

The Standard Bearer

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The Christmas Message to Joseph

Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us. Then Joseph being raised from sleep did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife.

Matthew 1:18-24

The narrative of the gospel given by divine inspiration through Matthew is especially for the Jews. The importance of the historical event

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considered in this passage is the clear revelation that the man Jesus, born in Bethlehem and raised in Nazareth, is also very God. He is Jesus, the Savior. He is the promised Messiah. He is Immanuel, God with us. Matthew's narrative has just given the genealogy of this child of Mary (1-18), showing clearly that He is a descendant of Abraham and David. But He is also identified by the angel as the Savior ("Jesus") and as God ("Immanuel").

The greatest joy for every humbled sinner is the knowledge that he is saved from the punishment he knows he deserves for his sins and sinfulness. So, at the very beginning of his gospel narrative Matthew informs us that the angel identifies the infant in Mary's womb as "Jesus." The angel goes on to declare that this name means that this baby came to save His people from their sins. This is the message of great joy to all peoples.



Our text describes the history of Joseph and Mary's engagement. "Espousal" or "betrothal" is a legal promise and commitment to marry. It is more than the concept of engagement familiar to those who live in the United States. A set time would take place between the espousal and the wedding ceremony—often so that a house could be built for the married couple. This period of time

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ended with the wedding ceremony. No sexual union was permitted prior to the wedding ceremony, even though the espousal was such a strong commitment. In light of this, we can well imagine how very surprised Joseph must have been when he learned that Mary was “with child.”

Joseph showed a great deal of maturity when he “thought on these things” (20). This means that he turned them over in his mind, struggling under the burden of his thoughts. He did not immediately talk about her condition with others. Nor did he immediately rush at her with charges of sin. Instead, he “thought on these things.”

From the narrative we can conclude that Mary had not told Joseph that she had been visited by the angel Gabriel, who told her that she would conceive a child by means of the Holy Spirit (Luke 1:31,35). From Joseph’s perspective, his beloved and betrothed was pregnant. His human nature could only think the worst: she had been unfaithful to him and to God.

Joseph is identified as “a just man” (19), meaning that he was regenerated and godly. As such, he grieved for what he thought Mary had done to God and to himself. Additionally, as a godly man he knew that God’s law called for one of two options for one who was pregnant prior to the wedding ceremony. One, he could make a public example of her, which would require that she be stoned (Deut. 22:23, 24). Or he could put her away privately, that is, set her aside and break the betrothal. His love for Mary did not react in anger out of personal hurt, so he was “minded to put her away privily.”



While Joseph was contemplating what to do, the angel appeared to him in a dream (20b).

As was customary when glorious angels appeared to sinful man, so this angel immediately said, “Fear not.” This came as a command to Joseph. This command is from God through the angel to His children. You see, there is reason for every sinner to be afraid before the holy God. By nature man cannot stand before the glory shining forth from God’s holiness. So when God displays His glory through an angel, sinful man is very much afraid. This is true also for God’s beloved children. But they are told that they have no reason to be afraid when He displays His glory to them. What a blessed mercy to

be told “fear not” when confronted with divine glory! The relationship God has established with His people is of such a forgiving and loving nature that there is no reason for them to be afraid.

The angel continues, “Fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife.” God declares to Joseph that he does not have to make her a public example, nor does he have to put her away privately! Instead he should take her into his house and shield her from a society that would say that she was immoral. The angel graciously explains why Joseph must go forward and take Mary as his wife: “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost.” Mary had not sinned. The child she is carrying has no earthly, human father. Rather, by means of the work of the Holy Spirit, God has conceived this child within the virgin Mary.

This message from the angel gives to Joseph and to us the knowledge that the child Mary was carrying can be and is the Savior (Jesus), because He is God (Immanuel). God the Holy Spirit conceived this child—thus the child is God. And without ceasing to be God or becoming less than God, He is God in human flesh. He is not just a good man, a great man, a sinless man, but He is God and man! This is a wonder greater than creation, more amazing than the ten plagues or any other miracle recorded in Scripture. It is the greatest miraculous work of God. The child Mary is carrying is truly God and truly man, so whatever can be said of God and of man (without sin) can be said of this baby.

The fact that this child is both very man and very God is a truth one must believe in order to be saved unto eternal life. If we do not believe that Jesus is God’s only begotten Son, then we perish, condemned and without eternal life (John 3:16-18). The value of the suffering and death to be endured by this baby lies in His being God. The cornerstone of redemption is found in this baby’s Person. It is the greatest wonder of God’s grace that He gave His divine Son, and that the Son willingly put Himself in the place of those sinners who are “His people.”

The wonder of grace is that He is “Jesus,” that is, “Jehovah salvation” (21). “Jehovah salvation” means that He will accomplish the work to “save His people from their sins.” To save means that He delivers them from the greatest evil—there is nothing worse than my sin and my sinfulness. And He provides us with the greatest good—a sweet relationship with God Himself. This marvelous

and gracious work of salvation He will accomplish for “His people.” He saves, but He does not save all—only His people, that is, those given Him of His Father before the foundation of the world (John 17:2). He will do all that is necessary to earn salvation—earning both forgiveness and righteousness. He will work that salvation in them, and He will keep them in that salvation.


That Jesus saves His people from their sins explains the manger and the cross, for He stood in their place, bearing the penalty of their sin. Their violations of the most high majesty of God made it necessary that He bear the penalty for all of their sin.

The great joy of Christmas is the fact that He came precisely to deal with the reality of our sin. Christmas is realizing that God humbled Himself to become complete man because the sins of His people required that. Payment had to be made and He became man just to do so.



Joseph immediately “did as the angel of the Lord had bidden him, and took unto him his wife” (24). Joseph believed the angel and obeyed. He might not have comprehended everything the angel said, but Joseph took it to be truth and did as he was commanded.

God graciously worked in Joseph the same that He works in us—the ability to believe the humanly impossible and to hold for truth what God says. This is the only reason Joseph could, without hesitation, arise and obey. Only the power of grace can take the self-centered mind of every man (naturally filled with suspicion and doubt) and enable it to believe, to lean not on its own understanding but to acknowledge God in all his ways.

God performs this wonder in our hearts and minds in this season when our attention is again drawn to the birth of Jesus. May we believe and obey as Joseph did. May we see the baby in the manger and worship Him with renewed faith. Let us receive the good tidings of great joy and give glory to God in the highest! 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

A Welcome Master's Thesis

It is a timely thesis.
It is a thesis well done.
The thesis to which we refer is that of Prof. Ronald Cammenga, a thesis submitted to the faculty of Calvin Theological Seminary in 2013, and now revised and enlarged in 2014, to complete the requirements for his Master of Theology Degree. The thesis is entitled *God of Friendship: Herman Hoeksema's Unconditional Covenant Conception*. Prof. Cammenga sat for the defense of his thesis in May of 2013, which oral defense was approved, and he was granted his Th. M.

Interestingly, Dr. John Bolt was one of the two faculty members who served to ‘interrogate’ Cammenga on his thesis and then signed his ‘parchment.’ The other was Dr. Richard Muller, Prof. Cammenga’s faculty supervisor.

In his introduction Prof. Cammenga informs us that he found their examination to be an enjoyable experience.

On behalf of the Theological School Committee and our churches we take this opportunity to extend to Prof. Cammenga congratulations and a word of thanks for his persistent and diligent labors

that gave birth to this thesis in its finished form.

We understand that some twenty copies or so of the thesis have been printed and bound in book form, some for our Theological School’s library, the others distributed to colleagues and friends who expressed an interest in reading it for themselves and adding it to their libraries.

I have done so myself. And profited.

The thesis in its present format is 338 pages long (with thirty pages of bibliography), long enough (and substantial enough) to have served

as a doctoral thesis we would judge. We find no fault with that. The subject matter, a thorough review of Hoeksema's covenantal view with an extensive study of its Reformed roots and historical origins, deserves no less in our judgment. The simple fact is that H. Hoeksema, due to the well-developed covenant view that has come to be identified with his name, has gained a certain status in the Reformed theological world these days; a theologian to be read and interacted with if one is to be considered well-read in covenantal theology.

Prof. Cammenga's thesis is timely.

If there is one doctrine dominating the theological landscape in Calvinistic circles today, it is the doctrine of God's everlasting covenant; and with it sharp debate about its biblical character—conditional or unconditional, unilateral or bi-lateral, one made with the elect seed only or with all the children of believers—and more aspects besides.

As is well known, the great heresy threatening the Reformed church world of the twenty-first century is that of the Federal Vision. And at the root of that teaching is its conditional covenant emphasis. Its proponents are insistent on that.

Shades of Schilder and Hoeksema and what precipitated the 1953 controversy with its subsequent split within our churches 'all over again.'

Strikingly, once again God uses false doctrine to revive (to compel men to) a more careful study of a biblical, confessional truth. In this instance, that of God's covenant and its promise(s)—to whom is it made? And, what is the nature of

the 'grace' to be associated with this covenant—sovereign and particular, or general and merely offered, the sovereign God waiting upon the sinner's accepting will?

