Father is the triune God who fathered Jesus through the virgin birth, and who through that miraculous birth accomplished the greater miracle of sending the eternal Son into our flesh as Mediator. It is this Father who sent Him. And He was sent into the world to teach that which the Father had given Him. As the eternal Son, Jesus has perfect knowledge of the Father. And the Father sent Jesus into the world to enlighten the world concerning the Father—who He is, what His will for our lives is, and concerning our sins and the salvation He provides in Jesus Christ.

These words that Jesus taught are the contents of the Bible. We must not limit Jesus' words to the red letter

The Standard Bearer (ISSN 0362-4692 [print], 2372-9813 [online]) is a semi-monthly periodical, except monthly during June, July, and August, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, Inc.: 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

Postmaster: Send address changes to the *Standard Bearer*, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137.

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Subscription Price

\$23.00 per year in the US, \$35.00 elsewhere
New eSubscription: \$23.00
eSubscription for current hardcopy subscribers: \$11.50.

Advertising Policy

The *Standard Bearer* does not accept commercial advertising of any kind. Announcements of church and school events, anniversaries, obituaries, and sympathy resolutions will be placed for a \$10.00 fee. Announcements should be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428-7137 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org). Deadline for announcements is one month prior to publication date.

Website for RFPA: www.rfpa.org

Website for PRC: www.prca.org

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words in the gospel accounts that are direct quotes of Jesus. The whole Bible is the Word of God through His Son. It was the Son of God that raised up the prophets of the Old Testament to speak the Word of God, and then led them to make a written record of God's Word by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. As the Son of God in our flesh, Jesus continued to speak the Word of God personally during His ministry on earth. He completed the Word of God through the apostles, whom He led also to record these words infallibly by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

And the word that Jesus spoke from the Father is true.

Jesus emphasized this: "he that sent me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I have heard of him..." (v. 26).

How important this is to understand and embrace!

God the Father is true.

That means that He is truly God. There have been many gods worshipped by mankind throughout history. None of them is truly God except the Father of Jesus, the God of the Bible. He is the one, only true God.

But that God the Father is true also means that He always speaks the truth. This cannot be said of all that speak. The Devil is the liar from the beginning (John 8:44). Those under Satan's control propagate his lies about the origins of the universe, about who God is and how He is to be served. But God always speaks the truth. Truthfulness is one of His virtues. And so He speaks only truth. This truth is recorded in the Bible.

This Word of God spoken through His Son is the only measure of truth. Truth is not determined by what is reasonable to us, what feels good to us or what the majority think is true. The Word of God the Father, spoken through His Son and recorded in the Bible, is the sole measure of truth.

And in these words of Jesus we have all we need to know for our salvation.

An important continuing!

"If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed."

To continue in Jesus' word presupposes that you are already in His word.

You are "in the word" of Jesus when you hear the word of Jesus. In Jesus' day that meant that you came to listen

to His teachings, when He was in your area. Today it means that you become a student of the Bible and especially seek the preaching of Jesus' word in the church. The preacher is a herald or ambassador of Jesus Christ, who speaks officially as the mouth of Jesus. When he expounds the Bible faithfully, you hear Jesus.

You are "in the word" of Jesus also when you accept that word as truth and believe it with all your heart.

And, finally, you are "in the word" of Jesus when believe on Jesus as Savior, relying upon Him for salvation and all things.

But we must not just be "in" Jesus' word. We must also *continue* in that word. We must persevere in that word and never depart from it.

And one that continues in that word is Jesus' disciple indeed. He is a true disciple.

A disciple is one who is a follower and student of some teacher. In Bible times there were many teachers who had their followers and students. Also today there are disciples of various teachers. Some are disciples of great theologians, such as Augustine, Calvin, Kuyper and Bavinck. Some are disciples of great men in the world of science or philosophy. Sad to say, many great leaders and teachers are false teachers who mislead their disciples.

Jesus is the great Teacher of truth, who leads His disciples into all the truth. Those who continue in His word are truly His disciples. Many who claimed to be Jesus' disciples did not continue in His word, but rather abandoned it. This would be true of many who "believed" in Him on this very occasion. After Jesus told them that being the natural children of Abraham did not assure them a place in the kingdom of God, they took up stones to kill Him (v. 59). And consider the multitudes that "believed" on Him but finally rejected Him before Pilate.

Also today there are those that claim to be Jesus' disciples but do not continue in His word. They studied the Bible; they heard the word of Jesus preached; they confessed their faith in Jesus Christ and even belonged to the church. They claimed to be Jesus' disciples, and to all outward appearances they were. But they did not continue in Jesus' word. For one reason or another they left the Word of God so that they no longer or seldom attend the preaching or study God's Word. They drift away from the church. At best they are evasive about their faith in Jesus Christ. This departure may be temporary—or it

may be permanent. Those who depart from Jesus' word are not truly His disciples. Those who leave the word of Jesus temporarily certainly are not Jesus' disciples during the time of their departure. Those who leave the word of Jesus permanently never were His disciples.

We must be warned to continue in Jesus' word as Jesus' true disciples. The Devil would have us abandon the word of Jesus. He uses many means. He uses persecution and opposition. He uses the pleasure of sin. He even uses the adversity that God sends into our lives to turn us away in anger from Jesus' word.

We must be on our guard not to be led away from the word of Jesus, but to continue in it.

A blessed result!

Those who continue in Jesus' word as true disciples shall know the truth.

This is the logical conclusion of all that Jesus has said. Jesus speaks only what the Father teaches Him. The Father is true and thus speaks only the truth through Jesus. And so, those who continue in Jesus' word as true disciples shall know the truth.

And they shall not merely know the truth intellectually. They will also know it with the spiritual knowledge of *faith*. The word "know" that Jesus used here speaks of a knowledge based on experience. Jesus was speaking of a deep and profound spiritual knowledge of the truth. To know the truth is to know your sins, so that you are

overwhelmed with godly sorrow. It means to know the salvation of God in Jesus Christ in such a way that you taste the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' perfect sacrifice. You know the power of a new life in Jesus' death and resurrection. You know the joy of living in the friendship of God.

And this (knowledge of the) truth shall set you free.

Many freedom seekers think only of political freedom, economic freedom, freedom from abuse or freedom from discrimination. And they may even attain these freedoms to one degree or another. But they are not truly free.

In verses 34-36 Jesus makes clear that He speaks of a higher freedom. He speaks of those who commit sin, that is, continue in sin. They are servants to sin, in bondage to sin. This is a terrible slavery in that it brings misery and ruin—even when there is political, racial, or economic freedom. Such we all are naturally. True freedom is freedom from the bondage of sin. It is deliverance from the penalty and control of sin. It is freedom to be right with God, to serve Him, live with Him, and enjoy Him forever.

The truth that Jesus' true disciples come to know will give them this freedom. It will not necessarily give them political, racial, or economic freedom. But it will set them free from the terrible slavery of sin.

Let us seek that freedom by continuing in the word of Jesus.

Then we will be free indeed. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

Sine Timore Aut Favore (2) A Motto for Preachers

S*ine Timore Aut Favore* is the old Latin expression for "without fear or favor." An older elder always used these words when he prayed before the consistory entered into the sanctuary for

Previous article in this series: January 15, 2015, p 173.

worship: "Lord, fortify our pastor to preach *without fear or favor*." That is, enable him to preach and apply truth without *fearing* the reactions of any who may hurt him, and without *favoring* any who may continue to give him gifts if he remains silent about their transgressions.

The older I become, the more I realize the importance of the elder's prayer. And the more I understand the painful reality that the lives of members—especially, but not only, *influential* members—can cause the preaching to go silent on things it ought to address. The minister can fear the *displeasure* of the

people, and fear losing their *favor*. Thus, we preachers no longer address certain sins or weaknesses, because so many have adopted these practices that to speak out against them would be to risk alienating a sizeable segment of members.

The pulpit's gradual and almost imperceptible decline into guilty silence on certain sins has occurred throughout history. Silence occurs not because the church restudied the issues and, on good grounds, decided that what formerly was condemned is no longer sin. That usually comes far later, when the church realizes that it ought to bring its official decisions into harmony with common practice, and unashamedly does so. But pulpit silence occurs because the people have steadily ignored the warnings, incrementally adopted the sin, and the minister now feels foolish continuing to address it. "What, he's still stuck on *that*? Where has he been?" The minister knows full well that will be the reaction. So he's silent. For fear.