The Federal Vision heresy, with its roots so emphatically grounded in the 'Heynsian, Schilderian' view of the covenant, has forced denomination after denomination with their theologians to re-examine their view of God's covenant with His Israel, to ask themselves whether the conditional, bi-lateral, contracting covenant view really stands the test of Scripture, the confessions, and the solid Reformed and Presbyterian theologians of the past.

In our judgment, it is especially in that last-mentioned area, namely, the prevailing consensus of Reformed and Presbyterian worthies of the past, that brother Cammenga makes a significant contribution to the present 'discussion' swirling about the nature of God's everlasting covenant with fallen man. Numerous quotations are lifted from past writings.

And the thesis is even-handed, offering extensive quotes from both sides of the historical debate and controversy.

Prof. Cammenga's thesis is well laid out—systematically!

The thesis has four main sections: (1) The Covenant as a Bond of Friendship; (2) Election Applied to the Covenant; (3) Within the Tradition; (4) The Unconditional Covenant.

The first two sections (covering 104 pages), dealing as they do with Hoeksema's development of the doctrine of the covenant, as well as

with some of our history with Schilder and the Liberated Churches, and then with laying out the biblical basis for the truth of God's covenant, will be of greatest interest to the general reader. These sections should prove to be most useful in providing an overview of the main ideas and emphasis of the truth of God's covenant with its promises to those whom He chose to be His friends.

But it is that third section that we value most.

This is not to minimize the value of the first two sections of the thesis, nor that of the concluding section, dealing as it does with the conditional-unconditional controversy that has raged over the nature of the covenant and come into such sharp focus of late.

But the third section we judge to be of special value. To the general reader these 100-plus pages might prove tedious due to the number of quotations lifted from so many theologians who addressed the doctrine of the covenant—going back to the Reformation and the formulating of the great confessions.

Daunting as some might find all these quotations, this is where Prof. Cammenga's research shows itself—extensive research that makes his thesis a *Master's* thesis. The value of the quotations (with sources listed for further reading for the interested) is not just the *number* of quotes, but their sources, the authors quoted—a veritable Who's Who of Reformed and Presbyterian theologians. Great names of both Continental and English-speaking origin, theologians ranging back

through the pages of history to the sixteenth and seventeen centuries (names such as Calvin, Bullinger, Turretin, and Perkins), followed by numerous quotations from men of the Afscheiding era (such as de Cock and Van Velzen), and then on to A. Kuyper's era, with a special emphasis on Bavinck. Nor is there lack of quotes lifted from theologians of the twentieth-century—men such as the Voses (of Princeton renown in her better days), and Berkhof, Heyns, and Schilder and supporters of his view as well

And that is just a sampling.

The value of the thorough research and wide-ranging references—quotations from primary and secondary sources—is that Cammenga demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt the proposition that serves as the heading of his third section, namely, that Herman Hoeksema as a theologian, was “*within the tradition.*” Cammenga has particular reference to Hoeksema's covenant view, a perspective in which election looms so large, a covenant bound by the grace of election. And hence it is a view in which God is sovereign both as the initiator *and maintainer* of His covenant, and man the blessed and ‘graced’ recipient—a grace of an irresistible sort!

What becomes plain, as Cammenga lifts quotation after quotation from old worthies known for their orthodoxy, is that Hoeksema's perspective of God's eternal, unchangeable covenant—a perspective in which election plays a governing role and God's Fatherly friendship gives it its ‘Divine family’ life and

warmth—is not a novel teaching. It is not a view to be dismissed as altogether new and, therefore, to be banished to the realm of the ‘hyper's’ and ‘the extremists.’

Though, if that were true, the

The value of the thorough research and wide-ranging references—quotations from primary and secondary sources—is that Cammenga demonstrates beyond a shadow of a doubt the proposition that serves as the heading of his third section, namely, that Herman Hoeksema as a theologian, was “within the tradition.”

quotes found in Cammenga's thesis would certainly demonstrate that going back through Reformed and Presbyterian/Puritan history, there are a goodly number of old worthies who, by today's standards, are deserving of the label of ‘hypers’ and ‘extremists.’ A rather common cat-

egory as judged by their covenantal views.

The simple fact is that the company in which Hoeksema and his protégés find themselves (ourselves) is a company of which no man should be ashamed—men of no mean theological and spiritual stature.

This the thesis makes clear as crystal.

If there is to be a charge of departing from the historic Reformed and covenantal ‘river-bed,’ it becomes plain the charge is to be laid at the door of those who want to excise election from the covenant, those who go on to insist that God's covenant promises pertain to and are sincerely meant for all the children of believers, even those who, like Esau, are reprobate and carnal seed.

To be sure, there can be found Reformed theologians of the hoary past who taught that, as the thesis acknowledges and shows. But they, it becomes plain, were not the solid, consistent Calvinists. They were not the ones who defined the Reformed consensus.

The thesis lifts a lovely quote from the writings of Geerhardus Vos, a theologian of Princeton fame whom no one has ever labeled as ‘hyper-,’ a quote that underscores the Reformed consensus. Addressing the issue of what determines who the seed of the covenant are, and hence members in it, Vos writes:

[It is] an essential feature of the [Reformed] covenantal outlook... that this outlook cannot function

apart from the idea of election [!]. The origin of the grace of God, the full benefits of which the Reformed believer enjoys by the covenant, always lies for him in election. If consciousness of the covenant is the right expression for the consciousness of faith in its Reformed form, then there must not only be a place in it for the idea of election, but *it must be permeated by that idea* (emphasis ours—kk). Otherwise its deepest, and the most beautiful fragrance [!] would be lacking. (*Doctrine of Covenant*, 257; Thesis, 203)

A beautiful fragrance indeed. A Reformed Calvinist whose senses are dead to that fragrance is to be pitied. Something is strangely amiss in his covenant sensibilities and taste.

The fourth section, which treats the unconditional nature of the covenant, with special attention paid to the contact Hoeksema and our churches had with the Liberated and the subsequent controversy, is also filled with an excellent selection of quotes. The numerous quotes can become a source of new information.

The thesis also cleared up a mystery for this writer, namely, why we as Protestant Reformed, with our sister churches in Northern Ireland and Singapore, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia seem to be the only denominations left sounding a warning against the error of common grace. After all, was it not Schilder's opposition to Kuyper's common grace that first brought him to Hoeksema's attention

and served as a basis for seeking further contact? Why have the Liberated gone silent on opposing this popular error?

The thesis clarifies the mystery.

In a quote lifted from *Una Sancta*, the magazine of the Free Reformed (Liberated) Churches in Australia, we learned (from a Liberated writer):

...Schilder modified his position [on common grace]. The Protestant Reformed Churches totally denied the doctrine of common grace, even to the point where they said: grace is only for the elect; and therefore God only makes a covenant of grace with the elect as well. Schilder understood that this was the logical [!] consequence of saying 'no' to common grace, but Schilder did not want to go there. So—on the point of common grace—Schilder had the courage to acknowledge that his "system" was not perfect: in relation to the covenant he did believe in an element of common grace [!] (*Thesis*, 92-93).

That is quite a statement for a number of reasons. The more one reads it, the more 'illuminating' and baffling it becomes.

Schilder understood the irrefutable logic (consistency!) of Hoeksema's perspective on the doctrine of the covenant (which irrefutable logic many others also acknowledge, and which, for some mysterious reason, is what makes Hoeksema worthy of being labeled an *extremist*), and yet denied Hoeksema's conclusion.

And keep in mind that it is Schilder's thinking and conditional covenantal view that rule the Federal

Vision perspective loose in so many churches today.

What the above quote betrays is a determination by many to refuse, deny, and, for some, even to denounce all logic and reason in order to maintain their pet doctrines. And that in turn implies, as far as these men are concerned, that when it comes to *truth*, God and His Word are just as inconsistent and irrational as are these men's doctrinal views.

Inconsistency becomes a virtue well-nigh divine! Mind-boggling, to say the least.

But it seems to be all the rage these days.

This was not Hoeksema's way of thinking. Nor, as Cammenga's thesis makes plain, that of many sound covenantal theologians that preceded Hoeksema.

Prof. Cammenga's thesis is a welcome addition to the Protestant Reformed defense of God's sovereign and unconditional covenant of grace.

His thesis will serve our churches and the truth well, and we would hope, the Reformed ecclesiastical world as well. Copies should be sent to other Reformed and Presbyterian seminaries to be added to their libraries and read.

Those interested in purchasing a copy of the thesis should contact Prof. Cammenga through our seminary. Bound volumes can be obtained at cost (\$25 or so).

And perhaps the RFPA should consider publishing it? At least sections of it.

It is a work that merits a wider reading public. ☞

■ Apple CEO Admits Homosexuality, Blasphemes God

Writing for the *Washington Post*, Abby Phillip reports:

Breaking his years of silence, Apple CEO Tim Cook wrote in an article that he is “proud” to be gay.

Cook acknowledged in the essay published on Thursday that while his sexual orientation has not been a secret to many people at Apple (and has long been discussed and debated by outsiders, too), he has never before spoken publicly about the issue.

“While I have never denied my sexuality, I haven’t publicly acknowledged it either, until now,” Cook wrote for Bloomberg Businessweek. “So let me be clear: I’m proud to be gay, and I consider being gay among the greatest gifts God has given me.”¹

Because of his influential position, there is much excitement in the homosexual community about Cook’s announcement. In their eyes Cook has done a good work that has the potential to produce what they view as positive outcomes. They hope that other “closeted” homosexual businessmen will be encouraged to “come out.” They hope that young people who are struggling with their sexuality will be encouraged to embrace homosexuality and see that it is possible for homosexuals to achieve lofty goals in their lives. They hope that there will be an advancement in the homosexual agenda to gain “equal rights” before the law. They hope that “anti-gay” laws will be rescinded throughout the United States, including laws that allow employers to fire employees because they are gay and laws that forbid the same-sex marriage. And they hope that because Apple is a multinational corporation, the CEO’s homosexuality will help spread acceptance of homosexuality throughout the world.

Cook’s announcement is an indication that homosexuality is indeed becoming more accepted by society, at least in the United States. Many have known for years that Cook is gay, but he was never willing to announce

it publicly. Why announce it now? Probably in part because he made the calculation that the climate in society is such that there would be very few if any repercussions. And the response to Cook’s announcement seems to indicate that his calculation is correct. Another writer in the *Washington Post* had this to say about the reaction:

Now that Cook has come out, some people and groups who oppose LGBT rights have spoken out about Cook.

But the reaction to his announcement has mostly stayed true to the recent environment, in which high-profile coming-out statements are followed by a relative lack of controversy—*perhaps a sign that LGBT orientations are no longer a viable wedge issue in the mainstream* (emphasis added).²

So we take note of Cook’s announcement as a sign that acceptance of homosexuality is spreading and that the world is rapidly filling the cup of iniquity.

But we also take note of Cook’s announcement because it indicates the dogged determination of some in the homosexual movement to claim God’s blessing on homosexuality. In addition to the approval of the “mainstream” world, Cook wants and claims the approval of God. He views homosexuality as a “gift” from God. By publicly acknowledging his homosexuality and encouraging the advancement of the homosexual agenda Cook believes he is doing the Lord’s work.

The day before Cook’s announcement I taught Lord’s Day 33 of the Heidelberg Catechism to a class of eighth and ninth graders. LD 33 defines good works in answer to Q. 91 as those done out of true faith, according to God’s law, and for God’s glory. I used the homosexual movement and its promotion of “gay rights” as an example of something many today call a good work, even though it is contrary to the law of God. The next day Cook made his claim that homosexuality is a gift from God and that he is doing good by promoting the homosexual agenda!

Cook thought he did a good work by announcing his homosexuality, and many agreed with him. But LD 33

¹ Abby Phillip, “Apple CEO Tim Cook comes out: ‘I’m proud to be gay,’” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2014/10/30/>.

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² Abby Ohlheiser, “Apple’s Tim Cook says he is gay. Here’s a reminder that not everyone is pleased,” *The Washington Post*, October 30, 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/national/wp/2014/10/30/>.

says that good works are not “founded on [our] imaginations nor the institution of men.” According to the Word of God homosexuality is a sin. Thus, in the judgment of God, Cook is guilty of grievous sin on account of his homosexuality. And he has compounded his sin by publicly celebrating his disobedience to the Word of God and refusing to repent.

Still more Cook added to his sin by claiming God gave him his homosexuality as a good gift. This is gross blasphemy. God created sex and gave it as a good gift to mankind to enjoy in the one-flesh union of marriage between a male and a female. Homosexuality is not a gift from God. It is man’s gross perversion of God’s good gift. Cook is lying about the character of God when He makes God an approving participant in his perverted sexual orientation.

It is important for the church to see Cook’s sinfulness for what it is. There are some who would say that Cook and his work are evidence of a common grace love of God for all men. Cook is part of the company that has produced life-changing technology (iPhones and iPads). And since he has taken over as CEO, Cook has arguably led the company well (the stock price is up). According to the teaching of common grace, God gave Cook his abilities in love, and Cook is able to use his abilities to perform non-saving, civil good works.

But Cook’s abilities do not mean that he is a recipient of God’s common grace love. God is indeed the source Cook’s intelligence and business acumen. But it is entirely wrong to say that God has given him these abilities in love so that Cook can do some moral good, something pleasing to God. No, as a totally depraved man, Cook is clearly using his natural gifts and position as Apple’s CEO for evil. In his announcement Cook stated that he is proudly gay and that he will use the considerable opportunities and resources he has as Apple CEO to promote the homosexual agenda. This is not to say that Apple products are now evil. Christians may still use iPhones and iPads for good. But Cook is now on record that he will use the production and sale of the incredible technology Apple makes to promote his sinful lifestyle and his blasphemous view that God approves of homosexuality.

Cook is not an example of a man loved by God in common grace and thus able in some way to do good before God. His announcement proves that apart from Christ natural man will only ever hate and rebel against God.

The only hope for man is to be redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ and regenerated by His Spirit.

■ The Murder of Brittany Maynard

Suicide is murder forbidden by the sixth commandment. The Heidelberg Catechism teaches that suicide is murder by explaining that in the sixth commandment God requires “that I hurt not myself, nor willfully expose myself to any danger” (Q&A 105). On November 1, 2014 Brittany Maynard, a terminally ill cancer patient, transgressed this commandment by willfully ingesting poisonous pills that killed her. She murdered herself.

USA Today reported:

Brittany Maynard, the 29-year-old face of the controversial right-to-death movement, has died. She captivated millions via social media with her public decision to end her life.

Sean Crowley, spokesman for the non-profit organization Compassion & Choices, confirmed Maynard’s death Sunday evening.

“She died peacefully on Saturday, Nov. 1 in her Portland home, surrounded by family and friends,” according to a statement from Compassion & Choices.

The statement said Maynard suffered “increasingly frequent and longer seizures, severe head and neck pain, and stroke-like symptoms.” She chose to take the “aid-inducing medication she received months ago.”³

Maynard’s decision to kill herself has been met with widespread approval. One blogger wrote:

Across national media and social media, I’ve been sickened to see that suicide is now most commonly described with words like ‘dignity,’ ‘bravery,’ ‘courage,’ and ‘strength.’ Popular refrains apparently only ever used to justify some form of murder and destruction have been trotted out once again: ‘it’s her body,’ ‘it’s her choice,’ ‘it’s her life.’

If you read the comments under most articles about this case, you’ll find a horrifying and blind adoration for euthanasia, with adjectives and phrases applied to Brittany that we usually reserve for war heroes and martyrs.⁴

This approval of Maynard’s suicide indicates that the

³ “Brittany Maynard,” *USA Today*, <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/nation-now/2014/11/02>.

⁴ Matt Walsh, “There is Nothing Brave About Suicide,” *The Blaze*, October 9, 2014, <http://www.theblaze.com/contributions>.


legalization of euthanasia will likely spread to more states beyond Oregon.

The surge of support for euthanasia in the aftermath of Maynard's death is horrifying. It is a demonstrable fact that when euthanasia is legalized, it usually moves from individuals having the option to choose to end their lives to doctors having the authority to order the death of their patients without consent. Another typical and disturbing trend is that allowing terminally ill patients to murder themselves leads to allowing other patients who are not terminal but simply weary of their aches and pains in life to murder themselves. Those who think that the practice of allowing doctors to murder certain patients can be contained so that euthanasia is only ever practiced on a small group of people are delusional.

The biggest delusion of those who approve of Maynard's suicide is that they think somehow she took control over her sickness, over her life, and over her death. Barbara Coombs Lee claims that "since January, cancer had controlled [Maynard]. When the end came close she wanted to control cancer."⁵ And Lee writes that Maynard hoped to "give to the dying a chance for peace

⁵ Barbara Coombs Lee, "Brittany Maynard, from sadness to action," November 13, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2014/11/13/>.

and dignity *on their own terms* (emphasis added)." So it is believed that by committing suicide Maynard took control of her life and in some sense defeated cancer and even death. This attitude is precisely why suicide is a sin. It is an attempt to overthrow God's authority as the Giver and Taker of life. This attempt to take control from God is also delusional. God is and remains King and Judge. Maynard may have ended her life on November 1. And she may have put an end to the physical pain her cancer caused her. But then she had to answer to—and is answering to—the God who is the Judge of the living and the dead.

It is often difficult to endure the afflictions of this life patiently. But those who have faith must do so knowing that God is in control and that His will is always good. So we leave it to Him to take us from this life at the time He has appointed. And we put ourselves willingly into His hands, knowing that our victory over cancer and death is only through the Lord Jesus Christ. If it is God's will for us to die slowly and experience pain, He will give the grace to endure. And our comfort is that the afflictions of this life, even if they last for decades and are excruciating, are really "light" and work "for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (II Cor. 4:17). 

O COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

With Willing Heart (9b)

The Offering

And they came, every one whose heart stirred him up, and every one whom his spirit made willing, and they brought the LORD's offering to the work of the tabernacle of the congregation, and for all his service, and for the holy garments.