A biblical explanation

That this shameful influence should always threaten God's church is not surprising because human nature is corrupt. So Scripture addresses this more than once. One striking example of sinful silence—of *believers* no less—is found toward the end of Jesus' ministry. John 12 declares that, in spite of Jesus' many miracles among the people, very few responded in faith. The explanation, according to Isaiah's prophecy, was God's sovereign blinding of them that they *could* not see, understand, and be converted

(12:39-41). Nevertheless, according to that same sovereignty of God, some did believe, even among the rulers. Powerfully, God worked faith in His elect. Yet *fear* and *favor* were so powerful, that these believing rulers would not confess their faith. They *feared* their powerful colleagues, the Pharisees, who were able to excommunicate them, "put them out of the synagogue." *Favor* was just as much in play, for "they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (12:42, 43).¹

Lest we suppose this dynamic works only among the leaders, John 9 tells us that the parents of a blind man healed by Jesus did not give forthright answer to the Pharisees' questions, that is, did not make a frank confession of Jesus, for the very same reason. "These words spake his parents, because they *feared* the Jews" (9:19-23).

If a faithful church will avoid this error from the pulpit, she must pray God that three parties work in harmony—the office of elder, the office of minister (addressed in the last editorial), and the office of believer.

The office of elder

The brothers in the elders' bench form the first—and really the main—line of defense in this struggle. This is the elders' task according to the Church Order and their own vows taken at ordination.

¹ Although not all take this position, for exegetical reasons it is my judgment that these rulers were true believers. Which means that, at some point soon these believers must have confessed Christ, because true faith in the heart bears the fruit of a confession with the mouth (Rom. 10:9, 10).

The Church Order mandates them to "take heed that the ministers... faithfully discharge their office...." The Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons has them promising "to be assistant with their good counsel and advice to the ministers of the Word," and "to have regard unto the doctrine [the teaching and preaching]...of the ministers of the Word...." Godly elders are determined to fulfill their vows because they know that the flock under their care is both built up in the faith and preserved from errors in faith and life by sound teaching. Elders feel the weight of this charge.

If, on the positive side, the preaching is sound and well-balanced, the elders' calling is to see to it that the congregation heeds the word preached. The pulpit's warnings about extended absences from worship for illegitimate reasons, for example, will be backed by visits from the elders to admonish those who continue to be lax, and then by official discipline of the impenitent. When the sermons call it a sin to be entertained by sin on television and movies, the elders will ask the young people at confession of faith whether they understand this and are committed to antithetical, sanctified living. When the pulpit calls our attention to the threat of becoming crazed by sports, as much of our society is becoming, the elders will make a point of adding this to their agendas for family visits, speaking openly to the people of God about how this applies to their particular home and family.

These examples are limited to the practical calls to sanctified liv-

ing, since these are areas the elders follow up in the congregation. Not mentioned, but just as important are the *doctrines* ministers may go soft on, knowing how offensive some biblical doctrines are.

The minister is emboldened to make the proper applications of the Word as he sees the elders taking those applications with the seriousness that is required.

What a blessing this will be to the ministry! When the pastor and elders labor in tandem, when the minister knows that the eldership carries the word into the homes and lives of the people so that “everyone properly deports himself in his confession and conversation” (Form of Ordination), the ministry of the Word will be a great boon for the growth of the saints.

But therein lies the (potential) problem. If the pulpit issues *appropriate* warnings and makes *biblical* applications, but the elders’ bench does *not follow up* the Word preached with the necessary admonitions and discipline, very soon the pulpit will go quiet. Or very general. Or begin to issue warnings about the sins of other churches that really are not dangers this congregation faces (making it *appear* that the pulpit is being sufficiently antithetical, even though it is not *properly* antithetical).

And the elders will be answerable for this because they did not carry the preached word into the lives of the people under their care. They allowed the people to ignore the Word, and then allowed the Word to go silent in important areas.

Faulty applications

Now, it is possible that the preaching is *faulty* in its applications. Then the difficulty is different. Then the elders have the task of addressing and correcting the minister. If, for example, the pulpit leaves the impression that no member may attend a church of another denomination, ever; or that no mother of young children may earn any money to supplement family income; or that it would be sinful (at least a sign of great weakness) for any young person to aspire to an occupation

*The grace of God
unbinds elders,
emboldens elders,
strengthens consistories
to be moved by the glory
of God rather than of man.*

of mercy or necessity that involves some Sunday labor; the elders must engage the minister in careful discussions about legalism in the preaching.

There is such a reality as legalism—declaring law for the congregation that the Word of God does not declare. Legalism is a noxious poison. Phariseeism resides in every human nature. Wise elders will keep an ear open for such, lest the congregation be damaged in either of two ways. Unchecked legalistic preaching will either cause the congregation to become disgusted with the preaching (and preacher),

or turn the congregation into a pack of legalists.

But—back to the main point—fear of *legalism* must not deter elders from calling for the necessary—specific and pointed—applications of the Word of God to the lives of the people. Then, following them up. And it’s the fear of *people* that can cause both elder and preacher to hold back from making those necessary applications of the gospel. Fear of people whose deportment is less than sanctified—to put it delicately.

Discussing the preaching

This is no easy task for the elders, in their relationship both to the people and to the pastor.

Properly to carry out this supervision of the preaching requires that the elders consider not only whether what they hear is truth and orthodoxy, but also whether the *whole* counsel of God is being proclaimed. That is, whether the pulpit errs by *omission*. Are the sermons missing important elements? Does the minister shrink from making some applications or neglects preaching certain offensive truths because he fears the people? The elder’s task is weighty! This is why the elders are “in duty bound diligently to search the Word of God, and continually be meditating on the mysteries of faith” (Form for Ordination). Then, when they understand what the “whole counsel of God” is, elders must see to it that it is *preached*. And for that they need the grace of God, to speak both kindly and openly.

Calvin’s explanation of John 12

applies here: “Earthly honours [and fears!] may be said to be golden fetters, which bind a man, so that he cannot perform his duty with freedom.” The grace of God unbinds elders, emboldens elders, strengthens consistory meetings to be moved by the glory of God rather than of man.

Where are we tempted to wink?

All this underscores the importance of regular discussion of the preaching at consistory meetings. Taking the initiative, the elders and minister will ask each other, “Gentlemen, what is it that our congregation needs to hear at this time of our existence? What are this church’s particular weaknesses? To what dangers are our young people exposed? What temptations do young couples face? Where does the enemy threaten to breach our walls?” And then the harder questions: “How will the pulpit best approach and address these matters?” And, “At what may we be tempted to wink because of our own faults?”

Good, regular, and frank discussions about the preaching are in order in every consistory room. The minister who resists this oversight of his preaching does so to the damage of the congregation and, possibly, to the undoing of his own ministry. The minister who allows, encourages, even asks for such regular discussions, does so to the great blessing of his relationship to the elders, his own personal growth in the ministry and, most importantly, to the strengthening of the flock committed to his care.

But the watchmen on the walls of Zion will see to it that these discussions are continued in the consistory meetings, or set them in motion if they are not a part of the regular business of the consistory.

The office of believer

Nor may the people—even though they lack seminary training—hesitate to speak when necessary, either on account of fear or favor.

Sheep recognize the voice of the Shepherd, too, and play an important part here. As believers listen to sermons, they have the ability to discern whether preaching is biblical, both as to orthodoxy and completeness. They are prophets, whose office must be exercised also in regard to the preaching. And the old tradition of elders giving opportunity to members at family visitation to talk about the preaching is a beneficial tradition.

In the end, of course, the elders will make the judgment whether the preaching is satisfactory. Members of the congregation may differ in their judgments. No preacher should be exposed to the conflicting opinions of the people. But the elders who understand the prophetic office of every believer, and who understand the danger of returning to Rome’s ignorance, will listen carefully to the sheep when they express their assessments about the pasture in which they graze. Then, filtering out what judgments of the people are improper, and using what criticisms are biblical, they themselves will give instruction to the pastor, whose ministry is their responsibility.

The people will be blessed. So will the preacher.

A true sight of God

I pray that no one takes this amiss because it comes from one whose weekly preaching ministry no longer comes under the supervision of one consistory. Admittedly, it is easy for such a minister (a seminary professor) to offer these suggestions. Be assured it is not because he was so lily-white in always seeking out the counsel of his elders.

So let me conclude with the sage counsel of Calvin (commenting on John 12) who also usually included himself in his cautions.

Calvin’s caution: “Now let the reader observe how great ignominy is incurred before God, by the cowardice of those who, from the fear of being hated, dissemble their faith before men. Can any thing be more foolish, or rather, can any thing be more beastly, than to prefer the silly applauses of men to the judgment of God? But he declares that all who shrink from the hatred of men, when the pure faith ought to be confessed, are seized with this kind of madness.”

Calvin’s cure: “Whence, therefore, comes the effeminacy which causes us to give way to treacherous hypocrisy, but because, at the sight of the world, all our senses grow dull? For a true sight of God would instantly chase away all the mists of wealth and honors.”

The sight of God! Seeing God, let us love Him. Loving Him, let us—preachers, elders, and members—revere *Him* and seek *His* favor. ☞

The Better Lot of One Stillborn

If a man beget an hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years be many, and his soul be not filled with good, and also that he have no burial; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he cometh in with vanity, and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he hath not seen the sun, not known any thing: this hath more rest than the other.

Ecclesiastes 6:3-5

It may be well, at this point, to recall, first of all, the direction in which Solomon would lead us. He has in view especially young people who are at the beginning of life's pathway and would say, "Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth..." (Eccl. 12:1). He would also direct us to the whole duty of man, which is centrally to "fear God" (Eccl. 12:13). This section, beginning in chapter five concerning covetousness and its bondage, is a warning, especially, then, to young people.

That warning is framed by a picture, at this point, of the man given to covetousness who seeks his treasure in this world. That man is in bondage under the judgment of God's wrath against sin. Riches he may be given, but God withholds from him the true joy of life, the gift of contentment: "God giveth him not power to eat thereof" (Eccl. 6:2). He walks in an "evil disease" of soul; a grievous misery is his existence. It is this reality Solomon would develop further to underscore it.

He underscores his point in a striking way: "If a man beget an hundred children and live many years, so that the days of his years be many..." (Eccl. 6:3). He draws a certain picture before us of long life and the begetting

of sons and daughters, yea, even a hundred children. In verse 6, he expands on this idea of long life by a number twice a thousand or 2,000, that is, one who lives twice as long as Methuselah (Gen. 5:25-27). Solomon evidently wants us to contemplate the genealogies of men recorded in Scripture, particularly those before the flood, though not limiting it to that period.

Such men did live, not only in the line of Seth, but also in the line of Cain. They had very long earthly lives, "many years," and begat children. Their "days were many," and their children were many, so that a hundred would not have been impossible. Contemplating those long lives with their many years, we might well be inclined to desire such long days in the earth. Solomon himself, when he asked God for wisdom, could have asked for such a gift instead. And God did give it to him in measure, even though he did not ask for it.

But what of it? If the "...days of his years be many and his soul be not filled with good" (Eccl. 6:3), is it a blessing or a curse? If a man's soul be not filled with good, what profit is it? If a man's soul is not filled with good, then it is filled with the restless evil of sin. He may have earthly riches and long life, but his soul enjoys not true good. Rather than being "filled with good," such a soul is empty, barren of true joy, having no contentment, no peace with God. In the context, he lacks the gift or power to eat of that which he possesses in joy of heart. Because he is wretched, the prolonging of his days is no blessing. Solomon adds, "and also that he have no burial" (Eccl. 6:3); he has, then, not even the honor and dignity of a grave in his end.

The time in view here, in the light of the thought of many days, is not that of the captivity of Israel or the return from exile, as many commentators would have it, but the time of wicked Lamech and his sons Jabel, Jubal, and Tubal-cain, who lived long lives in their era. They

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drowned in the Flood. They had no burial, in the sense of the honor and dignity of laying one to rest. They were swept away as were all the seed of Cain. They had earthly riches, the pleasures and powers of the world were under their hand, yet they perished in God's judgment. Can it be said of wicked Lamech and his history and that of his sons that their souls were filled with good? Their long years were vanity and their souls empty of good. Nor did they have a burial; rather, they were erased from the earth, like Jezebel after them.

Thus the Preacher exclaims, "I say, that an untimely birth is better than he" (Eccl. 6:3). This is a rather sober thought. The reference is to a child conceived and born prematurely, to a miscarriage or to a child who is stillborn.

Several things may be said from the text concerning the subject itself. The one born untimely, though miscarried, is nevertheless a person who comes into the world, passing from life through death. His birth is an untimely one. The viewpoint of the text is not, however, concerned with his eternal state after death. Solomon's focus is on what is seen "under the sun" and not that which is hidden from us. God's covenant promises in other places address the eternal state of the children of believers who die in such a manner.

Rather, he says of them, "this hath more rest than the other" (Eccl. 6:5). That is, one whose birth is untimely has more rest than the one who has long life and begets many children but whose soul sees no good. The grave, in whatever form that takes, as seen "under the sun," is a form of rest, for it is the end of the labor, toil, and travail of life. The description of such a child here is that of a person, who in his birth, though untimely, has rest from this life. It certainly implies that such a person will have their part in the resurrection at the last day, though that is an implication and not the focus of the text.

We must note carefully the point of comparison found in the text and what is set before us. The point of comparison is to draw a relation between the physical reality of one born untimely and the spiritual reality of one who, on the other hand, lives many days in many years but whose soul is not "filled with good."

Of one born untimely we read, "For he cometh in with vanity and departeth in darkness, and his name shall be covered in darkness." The state of one untimely born is that of darkness in the physical sense, of obscurity. He

never has a place in the labor and toil of this present life in the world; his name in this world, its life and activity, is covered with darkness. He is not known among men. His place is taken away before his birth. The text does not remove the possibility that he has a name before God, nor is the darkness spoken of that of God's wrath as such, but of his place "under the sun."

The effect is also described, "Moreover he hath not seen the sun, nor known any thing" (Eccl. 6:5). He has not seen or known the world "under the sun" nor walked through the years in its vanity. He passes briefly through this world into the sleep of death and rest which comes at the end of life's journey.

The point of the text is that his portion, his lot, as one untimely born, is "better" than the man who has many days and years but whose soul is not filled with good. He has also "more rest than the other" (Eccl. 6:5). It is not to the sorrow of one untimely born that we are to look but to the horror of one who lives many years, with the riches, wealth, and honor of the world, with a house full of children, and yet in it all his soul is not filled with good. He is a wicked and cursed man.

The wicked man also comes into the world in vanity and darkness, but it is the spiritual darkness of sin and death. In that darkness of sin he labors and toils. "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt" (Is. 57:20). And for such, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Is. 57:21). He walks in the darkness of enmity against God and will not come to the light. He labors and toils for the vanity of this world, because he himself is vanity and in vanity he came into the world. Never is he filled with good. He sees the sun, the glory of God's works under it, passes his days on earth under the light of the sun, and the truth of God is not hidden from him. But his soul is in darkness and he follows after vanity. He too knows not any thing. Intellect, craft, or skill he may have, but true spiritual knowledge he does not have. It is a world in the folly of sin in which he toils. His learning, for all its complexity, is still spiritual darkness. Of that which fills the soul with good the wicked man also knows not any thing. It is not given him of God.

He seeks to leave his name in the earth, giving to lands and houses his name, seeking a memorial after him. But death carries him away. His name and place, though they

endured through many years of labor and toil, are taken from him. God himself erases his name and place, and passing into the darkness of death, his name is covered in darkness and his place remembers him no more.

What rest, then—even in the grave—does such a man have, who has labored all his life with the ceaseless activity of sin for the vanity of this world? All his treasure is lost to him. The stillborn has more rest than he. And if

he does not even have a burial, even that dignity is taken from him. “For the face of the LORD is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth” (Ps. 34:16).

By way of contrast, how blessed are God’s children: “The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants; and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate” (Ps. 34:22).



BELIEVING AND CONFESSING

REV. RODNEY KLEYN

Assured by Holy Baptism

Lord’s Day 26

Question 69. How art thou admonished and assured by holy baptism that the one sacrifice of Christ upon the cross is of real advantage to thee?

Answer. Thus: that Christ appointed this external washing with water, adding thereto this promise, that I am as certainly washed by His blood and Spirit from all the pollution of my soul, that is, from all my sins, as I am washed externally with water, by which the filthiness of the body is commonly washed away.

Question 70. What is it to be washed with the blood and Spirit of Christ?

Answer. It is to receive of God the remission of sins freely, for the sake of Christ’s blood, which He shed for us by His sacrifice upon the cross; and also to be renewed by the Holy Ghost, and sanctified to be members of Christ, that so we may more and more die unto sin, and lead holy and unblamable lives.

Question 71. Where has Christ promised us that He will as certainly wash us by His blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

Answer. In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: “Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” “He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned.” This promise is also repeated, where the Scripture calls baptism the washing of regeneration, and the washing away of sins.

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There are two Lord’s Days that treat the biblical teaching on the sacrament of baptism. This Lord’s Day looks positively at the meaning and purpose of baptism, and the next treats two common errors in the understanding of this sacrament.

The Institution of Baptism

Baptism is both a sign and a seal. As a sign, it represents something, namely, the washing away of sins, and as a seal it is the promise of Christ, to all who receive it in faith, that their sins are actually washed away. Baptism is an external and physical sign of an inward and spiritual reality.

This means that baptism is much more than a simple external ceremony. There is a difference. A ceremony is a man-made ritual or practice that often has important symbolic meaning. There are many such ceremonies that are a part of our tradition as churches. For example, at the end of a worship service, to express their agreement with the minister's sermon, the elders will shake his hand. This is a good practice, symbolizing the work of the elders to take oversight of the preaching, and representing their approval of the Word that has been preached. But this ceremony, as important as it may seem to us, is not a sacrament. It is merely an external sign and a symbolic gesture. It is not commanded in Scripture, and the church can function without it.

The sacraments are much more than this. As a sacrament, baptism is a holy ordinance that Christ has commanded His church to practice continually till He comes again. Accompanying the practice of this sacrament is the promise of salvation to all who receive baptism with a believing heart.