Exodus 35:21

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Willing Giving

One important aspect of our giving to the Lord in worship is the *motive* of our giving. We must give to the Lord with *willing heart*. The letting go of the money from the hand must be tied to a heart that loves God, that wants to serve Him, and that wants His kingdom to prosper. As the apostle Paul states in II Corinthians 9:7 "Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth

a cheerful giver.” This is worship, when we give freely and cheerfully to the Lord.

The Israelites in Exodus 35 gave of a willing, cheerful heart. It is striking in that account of giving how often the willing heart of God’s people is emphasized. God’s commands willing giving in chapter 35:5: “Whosoever is of a willing heart let him bring it.” And then in verse 21 we see the people responding to this command from the heart: “And every one whose heart stirred him up, and everyone whom his spirit made willing...” Again, verse 22: “And they came both men and women as many as were willing hearted.” It continues in verse 26: “And all the women whose heart stirred them up.” And finally verse 29: “The children of Israel brought a willing offering...every one whose heart made them willing.” The Scriptures reveal that this is the explanation for the fact that they brought their offerings and could build the tabernacle in chapter 36—they had willing hearts before the Lord.”

So willing were their hearts that they gave whatever was needed for the work of the tabernacle. If they had it and it could be used, they gave it: gold, silver, wood, garments, precious stones. They gave their time, their energy, their gifts. Men helped. Women sewed and spun, if they could. There was a grand outpouring of willing service to give whatever it was that could be used for God’s kingdom.

Their willing hearts are also seen in *how promptly* they gave. Moses gives the command in Exodus 35:4-19; according to verse 20 the people leave to go to their tents. And immediately in verse 21 the text says, “And they brought the LORD’s offering.” They wanted to give, and so promptly they gave more than was necessary. Exodus 36:3 tells us that after the offering was originally collected, the people did not stop. They kept giving every morning, even though it was not commanded. They gave and gave until Bezaleel and Aholiab, who were in charge of making the tabernacle, had to come to Moses and say, “The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work which the Lord commanded to make” (v. 5).

What an example of cheerful givers, not giving grudgingly, but willingly pouring out all that they could in service to the kingdom! The word the apostle uses when he says, “God loveth a *cheerful* giver,” means a giver with overflowing joy—readiness, willingness, desire. This de-

scribes the Israelites in Exodus 35. They did not go back to their tents and grudgingly mull around in their minds, “What here can I keep? What here is for me, and what little left over shall I give to God?” But with joy in their hearts, they went back and asked, “What here can I give in service to the kingdom of God? How can I worship Him with the resources I have?”

Is this how you and I give in the offerings of the church? There is no contradiction between things that are commanded and willingness of the heart. Notice this in Exodus 35. God commands Moses, “Take an offering for my house.” And Moses in effect says to the people, “This is what God commands; now, everyone who is willing, give.” They gave because their hearts were willing to do what God commanded. They loved to do what God’s will was. They loved His church and they loved Him. God commanded; Moses communicated God’s commands; and the people gave.

Other causes may require fundraising tactics, even other Christian causes for which we give. But the church of God does not. Moses did not have to “make the sale” according to Exodus 35. He did not have to give the people something in exchange for what they gave to the cause of God’s kingdom. He did not have to go to their homes asking for money. He simply made it plain that God commands that His people support the church, and the people willingly gave.

There are many causes of the kingdom for which we take collections. View the offerings in worship as the primary giving that you do in support of God’s kingdom. How unspiritual if we wait for drives or fundraisers to give substantially to kingdom causes! We must not think, “I’ll put in my bit in church, but it’s not until they come knocking on my door or give me something in return that I will really give.” The weekly giving ought to be such that we give with generous hearts and open hands. Come with willing and liberal hearts for the worship of His name. This is a privilege that we bring gifts to the Lord in worship.

The Motive for Willing Giving

Why did these Israelites have willing hearts? The answer is, because they understood *God’s* willing heart to give to them. Their understanding of *God* gave them willing hearts. They did not view God as a great thief, tak-

ing all their things every time the collection plate came around. Rather, they viewed God as the great Giver. When Moses gave God's command, they did not think, "Here is God taking from us, that thief. Why doesn't He find His own gold and silver and stones?" Neither did they think, "Well, if God wants something, I know there are more wealthy people than I, so God can get it from them. Why is He pestering me?"

They understood that all they had was a gift from God. Where do you think they got the gold and silver and precious stones that they give for the building of the tabernacle? They are out in the wilderness walking to Canaan. They are not mining for gold and precious stones. And before they left Egypt they were slaves. Where did all that they gave come from in the first place? All they had came from the Egyptians themselves before they left Egypt. Exodus 12:36 explains, "And the LORD gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they lent unto them such things as they required. And they spoiled the Egyptians." After the tenth plague the Egyptians gave the Israelites all kinds of gifts and said, "Get out of here. We will be destroyed if you don't leave." The Israelites received gold and silver and stones and garments so that they spoiled or plundered the Egyptians.

It would have been tempting for the Israelites to horde this gold and silver. It would have been tempting for them to think, "We suffered so long in Egypt as slaves, it's about time we got what was coming to us for all the work and toil we gave there. We deserve this gold and silver the Egyptians gave. And who does the Lord think He is, calling for offerings? This is ours, we have the right!" But they did not think that. They saw that God had given them these things. God had taken them out of slavery in Egypt and brought them to Himself. God had plundered the Egyptians for them. And now they are willing to give back what is His in the first place.

But that's not even the deepest motive. Not only had God given them all their material possessions; He had forgiven them of their great sins. It is no coincidence that this outpouring of offerings recorded in Exodus 35 and 36 takes place immediately following the account of the worshipping of the golden calves in Exodus 32. There the Israelites, assuming Moses was dead on the mountain, began to worship an idol made by hands.

God's wrath was kindled. But through the intercession of Moses, God did not destroy the people in His holy wrath; instead He showed Israel that He is a merciful God who forgives their sins. Instead of destroying them, God tells them He will take them to a land flowing with milk and honey and that He will drive the other nations out before them. Israel, therefore, sees God as the God who is the great Giver of grace to them when they least deserved it. Therefore, in chapter 35 they give willingly from the heart to the cause of God's kingdom.

Do you and I love to give? Willingly? Cheerfully? When the collection plate comes around, when there is this cause and that cause to which we can give, do we think, "God is a thief?" Or do we view God as the great Giver of earthly sustenance and grace? Do we see that all we have is His to begin with, that He has given us the talents and abilities to work, the place in which we live, the job we have, the material possessions we own, the money in our accounts? What do we have that we have not been given?

Does grace fuel in us a cheerfulness to give? The streams of forgiving grace wash over God's people, and they experience that especially in the worship service. Does that grace make us want to give—love to give? The desire to give willingly, liberally, generously, comes from a heart transformed by grace. It flows from the realization that God has delivered us from the bondage of sin, and even after that time and time again has poured out His mercy upon us. Whereas the old man of sin would rather part with his very life-blood than his money, the new man opens wide his hand, for God's hand has been opened wide to him.

Giving as Trust


Because the child of God has seen God gracious to forgive and provide, he *trusts* God and therefore gives. Giving is an act of trust. When one sits down to fill in the amount for a check he is writing, the thoughts of worry come immediately to his mind: "What if the economy continues to go sour; what if no one is buying homes next year; what if the corn prices sink; what if this or that happens, what if I need this later on?" Of course, there does have to be wisdom. One does not make himself the object of the deacons' mercy for the sake of his giving. Nonetheless, I dare say that is not our

temptation. The temptation is to say, "When I reach this amount of income, then I'll really start to give. When I am able to protect myself from all that I am afraid might possibly happen, then I will put more in the collection plate. When I reach this much in the savings account, then I'll start to be more generous." But the willing heart is the trusting heart. And the trusting heart becomes a willing heart.

This is what God wanted to teach His children when He commanded offerings for the tabernacle in Exodus 35. Why did not God simply have a tabernacle fall from the sky? He could have easily done so. Because He wanted them to give. He wanted them to let go and trust Him. And, why did He wait until they were at Mt. Sinai to tell the Israelites they needed to give their materials for the tabernacle? The materials they are giving they had received from plundering Egypt. Why did God not tell them then, "This will be for My kingdom"? The answer is, that He wanted to give them an opportunity to handle

those things and still be required to let go of them. He wanted Israel to have those riches in their tents and to use them. He wanted them to think about how they could spend it with the nomadic groups around, if they were in a bind. And then with these possibilities swirling around in their minds, He wanted them to let go and trust.

When we deposit our contributions in the collection plate, God is teaching us to trust. He is teaching us to say to Him, "God, I let go of this money, and instead by faith take hold of Thy promises to care for Thy people. Thou art a faithful God. I have experienced that in my greatest need, the forgiveness of my sins. I trust Thee to care for me body and soul, and here I give with willing hands and hearts that which Thou hast blessed. I bring in thankful sacrifice my choicest gifts and best."