Q&A 71 deals with the institution of baptism, that is, the scriptural authority and command for practicing baptism. There are four proofs given from Scripture to demonstrate not only that Christ commanded baptism to be practiced, but also to show that baptism has a deeper spiritual significance for believers.

The first is the "Great Commission" passage of Matthew 28:18-20. In these verses the church is commissioned, among other things, to administer baptism in the name of the triune God. Even though baptism was a ceremony administered prior to this by John the Baptist and the disciples of Jesus, it is this specific command of Jesus, and the subsequent practice of baptism in the New Testament church, that make it a *sacrament*. Baptism in the name of the triune God is the promise from God that He receives us into covenant fellowship with Himself.

The second verse quoted is Mark 16:16, which is also

a part of the "Great Commission": "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This verse emphasizes two things: 1) that all who are believers should receive the sacrament of baptism and 2) that baptism includes a promise, not to all recipients, but to all who receive the sacrament by faith.

The third verse quoted is Titus 3:5, which connects the sacrament of baptism, the external "washing," with regeneration, the inward spiritual reality. This certainly does not mean that all who receive baptism are regenerated by water baptism. Rather, because in regeneration God performs an invisible and hidden work by His Holy Spirit, He has added the sacrament as a visible symbol.

The fourth verse quoted is Acts 22:16, which calls baptism, "the washing away of sins." These words again emphasize that baptism is much more than an external sign; they prove that baptism is a "seal" and "promise" of forgiveness to all who "call on the name of the Lord."

The Meaning of Baptism

Q&A 69 explains the external sign of baptism and Q&A 70 explains the spiritual meaning of baptism.

The external sign of baptism is the application of water to the body. Water has many different uses, one of which is washing. Every day we use water to wash our bodies clean. This symbolism of washing with water was not something newly introduced by Jesus, but was, in fact, a part of many Old Testament ceremonies in which water (or in some instances blood) was sprinkled as a sign that the object being sprinkled was purified (Lev. 16:15; Num. 8:7; Ezek. 36:25).

These sprinklings demonstrate that the amount of water to be used in baptism, whether a tub full in which a person is immersed or a small amount sprinkled on a person, is not all that important. A sprinkling of water, as we practice in infant baptism, is sufficient as a sign of baptism. Baptists will appeal to the words of Romans 6:4, "buried with him in baptism," as proof that immersion is the proper mode of baptism. This passage, however, is not talking about the mode of baptism, but rather its spiritual meaning. The verse does not speak of "immersion" but of burial, and Jesus was not buried in water but in the earth. The reality is that we, through baptism and by faith, are united with Christ in His burial. His death and burial were for us. Besides, the book of Hebrews calls

our washing by the blood of Christ a sprinkling (Heb. 9:13-14; 10:22).

Baptism symbolizes the spiritual reality of being washed by the blood and Spirit of Christ (Q&A 70). That is, baptism points to both our justification and our sanctification.

By the shedding of His blood Christ paid the full price for our sins. As our Mediator, Christ bore the full weight of our sins and in His death became the substitute for us. Our sins deserve eternal death, and the guilt of these sins was charged to Christ so that God's curse fell on Him instead of us. His blood, which represents His death, cleared us of any liability to pay the price for our sins, and so brings forgiveness and the right to eternal life to us.

This salvation comes to us personally through the Spirit of Christ in regeneration. At the moment of regeneration, the child of God is immediately justified and washed of the guilt of all his sins. Yet the "washing" of regeneration also includes two other important elements.

First, in an instant, we are made new creatures (John 3:3). This renewal gives us the ability to believe on Jesus Christ; it brings us to a knowledge of our need of Jesus Christ; it causes us to repent of all our sins, and through it we become partakers of Jesus Christ and all His benefits. Second, this washing of the Holy Spirit begins in us the lifelong work of sanctification, so that sin dies in us more and more and so that there is continual growth in godliness.

In other words, the Spirit's work of washing us from sin takes place in the heart and life of the believer every day of his life. Just as we need to use water each day to wash our bodies of filth, so every day we need to be washed of the guilt and power of our sins by the work of the Holy Spirit. When we understand this, then we see that our baptism is important for us every day of our lives.

In baptism, Christ also teaches us that we are a part of His body, the church. In the administration of baptism, even to infants, the recipient becomes a member of the church of Jesus Christ. This is true institutionally. Just as circumcision identified those who were members of the nation of Israel, so through baptism a person officially becomes a member of the visible church of Jesus Christ. However, this also points to the greater spiritual

reality of being united, not just to Christ, but to all the other members of His spiritual body, the church (I Cor. 12:13). Our baptism, then, should remind us of our place as members of the body of Christ, and the important calling we have to serve the other members of that body (John 13:13-15).

The Assurance of Baptism

The purpose of baptism is our assurance. Assurance is an inward and personal confidence that I am indeed united to Christ, forgiven all my sins, and bound for heaven. Jesus gives us the sacraments, particularly now baptism, because He wants every elect believer to have this assurance. There are three things, in baptism, that bring this assurance.


First, baptism points us to Christ and His finished work. This is emphasized in the catechism. With respect to ourselves, baptism calls us to confession of and repentance over sin. Baptism directs our focus away from ourselves and to Jesus Christ and His completed work for us on the cross. Assurance can only come when, in faith, we live in complete dependence on what Christ has accomplished for us (Phil. 3:7-10).

Second, baptism is a promise added to the gospel. Because Jesus knows the weakness of our faith, and because he knows how earthy we are, He adds to the Word of the gospel an external sign that we can see and experience with our senses. Just as a bride-to-be receives a ring as a promise of the love of her fiancé, so baptism is a visible promise to us of Christ's love and saving work.

Third, in baptism we are passive. The water of baptism is not something we produce, or that we apply to ourselves. Rather, in baptism the water is applied to us by a minister of the Word, who represents and acts in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ. This is one part of the importance of the baptism of infants born in the covenant. A child of believers is born in sin, and before that child has consciously done anything good or evil, he/she receives the sign of the washing away of sin in baptism. As we observe the baptism of infants, we should remind ourselves that we are saved as dead sinners, who have contributed nothing to our salvation.

The assurance of baptism comes only to those who receive it with a believing heart. Does baptism mean something also for the unbeliever and the impenitent

who have received the outward sign? Yes, it calls them to repentance, and it shows them that so long as they go on

in sin, they stand exposed to the wrath of God. 

Questions for Discussion

1. How is a sacrament different than a ceremony?
2. Why does the Heidelberg Catechism emphasize the “promise” that accompanies baptism?
3. Is the promise of baptism for every recipient?
4. What does the water of baptism represent?
5. What does it mean to be cleansed by the blood of Christ?
6. What does it mean to be cleansed by the Spirit of Christ?
7. Is a person renewed by the Spirit of Christ at the moment he/she is baptized? Can you give biblical proof for your answer?

8. Is sprinkling an acceptable mode of baptism? Can you demonstrate this from Scripture?
9. Since an infant is not even aware of what is happening in his/her baptism, what good is it to him/her?
10. Of what does your baptism assure you?
11. How can the baptism of others be an assurance to you?
12. How, in our lives, should we show that we have been cleansed by the blood and Spirit of Christ?

O COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

The Church Confessing Truth: Reciting the Apostles’ Creed 10a

But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

I Timothy 3:15-16

Introduction

In this series of articles on public corporate worship we have been engaging in a study of the elements of worship demanded by the regulative principle. In this article and the next, we do something slightly different, that is, examine an aspect of traditional Reformed worship that is not itself a separate element of worship, but rather a particular expression of an element of worship. We did

that previously with the reading of the law, which we saw was an aspect of the element of the reading of Scripture, and now we do so again. In my opinion, the reciting of the Apostles’ Creed does not stand alone as an element of worship. Rather, it is an aspect of another element that is demanded by the regulative principle, namely, the element of prayer. This may be debated, and I do not presume to have the final word on the subject, but I will give evidence to substantiate this view below.

This is a topical series of articles, but I have sought to treat each topic by planting us in a specific passage of Scripture while examining others. In this article and the next that passage is I Timothy 3:15, 16. The book of I Timothy is a personal letter to Timothy who was a young pastor, sent by Christ to preach the gospel to the church in Ephesus. Paul writes to Timothy about matters personal to Timothy in his own life as a pastor. He also writes to Timothy about practical matters in the life of the church. How ought the church to rule herself in an

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Previous article in this series: December 15, 2014, p. 130.

organized way? What are the proper gender roles in the church, and more? The first part of I Timothy 3:15 gives the purpose of the book: that you might know how you ought to behave yourself in the house of God. And the last part of verse 15 is the reason why the church must behave herself properly. The church is something wonderful; she is the pillar and ground of the truth in this world.

As such she worships God with the truth she upholds.

A Biblical Practice

My contention is that the confessing of our faith in public worship may be viewed as an aspect of the element of prayer. Prayer is an element demanded by the regulative principle of worship. Acts 2:42 lists prayer as an element of New Testament worship: “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” Lord’s Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism, therefore, correctly lists prayer as an element of Sunday Sabbath worship.

Prayer has a number of aspects to it. There are prayers of adoration, confession of sin, thanksgiving, supplication, and often, more than one of these aspects in any one prayer. Another aspect of prayer is confession of truth to God. It is like praise in that the purpose of it is the exaltation of God. This specific aspect of prayer praises and exalts God by confessing to Him, “This is what we know to be true about Thee, O God—glorious things about Thee and about what Thou hast done.”

This aspect of prayer can be seen, for example, in the first part of Hezekiah’s prayer as recorded in II Kings 19. Hezekiah is praying to God concerning the blasphemous words of the Rabshekeh written against Israel and Jehovah God. The Assyrians had invaded Judah at this time and were about to attack Jerusalem. The Rabshekeh said to Hezekiah, King of Judah, “Don’t let your God deceive you into thinking that He can help you withstand our attack. We have attacked many nations with our gods and have gained victory over every nation and their gods. You might as well give up now. Save some of the lives of your men, and surrender.” Hezekiah prays to the Lord and says in effect, “God, the reason why all the other nations were defeated is because their gods are idols of wood and stone. God, defend us, because Thou art not like that.” Here Hezekiah makes a confession of truth

about who God is in his prayer: “And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims, thou art the God, even thou alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth; thou hast made heaven and earth” (II Kings 19:15). Hezekiah is confessing the truth about who God is to God in prayer, and then adds his request for God’s help.

We also confess truth to God in many prayers that we pray. Maybe we have not thought about that before, but that is what we are doing. Often at the beginning of prayers this will be the case. “Covenant God and heavenly Father, the one who is in control of all things.... Great God, who has His enemies for His footstool...” This is confessing the truth about God in prayer, and it is praise to Him when we do that.

The Reformed Lord’s Supper Form includes a prayer of confession of truth as part of the liturgy of the Lord’s Supper. And in that Form this prayer of confession of truth is, in fact a recitation of the Apostles’ Creed. After the explanation of the supper, and before we actually partake, the Form has us praying a congregational prayer that God would use the sacrament for our benefit. In the middle of that prayer the Form says this: “Strengthen us also by this Holy Supper in the catholic undoubted Christian faith, whereof we make confession with our mouths and hearts, saying...,” and then we confess the truth in prayer with the words of the Apostles’ Creed, “I believe in God the Father....¹ Because it is used this way in the Form, I argue that this shows that the Apostles’ Creed used in the service may be seen as an aspect of prayer.²

¹ A prayer we may very appropriately pray *in unison*. The form says “with *mouths* and hearts.”

² It is a different kind of prayer because we do not close our eyes and address God overtly, things that may be used as arguments against what I am putting forward. Nonetheless, on the basis of the evidence I supply in the article as a whole, I believe it may be argued that reciting the Apostles’ Creed as an aspect of prayer is a legitimate part of worship according to the regulative principle. Calvin used the Apostles’ Creed in the service as *sung* by the congregation, thus making it the element of singing. Calvin also made a very close connection between singing and prayer, arguing that singing was simply prayer in song form (see his *Preface to the Psalter* under the heading “Why the choice of Psalms?”). I take this reality as further support for my contention. If one agrees with Calvin, one can see that reciting the Apostles’ Creed instead of singing it could be a form of prayer.

The New Testament calls God's people to confess truth before Him (Rom. 10:10), "For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."³ In the synagogue worship of the Jews something similar to a congregational confession of faith was made with the use of a creed. The "Shema"⁴ was confessed by the congregation as part of public, corporate worship even through the days of Christ.⁵ Our Lord, then, gave His approval to such as an aspect of worship, for He would not worship God in an unholy way. In addition, the New Testament church apparently had short confessions of faith that they themselves used to confess truth to God, some of which are recorded in Scripture. One of them is found in the passage at the head of this article (I Tim. 3:16): "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

The first part of this text, "And without controversy," is more literally "by our common confession," or "confessedly, great is the mystery of godliness." The point is, by the common confession that we all have memorized and make, it can be seen that the mystery of godliness is great. Then, what follows in that passage is the confession that the apostolic church apparently used in common. And you will notice that the last part of the verse is written in short statements that could be a confession: "God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."

This seems, then, to be a confession of faith that the New Testament church used as an early creed. This is a common confession of the Christian faith that we have contained in the inspired Scriptures themselves. There is no way of knowing for sure whether believers confessed this in the worship service; nonetheless, given what we know about how the New Testament church took most

of the synagogue worship into her own worship, this would not be a surprise. It is certainly not strange or unbiblical that we take the Apostles' Creed, a common confession, and with it confess the truth to God in the worship service.

Some have argued that confession of truth is its own separate element, based on what I have recorded above. However, significant as the information above is, there is still no explicit command or practice *in the New Testament* of confessing truth in public worship; therefore I refrain from taking that position. Also, if one goes in that direction, one would have to argue that Lord's Day 38 of the Heidelberg Catechism and Westminster Confession of Faith chapter 21 miss one of the elements of worship. I rather argue that confession of truth is not a practice strange to the New Testament; it is a practice that is an aspect of the commanded element of prayer.

Place in the Dialogue of Worship

The question now is, what place does this confession of truth have in the dialogue of public corporate worship? First, notice that since it is an aspect of prayer, this is an element in which the church is responding to Jehovah God. In this dialogue the church is speaking to Jehovah. We are addressing this confession not first of all to ourselves but we are speaking to Him! We are responding to something He has done and given us.

Second, notice the placement of this confession (in the evening service in the Protestant Reformed Churches) does not make it explicitly connected to what immediately precedes it in the service. Most of the elements are explicitly connected to what was immediately before. But the place that the recitation of the Apostles' Creed has in our service is related instead more to what it replaces in the morning service. In the morning service at this point we have the reading of the law. In the evening that is replaced with the recitation of the Creed. In the dialogue of worship, the recitation of the Creed in the evening is a response to God's forgiving our sins that were exposed by the law in the morning service.

The church of God, having been convicted by the law in the morning, does not repeat the reading of that law in the evening. Rather, having been convicted of sin, having confessed and pleaded for forgiveness, and having known forgiveness in the song and congregational

³ I recognize this text does not necessarily command this in corporate worship, but it does show that the children of God are commanded to be a confessing people and gives legitimacy to confession of truth as an aspect of the elements where that is possible in regulated worship, through song and prayer.

⁴ Deuteronomy 6:4, 5

⁵ Edersheim, Alfred. *Sketches of Jewish Social Life in the Days of Christ*. London: James Clark and Co. LTD., 1961. 268.

prayer and sermon in the morning service, the church in the evening service now confesses the truth concerning this God who has forgiven her. The church confesses joyfully to God that she believes what He has revealed to her about Himself and His Son and redemption; she confesses that this God of truth is the God who forgives sins. It is a confession from the heart, mind, and soul. We have just experienced the truth of who this God is and the fact that He takes guilt away. Now we confess out of forgiven hearts, “God, Thou art the God who has given this benefit and all the benefits of salvation. There is none other who can forgive sin. The truth about Thee is a truth that we know and have experienced.”⁶

What drives the church to confess her faith in the evening is the overwhelming grace of God that she has experienced already in the morning.⁷ And she comes together in the evening, then, and stands up (that is a great practice)! She *arises* to confess the truth that has liberated her and that continues to guide her all her life. To stand up and confess indicates commitment, a certain passion in the soul. Sometimes we use the phrase “stand up” to tell people to hold to a conviction: “Stand up for freedom. Stand up for rights.” When we confess the faith, we are standing up for God and all His truth. We are arising, in the face of all the world and its untruth, and saying, “God, this is what we believe about Thee, and should the world come into our building tonight and try to stop us from confessing truth about Thee, they will not stop us. We are redeemed by this truth, and we have experienced that again this morning; therefore Thou dost have our full allegiance.”

Apostles’ Creed Fitting for this Aspect of Worship

In this confession of truth before God we use the Apostles’ Creed in particular. This is, of course, not required by Scripture. It is a circumstance of worship.⁸

⁶ Notice the personal form it takes, “I believe in God the Father...I believe the forgiveness of sins.”


⁷ See Kuyper, Abraham. *Our Worship*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009. 155, 156. Kuyper is following Calvin who used the confession of the creed after the sermon and before the Lord’s Supper as the people’s response of gratitude for forgiveness and as a bridge to the celebration of the Lord’s Supper.

⁸ Not the things we do, but *how* we do them. See previous articles in this series on the regulative principle of worship.

However, the Apostles’ Creed is, from a practical point of view, an appropriate creed to use for this confession of truth before God. It is simple enough that it can be spoken in unison. This allows the nature of the worshiping assembly as one body to be manifest. The body as one joins together and makes confession, having as one experienced the forgiveness of sins.