God is always trustworthy. He provided manna when there was no bread, water from the rock when the church was thirsty. He protected Israel from her enemies when attacked. We, too, can let go and trust Him. 

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. MARTIN VANDER WAL

Male and Female

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

Mark 10:6

You live in an age of great confusion. The society in which you are growing up, and in which you are beginning to take your place is a very chaotic society. Everything is moving and shifting. Foundations once solid, strong, and safe are now crumbling under your feet. In the air is a sense of restlessness and anxiety.

Nowhere is this more true than in matters of gender. No longer are there two choices for identifying your gender. Serious discussion is taking place in educational circles about how many separate bathrooms are needed in schools. Boys' bathrooms and girls' bathrooms are no

longer enough. The same discussion is extending to locker rooms: how many different ones are to be required in a school?

This confusion goes even further. Today you may be a boy. Tomorrow you may decide you are really a girl. Or, today you may be a girl, but tomorrow you may decide you are really a boy. An army of psychologists, social workers, and doctors is readily available to help you change into the real you.

So much confusion is there. But do not be confused by all the confusion.

In all this confusion, there is a straight line. That straight line runs from society to God. This confusion is in truth a well-organized spiritual rebellion against God and against God's divine creation ordinance: "From the beginning of the creation, God made them male and female." This testimony of God's creation is shown in every

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child born. From birth it is evident: God makes one female, and another male. But man rebels against this divine order from the creation. He deliberately seeks to overthrow God's order by his own sinful confusion.

This same straight line also runs from God to society. It is the line of God's judgment. Because of man's rebellion against His sovereign government shown through the things He has made, He gives them over to their depraved affections and all the perversions you see in this society (Rom. 1:18ff.). In this confusion there is God, working in His sovereign glory.

Because God is sovereign over this confusion, you need not fear that it will swallow you up. Instead, see it as a sign of God's glorious righteousness and a witness of the coming again of your Lord, to set everything straight.

In all this confusion, you must know the great loss and damage that society does to itself. Such a confused, disordered society cannot be peaceful and productive. This confusion affects the faithful church of Jesus Christ. As the peace of society is ruined, so also the church's peace falls into danger.

What is your calling in all this confusion? How do you guard against it? How do you keep yourself safe from it? How do you promote the good order that God has ordained? How do you keep that order personally? How do you promote the church's peace? How do you keep order while living in this confused and confusing world?

Receive joyfully this gift of exactly who God has made you to be. Remember His Word in its application exactly to your gender: "From the beginning of the creation God made them male and female." If God has made you male, be thankful to Him for that gift, and use that gift wisely. Keep it and develop it, so that you become a godly man in the home, church, and even society. Pursue matters with single-minded aim and purpose. Explore and be eager to learn about new things. Learn to rise to challenges that are presented to you. Consider and contemplate carefully, but also be decisive in leadership. Learn to be brave and bold, but with the bravery and boldness that is through faith in Christ. Be open to criticism and apply yourself to correction.

If God has made you female, be thankful to Him for that gift. Rejoice to be of the fairer and weaker sex. Prepare for a life of service to God, hopefully in mar-

riage and the raising of children, but remain open to the possibility that He may have a single life in store for you. Enjoy relationships and thrive in them, and learn to care for others in those relationships. Learn to be gentle, mild, and sweet in your attitude toward others. Enjoy both modesty and femininity in your clothing and manners.

Some of you may have enormous struggles in this area of your life. What goes on in this broken world can affect God's children very deeply. This confusion may arise in your own heart and soul. But do not despair, and above all, do not think that you cannot be a child of God. He knows your struggles better even than you do, and His grace is always sufficient. Find your true peace and rest where it is only and always to be found, in being redeemed by Jesus' blood. Live peaceably by that blood with the way that God has made you, even though it may mean a constant struggle. In that struggle you glorify the power of God's grace that wonderfully keeps you near Him.

As you live in this calling, you are following God's creation ordinance, to be what God made you to be: either male or female. But something else happens as well. Young woman, being the female that God has made you to be helps males to be the males that God has made them to be. Young man, being the male that God has made you to be helps females to be the females that God has made them to be. The female needs the male to be male. And the male needs the female to be female. As each of you is what God made you to be, you help the other to be what God has made him or her to be. As you prosper and flourish in the way God has made you, you help the other to prosper and flourish in his or her way.

Then you will find that the male and female need each other to be whole. Think of the profound words of I Corinthians 7:8-11,


For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.... Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord.

Notice how that truth comes from God's creation, in the verse that follows. "For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God."

The female has need of a male, just as a body needs a head. The male needs a female, just as a head needs a body. So arises the lifelong bond of marriage, the two joined together by God and made one flesh. In that kind of union, male and female will be far stronger than they could be by themselves. Together, male and female, made one flesh, will help and be helped by each other. They will strengthen each other in the work that they share, caring for church, family, and school. They also strengthen each other in the work that is given them individually. They are able to endure burdens and hardships so much better with encouragement for each other's hearts. They will be able to help each other in looking to all that is good, to pursue it together, and to thank God for it.

In all this way of being male and female distinctively and clearly, you will strengthen the institution of mar-

riage. This is the reason why from the beginning the Lord made them male and female—for the sake of marriage. Remembering who you are, male or female, single or married, and enjoying being male or female, calls attention to and glorifies God's institution of marriage. When you do this because you know that marriage is God's divine institution, you bring glory and praise to your God.

As you live under God's divine creation ordinance in the world, you will also make more and more evident the light of God's grace in you. As the darkness grows deeper, so will the light of your lives shine more brightly. You will show that the order of your life's way makes you blessed and happy. You will show a true, steadfast and enduring peace in your way, as you powerfully testify of the power of God's grace to keep you as He has made you in His grace, male and female. 

MINISTERING TO THE SAINTS

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

The Qualifications of the Office of Elder (8)

The Elder's Relationship to the Truth

Explaining I Timothy 3:2-7 and Titus 1:6-9, we have noted in past articles that elders in the church of Jesus Christ must be 1) adult male members of the church; 2) blameless men, who cannot be charged with any grave fault, and who are godly in all aspects of their life; 3) men who, when they are married and have children, enjoy the kind of relationship with their wives and children which indicates that they love with the love of Christ, and are wise, devoted, mature, and able to rule well; and 4) men who have a concern for others—loving hospitality, loving good, and having a good report of those who are without.

Three qualifications remain to be treated. First, God's Word requires that the elder be "apt to teach" (I Tim. 3:2).

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Second, he must be "not a novice" (I Tim. 3:6). Finally, he must be one who holds "fast the faithful word as he hath been taught" (Tit. 1:9).

The Underlying Principle

Underlying these qualifications is the principle that the elder must have a firm grasp on the truth set forth in Scripture.

He must himself have been *taught* ("holding fast the faithful word *as he hath been taught*"). If the elder is a covenant child from his youth, this teaching includes the instruction of parents, covenant school teachers, and pastors in catechism, so that it can be said of him, as Paul said of Timothy, "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures..." (II Tim. 3:15). If the elder was converted in his youth or later, this teaching would include all that instruction by which he came to know the true *Christian*, not to mention *Reformed*, faith.

Nor is this teaching limited to what he learned in the past. The elder must continue to learn and grow in his knowledge of Scripture: of the historical facts set forth in Scripture, the doctrines of saving grace revealed in Scripture, and the principles of antithetical living which God's Word teaches.

This firm grasp on the truth as set forth in Scripture is necessary for an elder. Every officebearer, elder included, is charged with the task of bringing God's Word to bear on the needs of God's people and the circumstances in which God's sheep find themselves.

Because elders must clearly understand the Scriptures in order to do their work, and because this clear understanding of Scripture relates to these qualifications for their office, I encourage elders not to be too busy to study the Scriptures. In addition to the time you take for family devotions and for preparing for your Bible study society, read wholesome books and listen to wholesome sermons and lectures. Of course, you are busy throughout the week earning your family's keep, and your free time involves being with your family as a husband and father. But dedicate some time regularly to read and study.

The Requirements

This underlying principle comes out in the three qualifications that we are considering.

First, the elder must be "not a novice" (I Tim. 3:6). The Greek word so translated literally means "new planting." He must not be one newly converted to Christianity. As it takes time for a plant to put down a deep root, so it takes time for a new convert to become well-grounded in the Scriptures.

In no way does this qualification denigrate new converts. The church rejoices to hear that God has turned others from unbelief and ungodliness to faith and godliness! The church readily receives such members! But the elders of the church must not be such men, for not all new "converts" are truly converted in the heart. They may have "temporary faith," depicted in the parable of the sower by the seed that fell on stony ground (Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21). In addition, in the very nature of the case a new convert is not ready to lead, rule, and teach other Christians who are more grounded than the convert. Even in secular society, we appoint as our leaders those who have knowledge gained by experience.

Implied also is that the elder be spiritually mature.

This point is also underscored by the requirements that he be blameless and godly. However, he must not only be mature personally and in his spiritual life; he must also be mature in his understanding of Scripture. A man who has a vast knowledge of scriptural facts, but is not able to see the "big picture" that they teach; or a man who knows all about the laws and commands of Scripture but does not understand the doctrines of grace; or a man who can use (twist) Scripture to draw out his own conclusions, contrary to the meaning of Scripture—such men are not candidates for the office of elder.