The Apostles’ Creed is also appropriate because it covers the main truths of God’s Word in a concise and Christ-centered form. It is organized according to the Trinity. The first part concerns God the Father, the second God the Son, and the third God the Holy Spirit. But its main focus is on Christ and His work of salvation, just as the confession recorded in I Timothy 3:16. That confession is only about the work of Christ. It has three parts to it—all about Christ’s work of salvation. What He did (came in the flesh, justified in the Spirit); how His work was made known (seen of angels, preached to the Gentiles); how His work was received (He was believed on in the world, and received into glory, the Father receiving His work as well). The Apostles’ Creed, although broader, is focused on Christ’s work for His people.

In addition, the Apostles’ Creed is appropriate because it has such a long history of use in the church’s worship. It was used already in the ninth century,⁹ and later the Reformers returned to using it in their services. Therefore, using this creed ties us to the true church of all ages.

There were and are, of course, false churches that still use the Apostles’ Creed. Nonetheless, it ties us to the universal, true body of Christ of the past and the present and found the world over. Its recitation is really a beautiful part of the worship service. The local church, in all her worship, but especially in the confession of the truth with the creed, joins her voice to all true believers the world over to confess and praise the God we know in truth. 

⁹ The early church used it as a confession of faith especially by new converts before coming to the Lord’s Supper. Something of this is reflected also in the Reformed Form for the Lord’s Supper.

Renewed in Old Age

Just a century ago, the well-known psychologist Dr. Sigmund Freud wrote that those over the age of 50 were “no longer educable.”¹ Still today, new is in, old is out. Mass media and billboards plaster a cult of youth virtually everywhere. Let the good times roll without the weak, dependent elderly around! Freud’s view was not new. Some societies even abandoned their old people by exposing them to the elements or outright murdering them. Against the law for now, perhaps our society does better. The mercies of the wicked are cruel.

We Christians certainly do love the elderly in our midst. We value their godly fellowship and are willing to help them in their need. Perhaps we might joke about them as “over the hill” or “out to pasture,” but we do not really mean that they are going downhill spiritually, do we? We can help each other by reminding ourselves and our children to be respectful: “Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the LORD” (Lev. 19:32).

It is good to direct our children’s focus on Christ’s work in older believers rather than on their physical limitations. The Scriptures teach, for example, that an older adult can continue to learn and grow. We know that unbelieving man will not use knowledge to come to truth, but the elderly believer will. Even though catechism instruction ended long ago for them, they are lifelong learners in the Scriptures. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (I Tim. 2:15). These are the elderly who never tire of hearing the preaching of His word, and

who love reading and meditating upon the Scriptures. To them, there is always something new to learn and understand more deeply of our awesome, covenant God.

The godly elderly are productive: “They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing” (Ps. 92:14). A notable characteristic of them is this: an increased sense of duty, even an urgency to witness to the younger generations before they physically cannot. Children, grandchildren, friends in Christ, and anyone they happen to meet can hear their praise and testimony of God’s wondrous works and sovereign grace. “...When I am old and grayheaded, O God, forsake me not; until I have shewed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come” (Ps. 71:18). Who says witnessing decreases with old age? Rather, those who see God’s mercy and power from womb to hoary head cannot help but “praise thee more and more” (v. 14). It is something to think about as we age, too.

The younger will greatly benefit from the older saints’ wisdom. Many years have they prayerfully studied God’s Word and applied its principles to everyday life. The older saints have experience. By God’s grace they have learned from toil and sweat, from relationships, from good decisions and bad, from the grief of sin and the “hard knocks” that follow, and from the liberating path of repentance. They are skilled problem-solvers and graced with contentment with the unsolvable, trusting in the Lord’s perfect will. It is good to bring this out to our children: Listen to the older saints and learn. Put away your texting and entertainment, and fellowship with them. Show them your love, respect, and express why they are valuable to you.

I wished an elderly sister-in-Christ a happy birthday the other day and said, “Happy birthday to the newer, stronger you!” Her eyebrows raised and then she burst into laughter. It was not the birthday greeting she expect-

¹ Sigmund Freud. “Selected Papers on Hysteria and Other Psychoneuroses.” Chapter VIII, 1912, accessed January 2, 2015, <http://www.bartleby.com/280/8.html>.

Mrs. Laning is a wife and mother in Hull Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa.

ed. We enjoyed a chuckle as we spoke about the aging process and where desperation can lead. Do they really take fat from the seat and inject it into cheeks? Oh, the myriad of products, cosmetics, and surgeries to stave the inevitable! Like it or not, our outward man is perishing.

I put my hand on her hunched shoulder and reminded her that it really is true—she, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, is getting newer and stronger like Christ. If it were not for passages such as this in Scripture, we would not believe it ourselves: “...but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day” (II Cor. 4:16). Legendary explorer Ponce de Leon sought a fountain of youth, so the story goes. Yet, the place he did not look is in Christ. For Jesus said, “...The water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life” (John 4:14).

The inward man is renewed day by day! Do not let the wrinkles and weakened body beguile you. There is fortitude, stability, and a going from strength to strength, with fresh graces and new mercies in the lives of His faithful, aged saints. How much better they know their God now than they did when they were 20 or 30. How much more they have learned to “lead a new, godly life,” as they solemnly promised at their public confession of faith so long ago.

According to Luke 2, aged Simeon and Anna at the temple were likewise unable to keep silent about God’s praises and marvelous works: “For mine eyes have seen thy salvation....” Yes, even in old age there is spiritual strength and vigor, perhaps even more than in youth. The result? Mary and Joseph were certainly strengthened in faith by Simeon and Anna’s words. Therefore, elderly saints can be such an encouragement to the younger.

Here are a few suggestions to help our children appreciate the fruit of God’s people in old age:

1. *Listen to the elderly.* They are living historians. Ask them questions such as, what was it like for you as a child at home, church, and school? What was important to your parents? How were children and young people in church different than today? How were they the same? What concerns do you have for the church today?

One elderly saint I know often brings up how much she loved catechism as a child. Even though she is nearly 90, what she learned as a child continues to bring her

much peace and strength in her widowhood and failing health. Such conversations encourage our youth to study and pay attention to their catechetical instruction for its lasting value.

Perhaps our Christian schools, from time to time, can incorporate the elderly more into their lessons by having them speak to the students about historical events through which they lived. For example, what was it like during the PR church split in 1953? What was it like to go off to war as a believer? What was it like to live through the Depression Era? How did God use these events to mold you to be the person you are today?

2. *Talk with the elderly.* The older saints desire to get to know the younger, and would like more than a one-sided conversation of answering questions. Important for fellowship, they want to hear what is on the mind of the younger generation. Our children and young people should feel they can converse about the things that matter to them. The youth may be surprised to learn that the elderly have thought very similar thoughts as they have. If they cannot hear well, try sitting closer to them and ask if that is better.

3. *Be attentive to the elderly.* Our fast-paced society does not have time for old people. The Scriptures teach differently. The members in the body of Christ who are physically weaker, upon them “we [should] bestow more abundant honor” (I Cor. 12:23). The elderly saints deserve special treatment for Christ’s sake. Do our children and young people remember to hold the door open for them when they walk in or out of the church building? What about after the church service when children and teens rush by, nearly knocking them dangerously off balance? Parental reminders and supervision can go a long way. More than that, our children might not realize how much it means to an older person if the youth would just stop to greet them.

Today, with young people preoccupied with electronic gadgets, giving older adults full attention cannot be stressed enough. Communicating on devices while visiting the elderly can be insulting. As parents, it is never too late to establish family rules that promote meaningful communion with one another. Turning off devices during visits may be a good step in the right direction.

4. *Ask the older saints for advice.* How easy it is for

our teens to go exclusively to their peers when they want advice. King Solomon's son, Rehoboam, refused to make use of the elders' counsel, instead listening only to the advice of the young men. His reign bore the bitter fruit of that.

The elderly may not be able to keep up with all the new technologies, but when it comes to helping with real-life problems, their experience and biblical insight make them wise counselors. They want to be of service. Many prayers are offered by them to our heavenly Father on behalf of our children. They love the church and are concerned for her future, her holy worship, her faithful Bible study attendance, and her daily living.


Faithful, aged believers do not think they have perfect spiritual strength. They are the first to confess they battle sin, that their old man is completely corrupt and never improving. I knew a godly widow who asked to take home my laundry after I had a baby. When she brought it back, it was neatly folded in a basket and beautifully ironed on hangers. I thanked her and she replied, "I am such a self-righteous Pharisee." This was not the response I expected. I was aware that she listened to good sermons while doing her ironing and chores. She delighted to study the Word. She loved and cared for the saints. She was a prime example to me of someone growing newer and stronger.

Yet, I think I know what my friend meant. The more God's people mature, the more they see and abhor their

sins. This includes those sins mixed in with good works. But what a joy God's deliverance brings. By His sanctifying grace, we are renewed day by day. By the work of the Holy Spirit, it is a small beginning, but what a beginning it is!

Sometimes small beginnings receive an extra boost. In creation, fire can be beneficial for plant growth. For centuries, springtime on the American Midwest prairie meant fire. Just as the tender blades of grass appeared, the Indian hunters burned it down. By and by, a sea of tall-grass and native flowering plants emerged with astonishing redoubled growth. Big and Little Bluestem, hay-like Indian Grass, spikey Switchgrass—the herds of bison and other grazers feasted all summer long.

Elderly believers have had their faith tried by fire in times filled with great hardship and heartbreak. These have been the sanctifying fires that produced greater spiritual growth. Over the years, this has a strengthening effect upon those who walk in obedience: "...and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not" (Is. 58:11). By faith the saints, these elderly especially, have tapped into the fountain of youth.

What a blessing the faithful elderly are to us! And what a promise we have that the inward man is renewed day by day! The elderly may not move as fast, nor see and hear as well as they once did, but in their spirit they have the strength of youth. May we show them much love and honor for Christ's sake in the days ahead. 

CHURCH AND STATE

MR. BRIAN VAN ENGEN

Corporal Punishment—Still Legal for Discipline? (2)

In the last article under this rubric, we looked at the status of the law as it pertains to corporal punishment, or spanking, of children. The general rule is that parents are allowed to use corporal punishment as

long as it is not excessive. "Excessive" is defined differently by the various courts and states, but as we saw in the last article, godly correction of children would generally not (and ought not) be excessive. The fact that this is still the status of the law is encouraging to Christian parents.

One might say in this situation, "Well, if the law allows for corporal punishment, there is no way I would have a problem with the court. The law is on my side." However,

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Previous article in this series: December 15, 2014, p. 138.

we have all heard stories of parents who spanked their children and became entangled in the juvenile court system because someone made allegations that the punishment was abusive. The nature of the juvenile justice system is such that parents have good reason to be cautious about getting involved in the system due to allegations of child abuse arising from the discipline of children. In this article, we will look at some of the unpleasant realities facing a parent caught in the juvenile justice system. Although the general nature of juvenile court systems throughout the country is similar, the following observations are based on this author's experiences in the juvenile courts of the state of Iowa for approximately seventeen years.

The first general observation is that the law is more favorable to a criminal than to a parent accused of child abuse. This is a simple fact for several reasons. First, a criminal has the right to a trial by jury, and twelve jurors must agree on guilt. A parent accused of child abuse might not be charged with any crime, but could instead be summoned to juvenile court to determine whether his child should be taken away from his home. In such a court proceeding, a single judge makes the decision. The difference is due to the fact that the Constitution guarantees certain rights to make sure people accused of crimes are not unjustly sent to prison. Citizens do not have the same level of constitutional rights with regard to their children. In the eyes of the law, it is a more serious matter for a person to be convicted of a crime than for a person to have his child taken away. The penalty for many crimes is typically only a few days in jail, which most parents would consider far less serious than losing a child; nevertheless, the law provides greater protection from the criminal charges.

Another example is the standard of proof needed in each case. As we have all heard, for a criminal to be convicted the State must prove its evidence "beyond a reasonable doubt." However, in a child abuse case, the State need only prove the allegations "by clear and convincing evidence," which is a much lower burden of proof.

Another difference between criminal cases and juvenile court cases is the use of "hearsay evidence." "Hearsay" is defined as a statement made by an out-of-court declarant and offered for the truth of the matter asserted. In other words, it is evidence that someone who is not

testifying in court presented, supporting the allegations the State is trying to prove.

In a criminal case, this may be the statement of an eyewitness who claims he saw the defendant commit the crime, an eyewitness who is not in court testifying but who told a third party that is in court. Perhaps it is someone who claims he saw the defendant punch the victim. The Constitution guarantees a criminal defendant the right to confront his accusers and cross-examine them, so hearsay is not generally allowed, and this is with good reason.

Often, an "eyewitness" may turn out to be a friend of the victim, who did not actually see what happened but was told about it later by his friend. Or the witness may have seen only part of what happened, and witnessed the defendant defending himself against an earlier assault from the "victim." If the defendant is given an opportunity to question the witness, these deficiencies in the witness' story usually come out. If a third party was allowed to testify that the witness told him he saw the defendant punch the victim, the defendant could not question these deficiencies in the witness' story.

With a case of alleged child abuse, the hearsay may be the statement of a reporting witness to a child protective services worker that a parent was "beating" a child when the parent was spanking the child. But unlike a criminal case, the law allows much more hearsay into evidence in a child abuse case in juvenile court. Consider this excerpt from a case in which a mother objected to statements contained in a report from the department of human services, among other items:

The mother next contends the court improperly admitted hearsay evidence that was prejudicial.... These documents were admissible pursuant to Iowa Code section 232.96(6), which states:

A report, study, record, or other writing or an audiotape or videotape recording made by the department of human services, a juvenile court officer, a peace officer or a hospital relating to a child in a proceeding under this division is admissible notwithstanding any objection to hearsay statements contained in it provided it is relevant and material and provided its probative value substantially outweighs the danger of unfair prejudice to the child's parent, guardian, or custodian. The circumstances of the making of the report, study, record or other writing or an audiotape or videotape recording, including the maker's

lack of personal knowledge, may be proved to affect its weight.

The evidence contained in the objected to exhibits was clearly relevant and material and its probative value exceeds any unfair prejudice to the mother.¹

In other words, a report from the Department of Human Services would be admitted even if it contained statements from anonymous witnesses who would not be present in court for cross-examination. The burden would then be on the *parent* to “prove the maker’s lack of personal knowledge,” such that the parent would have to try to question the accuracy of the information included in the report.

In addition to containing hearsay statements, the statements are often recorded in a way to support the bias of the person drafting the report. For instance, if child protective services is contacted about allegations of child abuse, a social worker will usually come out and conduct an investigation, which may involve interviewing the child, the parents, neighbors, or even grandparents. Statements made by these people will be included in the report to the court, but will be interpreted by the social worker writing the report. Perhaps the social worker interviews the parents of the father who is accused of abuse for spanking his children. The conversation could go something like this:

Social Worker: Are you aware that your son spans his children?

Grandparent: Yes

Social Worker: Do you think spanking affects the children at all?

Grandparent: Well, yes, I believe that if you “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it,” so I think that spanking the children will have an effect on them in the long term.

Such a statement could be included in a report to the court as “the grandparents admitted that they were aware that their son hit his children, and also admitted that they think this abuse could have a long-term effect on the children.”

An attorney representing parents in the face of such statements in reports has a difficult task. Often the reports do not state who was interviewed, other than “a relative” or “a neighbor,” so it is difficult to ascertain whether

the statements accurately express the sentiments of the parties interviewed. Even if the identity of those making the statements is discovered, one must be careful speaking to those making the statements, or the State could allege witness tampering. The other option would be to use formal depositions to question those making the statements, but such depositions cost several hundred dollars per witness.

Since the reports of social workers, police officers, and doctors are admissible even if they contain clear hearsay, one can easily see that parents can have a difficult time defending themselves against allegations of child abuse. This becomes especially true if the author of the report, such as a social worker, has differences in ideology or belief that puts them at odds with the parents. Perhaps the social worker believes that children should never be spanked for disobeying but should instead be allowed to “discover their own set of values,” as is commonly advocated today.

The social worker may request that the court order the parents to undergo a psycho-social evaluation to determine any problems with their parenting. The social worker may then refer the matter to a fellow social worker or psychologist who holds similar views and who will do the actual testing. Some evaluators use standardized tests which actually rank parents on “how much they erroneously believe in corporal punishment as an effective discipline tool.” The test assumes that corporal punishment is not proper discipline, and then simply evaluates whether the parents believe in corporal punishment.

Once an investigation begins, a social worker may find many other “concerns” with a home, such as toys on the floor that the children could trip over, spoiled food in the refrigerator that the children could accidentally eat, or Tylenol in a location the children could possibly access. Whether or not these concerns pose a legitimate threat to the children, they will be included in the reports to make it appear that the children are neglected.

In summary, even though it is still legal to discipline children using corporal punishment, that does not mean that Christian parents may not find themselves involved in a juvenile justice system that is difficult and expensive to extract themselves from. As with other areas of life, the State and its agencies want to insert their judgment and “society’s” values into the home in place of the parents’.

¹ *In re A.F.* 752 N.W.2d 35 (Iowa App. 2008).