Second, the elder must "hold fast" this Word (Tit. 1:9). He must treasure this Word, to ensure that he does not lose it. Literally, he must always "have the faithful word before him." We will not lose that which we always keep in our sight.

Implied is that the elder is in danger of losing sight of the Word. This is a danger for all God's people; the care of the world and the deceitfulness of riches can choke the Word (Matt. 13:22). Jesus speaks this regarding those who have absolutely no care for the Word, and show themselves to be unfruitful unbelievers; but it can be applied relatively to the children of God. So the elder must realize that part of his task as elder is to grow in knowledge and love for the Scriptures.

Also implied is that the devil will try to snatch this Word from the elder personally, as well as from the church. "Gainsayers" will arise, who oppose the teachings of Scripture, trying to show them to be false, absurd, or irrelevant. If the elder is wishy-washy, he stands in danger of losing the Word, the very tool and weapon with which he must oppose these gainsayers. To this we will return in a moment.

Third, the elder must be "apt to teach," or skillful at teaching (I Tim. 3:2).

Some interesting questions arise in connection with this qualification. Does this qualification apply more to the church's pastors ("teaching elders," to use the term commonly used by Presbyterians), than to her elders ("ruling elders")? If the qualification applies to the ruling elders, why do they need to teach? And how must they be able to teach?

God willing, we will return to these questions in our next article, to give them a well-worked out answer without constraints of space.

For now we assert that “apt to teach” does require the church’s ruling elders to be men who are capable of teaching. Teaching has two fundamental aspects. One is that teachers must know the subject matter that must be taught. In other words, this qualification follows from the underlying principle of the three that we are considering: the elder must have a firm grasp of the teachings of the Scripture, because he must himself teach them. The other aspect is that one must be able to communicate effectively. How the elder does this, we will come back to next time. But for now we emphasize that a man who is simply devoid of the ability to teach truth is not qualified for the office of elder, even if he is a godly man and qualified in all other respects.

The Purposes

God tells us why these qualifications are so important.

He must not be a novice, “lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil” (I Tim. 3:6). And he must hold fast the faithful Word as he hath been taught, “that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers” (Tit. 1:9).

Although the reason in I Timothy 3 regards the elder himself, and the reason in Titus 1 regards others (“gainsayers”), the reasons boil down to the same thing: Satan is incessantly trying to destroy the church of Christ. Therefore, the church’s elders must be the kind of men who know how to fight, and who can be in the vanguard of the battle.

This requires elders to battle against sin within ourselves. One way the devil attacks the church is by attacking her leaders, her officebearers—by fanning their pride. Satan knows the consequences of pride; for *pride*, he himself was cast out of heaven, and consigned to hell. If he can get the officebearers to be proud, he can make inroads into the church.

Pride is a particular temptation for any elder. The fact is, they have been chosen out of all the men of the church—to the office of rule! Clearly, they might imagine that they are better than others...more capable than others...more spiritual than others! The decisions they make affect and influence the lives of other people! Such thinking manifests proud hearts, and is the yeast that leavens the whole man’s thinking and acting, preparing him for a fall (Prov. 16:18).

If *any* elder must guard against pride, all the more

would a *novice* need to. He might think: so quickly I rose to leadership in the church; am I not better than the others?

But the church is not served well by proud leaders. Her elders must fight sin within. If we do not, we will fall into the condemnation of the devil—that is, upon us will be pronounced the sentence of the everlasting misery of the torments of hell, which is pronounced on Satan himself!


Then, of course, elders must battle sin in the lives of others. “Gainsayers” are those who contradict the truth and the rule of godliness. They are found not only outside of the church but also within the church. They are the ones whom the elders must exhort and convince!

Strikingly, the word “rebuke” is not used here. The words “exhort” and “convince” indicate a very tender, meek approach. That they must “exhort” such means that the elders must come alongside of such, to give quiet instruction. That they must “convince” means that the elders must reprove and admonish, and especially point out one’s error—but not with earthly threats, nor with a loud, angry voice; the elders must bring the Word of God, authoritatively and convincingly. To do that, they must know the Word!

The word “convince,” as we use it today, suggests that the other, the “gainsayer,” sees and turns from his error. Sadly, such will not always be the fruit of the work of the elders. But when the gainsayer does not turn, let it be because he rejects the *Word* that the elders brought, and not because he is offended by the *manner* with which it was brought, or by the haughtiness or the impatience of the *man* who brought it.

Yet the elders who bring the faithful Word that they have been taught, and who bring it in humility and meekness, will accomplish their purpose: they will “convince,” in the sense that they leave the gainsayers without excuse, and make plain that the doctrine and life of the gainsayers is contrary to that set forth in the Scriptures.

In some instances, by God’s grace, this will be the means to work repentance in those gainsayers, and to restore them to the sheepfold of Christ!

By God’s grace *alone*—yet using the means of elders who know, love, hold fast, teach, and live according to God’s Word. 

Corporal Punishment—Still Legal for Discipline?

Public debate over discipline of children and the use of corporal punishment erupted recently after newspapers were filled with stories covering allegations that a professional football star had abused his four-year-old son. Adrian Peterson, a running back for the Minnesota Vikings, has stated he was disciplining the boy, and admittedly used a “switch” or small branch from a tree to spank his son. The state has charged Peterson with child abuse as a result of the incident. Some news reports have indicated that the boy was examined by a doctor after the incident and had multiple bruises and bleeding cuts, which led to a public outcry demanding Peterson’s suspension from play.

Regardless of the actual facts and circumstances of the Peterson case, the incident has brought renewed attention to the issue of corporal punishment of children. Corporal punishment is the legal term used for physical punishment, such as spanking. Many people are unsure of the status of the law and what forms of discipline are acceptable. Media attention to the Peterson case has led to renewed calls to ban corporal punishment.

Over the past 60 years or so, attitudes regarding corporal punishment of children have changed greatly. More and more society embraces the notion that children should never be physically punished for wrongdoing. This notion conflicts with the biblical principal expressed in passages such as Proverbs 13:24, which states: “He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.” Or Proverbs 23:13-14, which state: “Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and deliver his soul from hell.”

Most people have heard of some case in which parents became entangled in the juvenile court system for spanking their children in what was deemed an abusive

manner. Many parents are hesitant to spank children in public for fear that someone will report them to the department of social services. In this article we will examine the issue of corporal punishment and the guidelines the courts have drawn for permissible punishment of children. Lord willing, in a future article we will look at the juvenile court system and the aspects of that court system that are a cause for concern on the part of parents administering discipline now, and even more so in the future.

In discussing the status of the law in this area, it is important to note that many states have different rules and varying case-law-interpreting statutes, making it difficult to address all the specific rules in this short space. For purposes of discussion, we will look at the laws of the state of Iowa, where this author primarily practices. For specific information, the reader is encouraged to consult with an attorney licensed in his own state.

The general rule is that parents are allowed to use corporal punishment in disciplining children. The Iowa Supreme Court has described a parent’s ability to use physical punishment as follows:

[P]arents have a right to inflict corporal punishment on their child, but that right is restricted by moderation and reasonableness. When the parent goes beyond the line of reasonable correction, his or her conduct becomes criminal. “Corrective” means it must be for the purpose of behavior modification rather than to satisfy the passions of the enraged parent. The proper test is whether, under the particular circumstances, the amount of force used or the means employed by the parent rendered such punishment abusive rather than corrective in character. No precise rule defining what is permissible can be laid down, because the amount of force which would be reasonable or excessive necessarily varies with the age, physical condition, and other characteristics of a child as well as with the gravity of the child’s misconduct.¹

Mr. VanEngen, a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hull, Iowa, is a practicing attorney.

¹ *State v. Arnold*, 543 N.W.2d 600, 603 (Iowa 1996).

This language is typical of the way many courts define proper corporal punishment. The problem for parents, when cases are determined on a case-by-case basis, is that the court will decide after the fact whether the punishment used in a particular situation was appropriate. The number of variables that may weigh in on a court's decision, and the weight given to those variables, can change the outcome of such a case dramatically. As the Iowa court stated in the language quoted above, "No precise rule defining what is permissible can be laid down." When a court uses a standard of "reasonableness," that is legally defined as being what an ordinary person would consider reasonable under the circumstances. With changing attitudes concerning discipline of children, an "ordinary" person may not consider any amount of physical punishment to be appropriate. Therefore, although the law assures parents of the right to use corporal punishment, it is difficult to define precisely what type or level of corporal punishment may be deemed acceptable.