Several years ago, a justice of the Iowa Court of Appeals filed a concurring opinion expressing the concern that the state might be going too far in replacing the parents' judgment and values with its own. The case involved parents who used corporal punishment on their children, based on their religious beliefs. The following excerpt is from Justice Sackett's concurring opinion:

I have lived long enough to know from personal experience that not many years ago in this state children were disciplined in homes and at school by spanking them with rulers, sticks, and belts, and this type of discipline was not looked upon as child abuse. Rather, it was considered an acceptable form of discipline. It is not the purpose of this special concurrence to debate the issue of how children should be disciplined. There are probably as many theories of discipline as there are parents. I personally do not believe spanking children to be acceptable discipline, yet it is not necessarily my place to impose my values on others. Rather, it is my job to reasonably assess whether what happened here is serious enough to demand State intervention.

It would be hoped a child would never suffer even a bruise or a scrape. Yet, even children in homes where parents never [w]ield a stick or a hand suffer bruises and scrapes and sometimes more serious injuries. The injuries come from play and acceptable sporting events, such as football, boxing, and soccer where physical contact with another that produces pain is a part of the sport itself. Consequently, had these children received the bruises and lacerations in a football game or a boxing meet, or been clobbered by a hockey stick, we would look at the injuries as normal incidents of childhood and allow an otherwise functioning family to go about their own business without State intervention.

There is strong support for the fact children are well-served in an intact and strong family unit. I believe even when State intervention is undoubtedly needed and brings necessary relief to a troubled family, it comes at a considerable cost to the family unit and can undermine the relationship between parent and child. The State of Iowa, despite the efforts of a number of conscientious people, is a poor parent and my years on this court have only strengthened this belief.

Each child, each family, and each situation is different, and parents and children react differently. Furthermore, no parent offers the perfect home. In our less than perfect world, all parents inflict injury, whether physical or emotional, on their children.

...

Life is not perfect, despite attitudes that with enough government regulation we will make it so. There are a large number of children in this state who face extremely bleak and distressing circumstances and do not enjoy the love and attention [the children in this case] receive from their family.²

As the justice noted, the State tends to second guess the parents in exercising discipline of their children, and sanction the parents for inflicting injuries that may be less severe than the children receive from normal play activities. As the justice also noted, the intervention of the State in matters of discipline and other aspects of parenting is increasing. In a future article, Lord willing, we will look more at how the State's increasing intervention in parenting affects families of believers. ☞

² *In re B.B.* 598 N.W.2d 312 (Iowa Ct. App. 1999) (Sackett, concurring).

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

Minister Activities

On December 25, 2014 the calling church (Doon PRC) for the foreign mission field in the Republic of the Philippines extended a call to

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

Rev. William Langerak, pastor of Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, to be the next missionary to the Philippines. May God make His will and way clear to Rev. Langerak as he considers this call. Rev. Langerak planned to answer this call on January 25.

Congregation Activities

In accordance with Article 67 of our Church Order, the Protestant Reformed Churches of North America held worship services on Christmas Day, Old Year's Day, and New Year's Day to celebrate the birth of the Messiah, thank God for His faithfulness in 2014, and

look forward in assurance to God's working of His divine providence in 2015.

The congregation of First PRC, Edmonton, AB, Canada shared coffee and *olie bollen* after their New Year's Day service.

Mission Activities

The Berean Protestant Reformed Church (Antipolo, Rizal, Philippines) has changed the times of its worship services from the afternoon to 8:30 and 10:30 each Sunday morning. This change was made mainly to provide more time on Sunday afternoon for Young Adult's and Young People's Bible studies. In addition, the Berean PRC hosted a one day Reformed Theology conference on December 30 at the Bantayog Memorial Center in Quezon City with Prof. David Engelsma as guest speaker. The theme of the conference was "Five Solas of the Reformation" and focused on "Sola Scriptura"—by Scripture alone, "Sola Fide"—by faith alone, "Sola Gratia"—by grace alone, "Sola Christus"—through Christ alone, and "Sola Deo Gloria"—glory to God alone. A large audience numbering about 133 persons attended and 250 RFPA books were purchased that day.

Prof. Engelsma also preached in the Berean PRC on December 28 and January 4 (installing office bearers), after arriving in Manila Saturday, December 27 in a time zone 13 hours ahead of West Michigan. The Engelsmas left for home on January 6. Quite a spirited and rigorous schedule for Prof. Engelsma! We are thankful that God continues

to use him as an instrument in the churches.

The Lord in His good providence has blessed missionary-pastor Rev. Richard Smit and his wife Tricia with another pregnancy, with the baby expected near the first part of June, D.V. We pray for health for the baby and mother in the coming months. This wonderful news has created a change in plans for the Smit family regarding their move back to the USA. An expected June or July move will not be possible, as the airlines will not allow the family to fly so close to the due date. Also, if the baby were born in the Philippines, the trip to the States would need to be delayed because of an expected twelve-week wait for a birth certificate and passport for a foreign newborn. Health insurance regulations were also a factor, and all things considered, the baby doctor recommended an earlier departure.

In view of this, the Council of the calling church in Doon, IA, and the Foreign Mission Committee have approved a March 18, 2015 move to the West Michigan area, so in the next three months much activity and preparation will occur in the Smit family residence. The Smits and Kleyns are often in our prayers. Please remember them before God's throne in this time of transition. Rev. Smit and his wife Tricia celebrated their 20th wedding anniversary on December 23 with thankfulness to God for His faithfulness, and for His mercies which are new every morning.

Sister-Church Activities

The congregation of the Cov-

enant Protestant Reformed Church of Ballymena, Northern Ireland was invited for games and fellowship on New Year's Eve to the manse (also known to many of us as the parsonage), home of Rev. Angus and Mary Stewart.

Taken from the bulletin of the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of Singapore:


Propriety in Worship: Worship is a sacred and holy experience. The people of God meet in public worship to seek God. Our focus in worship is to exalt God, to praise Him, and to listen to the preaching of His Holy Word. As such, the Bible expects all worshippers to: Be punctual for worship service—Psalm 63:1, be reverent in behavior—Exodus 3:5, be sincere in worship—John 4:24, be silent in worship when God speaks in the preaching—Habakkuk 2:20, be active in praise and prayer—Psalm 66:1-2.

School Activities

With thankfulness to the Lord, the board of the Genesis Protestant Reformed School in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada reports they have purchased a school building. The initial plan was to build a new school building adjacent to their church building in Lacombe. In God's providence, this door was not opened as building costs escalated and the city imposed strenuous regulations upon the planned new building. But God did provide another school building called Satinwood, a short drive out of the city. This former government-operated school building had been empty for

some time and was offered for sale by legal tender which included a secret bidding process. The Genesis PR School made an offer that was accepted and ratified, making the property theirs! This is certainly an

exciting time for the congregation in Lacombe! May God be with them in the times ahead as they plan to occupy this new school by the end of January.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Georgetown PRC express their sincere sympathy to Karen Korhorn and her children, Rachel, Evan, Kathleen, and Kimberly, in the death of their husband and father,

ROD KORHORN.

We pray that his family, as well as his uncles, aunts, and cousins in our congregation, may be assured that the words of Simeon in Luke 2:29-32 were also the confession of our brother in Christ who now is in glory: “Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word: For mine eyes have seen thy salvation, Which thou hast prepared before the face of all people.”

Rev. Carl Haak, President
Jerry Kuiper, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Southeast PRC extend their deepest sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Ivan (Bud) Korhorn and to Gerald & Heidi Van Baren and their families in the death of their son and brother,

MR. ROD KORHORN.

May they take comfort in the words of Isaiah 41:10: “Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.”

Rev. W. Langerak, Pres.
Mark Ophoff, Asst. Clerk

Teacher needed

■ The Protestant Reformed School in Wingham is planning to begin a school in September 2015 with grades 1-8, D.V. To that end we are seeking applications to fill a full time teacher/administrator position for the 2015-2016 school year. For more information and to apply for this position you are encouraged to contact our recruitment committee: Henry DeVries 1-519-367-3627 devries@wightman.com, Brian Hilt 1-519-357-0667 brnhilt@gmail.com, or Gerry Guichelaar 1-519-395-5868.

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their sympathy to Dennis and Cindy Altena and their children in the death of their father and grandfather,

ELROY ALTENA.

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

Rev. J. Engelsma, President
Bob Mantel, clerk

Classis West

■ Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches will meet in Doon PRC on Wednesday, March 4, 2015, at 8:30 A.M. the Lord willing. All material for the Agenda is to be in the hands of the stated clerk by February 2 (30 days before classis convenes). All delegates in need of lodging or transportation from the airport should notify the clerk of Doon’s consistory, Jim Hoogendoorn, (712) 726-3573, jimhoog@premieronline.net.

Rev. D. Kuiper,
Stated Clerk

Seminary

■ All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Bill VanOverloop (phone: 669-1504). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, March 10, 2015, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Bill VanOverloop, Secretary

Reformed Witness Hour February 2015

Date	Topic	Text
February 1	“Who Benefits from Our Good Works?”	Psalm 16:2, 3
February 8	“Jehovah Is My Portion”	Psalm 16:5, 6
February 15	“The Lord Always Before Me”	Psalm 16:8
February 22	“Facing Death Triumphantly”	Psalm 16:9-11