Some guidance as to what is *not* acceptable can be found in the statutory law regarding child abuse. Child abuse may be defined as a nonaccidental physical injury suffered by a child as a result of the acts of a person responsible for the care of the child.² Physical injury may be defined as damage to any bodily tissue to the extent that the tissue must undergo a healing process in order to be restored to a sound and healthy condition or damage to any bodily tissue which results in the death of the person who has sustained the damage.³ Examples of such injuries are as follows:

- (i) Abrasions [scrape, rubbing off of the skin];
- (ii) Lacerations [cut or tear in the flesh, jagged wound];
- (iii) Bruises [discoloration of the skin caused by a blow without a surface break];
- (iv) Hyperemia [reddening of surface tissue] lasting 24 hours or more*;
- (v) Burns [injury to skin caused by fire or chemical];
- (vi) Scalds [burn or injury with hot liquid or steam];
- (vii) Sprains [wrench or twist a ligament or muscle without dislocating the bone];
- (viii) Dislocations [put a bone out of joint];
- (ix) Fractures [break in a bone, tear in cartilage];

- (x) Eye injuries [including detached retina];
- (xi) Welts [raised area on surface tissue, caused by a blow]; and
- (xii) Internal injuries, including abdominal or chest; brain; central nervous system or subdural hemorrhage or hematoma.

* Note that hyperemia [reddening of the skin] is the only type of injury in which the 24 hour rule applies.⁴

Of this list, abrasions, lacerations, bruises, hyperemia (red marks), and welts are the type that could possibly be caused by traditional corporal punishment or spanking. Any parent who punishes a child in a manner that causes such injury could be found to have abused the child.

If a parent is accused of child abuse, there are two ways in which the parent can become involved in the court system. The first is through criminal charges. In this case the parent is basically charged with assaulting the child, just as if the parent were intentionally to injure some other person. In many states, an assault on a child or other family member constitutes domestic abuse, which often carries enhanced penalties such as mandatory jail time and loss of right to bear firearms. However, the criminal justice system also carries certain safeguards for the parent accused of abuse. The state must prove abuse beyond the shadow of a doubt. The accused parent has the right to confront and cross-examine witnesses against him. The rules of evidence apply, including the exclusion of hearsay evidence. Hearsay is an out-of-court statement offered for its truth, such as testimony from a witness who says another party told them they saw the parent abusing the child. Unless the eyewitness is present so that the parent can question whether they really saw what they claim, the evidence would be excluded.

Because of the more stringent rules applicable to criminal cases, many allegations of child abuse are instead referred to juvenile court, with no criminal charges being filed. While the juvenile court cannot levy criminal sanctions against a parent, the court can limit the actions of the parents and can even order the removal of the child from its parents' home. Often social workers from the Department of Social Services will become involved in the home and will be given authority from the court to oversee discipline and other parental functions in the

² Iowa Code, Section 232.68(2)(a)(1) (2014).

³ 441 Iowa Administrative Code, 175.1 and 175.21.

⁴ Child Protective Services Investigation Handbook [Feb. 1995], 7.

home. The functioning of the juvenile court bears closer examination, because of the unique rules that apply to that system and their implication for parents who become involved in juvenile court. We hope to study the processes of the juvenile court more closely in our next installment in this series.

When considering how Christian parents should discipline their children in this context, we do well to review several excerpts from a sermon entitled “The Rod and Reproof: The Loving Discipline of Covenant Children” by Rev. S. Key, which has been reprinted as a pamphlet by the same name (cf. prca.org/resources).

We must also note in this connection, that rightly to use the rod on our children requires love. All too often, where physical discipline is exercised, it is not done out of love either for God or the child. We who must administer such discipline to our covenant children, must do so under God’s authority and with His manner and attitude.

It takes just a little time and effort to get the stick out. And for us to reflect God’s attitude of love through our reactionary, impatient, sinful flesh, it is necessary that we slow down and think about what

we are doing. Slapping your children around the head and beating on them with your fists, whipping them or beating them with any object close at hand, or anything of the like, is nothing more than abuse of the children whom God has entrusted to your care. And if that has been your ungodly method of punishing your covenant children, you must repent before God and before your children this day!

When we parents administer the discipline of the rod in love, then we do not do so to injure.⁵

⁵ *The Rod and Reproof: The Loving Discipline of Covenant Children*, Rev. S. Key (1990).

Applying these principles to the standards expressed by the Iowa Supreme Court in the *Arnold* case, we note that the court stated that the punishment “must be for the purpose of behavior modification rather than to satisfy the passions of the enraged parent.”⁶ The loving correction described above would certainly meet that portion of the test. The Court also stated that “[t]he proper test is whether, under the particular circumstances, the amount of force used or the means employed by the parent rendered such punishment abusive rather than corrective in character.”⁷ Again, the loving discipline described in the excerpts above would be

within the bounds of the law. Any discipline resulting in red marks that last for a period of time, lacerations, bruises, or welts could certainly put the parent on the defensive with the state, but such discipline would probably be outside the loving discipline described. The discipline administered by Adrian Petersen, which allegedly resulted in bleeding cuts to the child’s legs, would also be outside the scope of the loving discipline described above.

Sadly, the world around us more and more encourages everyone to do what is right

in his own eyes, and this attitude carries over to a lack of discipline of children. In this climate, any physical punishment is frowned upon by the world; even the most loving punishment could still subject a parent to allegations of child abuse. In the next article, Lord willing, we will look at the difficulties presented by the juvenile justice system in such a changing world. As we seek to raise our children in the fear of His name, we must remember that we ought to obey God rather than man. We can be comforted in knowing that He will avert all evil or turn it to our profit. ☞

⁶ *State v. Arnold*, 543 N.W.2d 600, 603 (Iowa 1996).

⁷ *Ibid.*

Reformed Confessions of the 16th and 17th Centuries in English Translation: Volume 4, 1600-1693, edited by James T. Dennison, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014). Pp. 752. Hardcover. \$50.00. [Reviewed by Douglas J. Kuiper.]

Overview

With this volume, James Dennison concludes his project of translating and compiling Reformed Confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The first three volumes contained 91 confessions dating from 1525 to 1599. This final volume contains another 36 confessions, all dating from the 1600s. Each confession is preceded by an introduction, which gives the historical background and tells us where else that confession has been published. Obviously, a confession that is a few hundred years old has been published previously—but for some, this is the first *English* translation and publication.

This volume also contains three comprehensive and helpful indices for all four volumes—a Scripture index, a name index, and a subject index. This means that anyone who already has one or more previous volumes, will certainly want this volume.

Not to be overlooked in this volume is the contribution of members of the PRC. Tom and Kirsten DeVries of Hope (Walker) PRC translated the Hessian Catechism (1607), and made revisions to the translation of the *Confession of the Evangelical Church in Germany* (1614). And Peter VanDerSchaaf of Faith PRC translated the *Leipzig Colloquy* (1631) and made revisions to *The Colloquy of Thorn* (1645). Mr. VanDerSchaaf had also helped with the translation of *The Stafforts Book* (1599) in volume 3, with help from Jason Holstege (Hudsonville PRC).

Not all of these confessions were officially adopted by churches; some are the personal confessions of individual men. Of special note is *The Confession of Cyril Lukaris* (1629/1631). Lukaris was nothing less than an *Eastern Orthodox patriarch*—first in Alexandria, and later in Constantinople! Having become convinced of

the Reformed faith, he wrote this confession. In the end, after he was murdered, the Orthodox Church “roundly anathematized” his views (155).

The reader should realize too that Dennison uses the word “Reformed” in a very broad sense, to refer to several branches of Protestantism. Included are confessions of other Protestant bodies, such as Lutherans, Waldensians, Presbyterians, Calvinistic Baptists, and Puritan Congregationalists. One document found in this volume is emphatically *not* Reformed in doctrine—that being the five points of the Remonstrants, which occasioned the five heads of the Canons of Dordt.

Benefits

Let me state several benefits of reading through this volume in particular—which benefits can apply also to the entire set.

First, to read through these volumes is a valuable study in Reformed doctrine. Overall, these are *Reformed* creeds, champions of unconditional election, limited atonement, and other aspects of sovereign grace.

This is not to say that every Reformed believer will agree with every statement made in these confessions. For one thing, the Westminster view of the covenant of works and of divorce and remarriage is found in this fourth volume. For another, several of these confessions are those of Calvinistic Baptists, whose views on believer’s baptism and baptism by immersion are reflected. And, while the *Colloquy of Thorn* (1645) is a good confession overall, it does contain troubling statements. It expresses the conviction that the regenerate (“reborn” and “justified”) who persistently live for a time in sin lose not only the assurance of their salvation, but “retain for that time neither the living faith nor the justifying grace of God, ...burden themselves with a new debt of wrath and eternal death, and therefore, if they are not awakened by the special grace of God (which we do not doubt in the elect) and renewed in repentance again, naturally they too must be damned” (215). It is one thing to say that God’s children who live in sin lose the assurance of their salvation; but this says they lose the very saving grace of God itself, and stand in need of being “awakened,” or regenerated again.

A denial of irresistible grace!

Rev. Kuiper is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church of Edgerton, Minnesota.

But such statements are the exception, the *rare* exception, in this book.

Second, to read through this volume in particular is to study the development of Reformed doctrine. In part, Reformed doctrine developed simply because the Reformed churches grew in their understanding of it. But heresy was a major factor in this development, especially in the seventeenth century. *This* is the value of including the five points of the Remonstrants, even though they are doctrinally un-Reformed. Our beloved Canons of Dordt is included in this volume. In addition, the *Bentheim Confession* (1613) was written to oppose Arminianism, as well as a then-current denial of the Trinity; *A New Confession of Faith* (1654) was written partly in response to Socinianism, which denied both that Christ is eternal, and that His death was atonement; and *The Formula Consensus Helvetica* (1675) was written to oppose Amyrauldianism, which taught a form of universal atonement.

Third, reading through this volume, one is struck by how segmented the various branches of Protestantism were becoming already within 100 years after Calvin. The Puritan Congregationalists and the London Baptists liked much of what was found in the Westminster Confession of Faith, but revised it to fit their needs. Hence, the *Savoy Declaration* (1658) and the *London Baptist Confession* (1677). *The London Confession* (1646) was written by Baptist churches “Which Are Commonly (Though Unjustly) Called Anabaptists” (borrowing from the lengthy full title of the document). And other confessions are written because, while a group agreed with much of a particular confession, they didn’t agree with all of it—so they felt the need to state their particular views.

Fourth, reading this volume reminds us that persecution has often been the impetus for writing confessions. Remember that the English monarchy kept changing hands from Catholic to Protestant, and back to Catholic and again to Protestant, during this era. Several of the

English Puritan confessions of this century were written to defend their faith to the monarchy.


Fifth, one is reminded that the seventeenth century was a century of the expansion of Protestantism to America. The *Seven Articles of the Church in Leiden* (1617) were written with a view to the Puritans—also known as the Pilgrims—going to America. And *The Cambridge Platform* (1648) was written in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the benefit of New England Congregationalists.

Exciting times in church history!

Evaluation

Do you know why Dennison stopped his project with this volume—why he will not compile a volume that includes “Reformed Confessions of the 18th Century”? Because there were not many in the eighteenth century. By the end of the seventeenth century, the prominent Enlightenment thinkers had been born, and were beginning to spread their ideas. These confessions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, hammered out on the anvils of persecution and heresy, would soon be relegated to dusty bookshelves as heresy and apostasy would spread. Sad.

Many readers of the *Standard Bearer* will not feel the need to spend \$38 for this volume, or \$142 for the whole set (RHB discount price). But the serious student of Reformed doctrine and of the history of doctrine will certainly find this a valuable resource, well worth the price. If you prefer to buy the whole set in electronic format, it will cost \$89.99 (www.heritagebooks.org). An excellent value!

But do not buy it just to set the books on your shelves, there to get dusty (or on your hard drive, there to sit idle). If you buy it, read it, and grow in your appreciation of the fact that God raised up certain men, and providentially guided them as they put pen to paper, in defense of the Reformed faith! 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. PERRY VAN EGDOM

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

Sister Church Activities

The Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church (CERC) of Singapore sponsored a Reformation Con-

ference on November 7 and 8. The theme for the conference was *The Reformation and Development of the Truth*. Rev. Daniel Kleyn,

missionary to the Philippines, was the featured speaker and presented three speeches: “The Restoration of the Truth,” “The Furtherance of the Truth,” and “The Price Paid for the Truth.” There were a good number of visitors at the conference and many timely questions were asked in a rather interesting manner. Rev. Kleyn was given a cell phone and questioners were instructed to submit their questions to him via text message. On Sunday, November 9, Rev. Kleyn led the installation service for Rev. Andrew Lanning into the office of minister of the Word and sacraments in the CERC. Rev. Kleyn preached on the theme “Preaching Things Consistent with Sound Doctrine” from Titus 2:1. We are glad to hear of the successful conference—and thankful with the CERC that they now have a minister to call their own to labor in their midst!

Evangelism Activities

A Fall lecture was held November 14 in Kalamazoo, MI PRC. Prof. Barry Gritters, instructor in the Protestant Reformed Theological School in Wyoming, MI spoke on the topic, “The Prince of Darkness Grim: The Reformed Truth About Satan.” Refreshments were provided after the address.

Mission Activities

Though in November most U.S. Midwestern farmers have completed their harvest, in the Philippines it is optimal time for planting vegetables as the cool and dry season is beginning. This is the season that the missionary families are happy to

see, as it brings a bit of relief from the heat. The young Smit family gardeners have been hard at work planting carrots, radishes, beans, cucumbers, and lettuce. Pastor Donasco in Si-alay, Negros Occidental is their green-thumbed gardening consultant, supplying answers when needed for the missionary gardeners. The chickens that the Smit children had raised from chicks have now been sold. Duke and Lady, the two family dogs, are present and doing well. Speaking of the cool season, a recent overnight Antipolo low temperature was 69.9 F. It may be hard to believe, but that truly is shivering weather in the Philippines!

Congregational Activities

And speaking of shivering, the Tri-state area of Iowa, Minnesota, and South Dakota (also known as Siouxland, see Wikipedia) where five of our churches are located, experienced uncommonly cold weather in mid-November. For almost two weeks the temperatures registered highs in the teens and 20’s, and lows as cold as -5F, with wind. It is likely no Filipino would have survived that! We understand that much of the country has experienced an early taste of winter from God’s hand, including possibly where you reside. We are thankful that such a powerful God whom the winds and waves obey, such a powerful God whose cold none can stand before, holds us in His Almighty hand, guiding and directing all things for our profit!

Every Remembrance Day (equivalent to the U.S. Veteran’s Day)

the congregation of First PRC, Edmonton, AB, Canada holds their “car rally,” inviting the congregation of Lacombe to join them. The bulletins there requested that participants bring along a Bible, pen, digital camera and enthusiasm. You might wonder, as we did, what a November Canadian “car rally” involves? Each team piles into a car and away they go, using the provided clues (many from Bible texts) to find their way around and complete the tasks required. Teams are scored by the number of correct answers and the time (around two hours) and distance it took them to complete the rally. Extra points are awarded to teams with members under ten years of age. A delicious soup supper followed the rally. That sounds like a really enjoyable and challenging day!

Minister Activities

Rev. Clayton Spronk preached his farewell sermon in Peace PRC, Lansing, IL on November 16. Following the second service on that date, a time was set aside as a farewell for Rev. Spronk and to thank him for his faithful labors there. Rev. Spronk was scheduled to be installed as the seventh minister of the Word and sacraments at Faith PRC, Jenison, MI on November 30. We give thanks to God with Faith Church for a pastor of their own to labor in their midst!

On November 16 Doon PRC, the calling church for the Philippine mission field, extended a call to Rev. Jonathan Mahtani (Cornerstone PRC of Dyer, IN) to be the next missionary to the Philippines.

Standard Bearer

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MICHIGAN

On November 16 First PRC of Grand Rapids, MI announced a new trio consisting of Rev. Allen Brummel (Heritage PRC, Sioux Falls, SD), Rev. Richard Smit (foreign missionary to the Republic of the Philippines), and Rev. Ronald Van Overloop (Grace PRC, Standale, MI). First Church planned to call from this trio on December 4, D.V.

Denomination Activities

The Protestant Reformed

Churches were present at the recent meeting of the North American Presbyterian and Reformed Council (NAPARC) held in Hamilton, ON, Canada. Rev. Nathan Decker (Trinity PRC), Rev. Gary Eriks (Hudsonville PRC), and Rev. Kenneth Koole (Grandville PRC) attended with the intent to observe, investigate the changes to the group's constitution, and to help assess the value and possibility of continuing to send observers to NAPARC.

RFPA News

The Reformed Free Publishing Association expected a new book to be published in early December. Entitled *Just Dad, Stories of Herman Hoeksema*, this book is written by his daughter Lois Kregel and records many never-before-told stories of this PRC church father.

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

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Just Dad

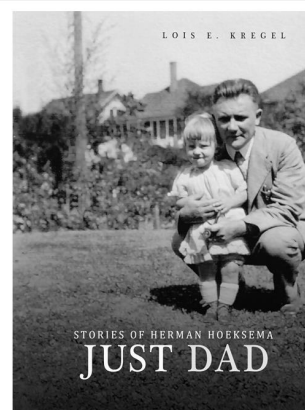
Many people are familiar with the public persona of Herman Hoeksema. As one of the leading theologians of the twentieth century, a seminary professor, the pastor of a large congregation, and a prolific writer, he was well-known in ecclesiastical circles, as well as in the world in general. But to his family, he was "Just Dad." This anecdotal biography written by his youngest child records many stories about him, some perhaps familiar but others never before told.

This small paperback will make a great Christmas gift!



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This title will be automatically distributed to Book Club members. If you are not a Book Club member and would like to preorder this book, call 616-457-5970, email mail@rfpa.org, or order at www.rfpa.org.



Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 14, 2015, at the First Protestant Reformed Church of Holland, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 15, 2014.

Jon J. Huiskens,
Stated Clerk

Teacher needed

■ Hope PR Christian School (Grand Rapids, MI) is seeking applicants to fill positions in both kindergarten and a lower-elementary grade for the 2015-16 school year. For more information or to submit your resume contact David Langerak (616-437-3643, dave.langerak@gmail.com) or Dan Hanko (616-453-9717, dhanko@hopeprcschool.org).