

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	Jehovah's Song of Joy REV. CORY GRIESS	434
<i>Editorial</i>	Our Church Order, Psalms, and Hymns REV. KENNETH KOOLE	436
<i>Letters</i>	More on Ken Ham Debate MR. PHILIP RAINEY	439
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (30) PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	440
<i>Strength of Youth</i>	To Teach Them War (Introduction 2) REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA	443
<i>Ministering to the Saints</i>	Qualifications of the Office of Elder (6) REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER	446
<i>All Around Us</i>	The Movie <i>Son of God</i> REV. NATHAN LANGERAK	448
<i>Believing and Confessing</i>	The Relation of Good Works to Justification REV. RODNEY KLEYN	452
<i>Activities</i>	News From Our Churches MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	454

Jehovah's Song of Joy

In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack. The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.

Zephaniah 3:16-17

Zephaniah is a prophet of God prophesying in Judah at the time of King Josiah. This is before the captivity and after the rule of the great King Hezekiah. Judah is filled with syncretistic religion at this time. There is the worship of Jehovah mixed with the worship of all the pagan gods. Zephaniah's prophecy is a prophecy of impending judgment for this forsaking of God. More than any other prophet, Zephaniah focuses upon the coming Day of the Lord, a day of reckoning when all will be judged. But judgment, Zephaniah reminds the church, begins in the house of God. Judah, too, will come under judgment. That prophecy of judgment takes up a majority of the book. Read a bit of it from 1:14-17: "The great day of the LORD is near, it is

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near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD.... That day is a day of wrath...because they have sinned against the LORD."

But in Zephaniah 2 there is a call to repentance and faith. And chapter 3 records the wonderful mercy of God upon those who by grace repent and ask for forgiveness. Zephaniah, foreseeing the repentance and faith of the remnant, gives in chapter 3 one of the most beautiful and precious descriptions of God's tender love in all of Scripture. God tells His people through Zephaniah that He is a God who breaks forth in singing for joy over His repentant sons and daughters whom He loves.



The text says something that strikes us as strange. It says that *God* rejoices over *us* with joy and singing. This sounds strange because we are commanded repeatedly to rejoice before God and to sing unto God, but we do not expect to hear that God rejoices and sings over us. That seems backwards. And though it is true that this is a figure by which God declares His great love for us, we must not downplay the significance of the thought.

What does this mean, then, that God will rejoice over thee with singing? This rejoicing and singing is not the

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singing of worship of course. Part of the reason we sing and rejoice before God is to worship and exalt His Godhead. This is not the case here. God is not worshipping us when He rejoices over us with song. Rather, this is a figure that expresses God's intense, zealous love for and joy in His people. A song is often an expression of the delight a person has in another person or thing. That song will recount that person's characteristics that delight the one singing. That is what this song is here. It is a singing and rejoicing of delight.

You find a young mother singing with delight over her newborn baby that she carries in her arms. You find in Eastern lands a bridegroom rejoicing over his bride. It was a common tradition for a bridegroom to have a song that he would sing over his bride upon their marriage. That song represented his delight in his new bride. This is what God is doing here, rejoicing as a bridegroom over His bride. Isaiah says that explicitly in chapter 62:5: "And as the bridegroom rejoiceth over the bride, so shall thy God rejoice over thee." What a beautiful picture, God the bridegroom rejoicing over His bride, His people.

There are two dangers when speaking of the love of God. One is that we cheapen it by speaking of it to the exclusion of His holiness. Then God is presented as a being whose love a person can take advantage of. It's a love that is weak, presented so cheaply that it loses any of its meaning and even desirability. The other danger, however, is that God is not viewed as a loving Father to His people in Jesus Christ. Rather, He is seen as a cold, hard, angry Father to His people, who would really rather destroy them but cannot, now that Jesus has died for them. God presents Himself here as a God who not only loves His people, but loves to love them. He retains His glory and dominion and power, but He does not hesitate to be a God who also breaks into song at the thought of His people whom He loves in Jesus Christ. It does not demean Him in the slightest to show us that this is who He is, a Father who pours His delight and love in audible and visible expression over His people.

There is a lesson here for husbands and fathers. As God is both austere and loving, so must we be. We are called to be honorable, men of character and holiness. There ought to be a weight to our word in our homes. There ought to be a firm will that engenders respect, as well as strict discipline when that word is ignored. At the

same time, it ought to be the experience of our wives that we delight in them. When our children are grown and out of the home, there ought to be in their mind memories of a father who delighted in his children, who rejoiced over them. For such is our Father in heaven.

It is precious that the text says that God rejoices *over* us, and sings *over* us. Verse 17: "He will rejoice *over* thee with joy. He will joy *over* thee with singing." It does no good to rejoice and sing concerning someone if that person is not there to hear it. God rejoices *over* us. This is an overture of intimacy and communion. We are there while God is rejoicing and singing.

Nowhere in Scripture does it ever record God rejoicing and singing over anything or anyone other than His people in Christ. Scripture tells us that, when God created all things in the beginning, He looked upon His creation and pronounced it good. It does not say that He rejoiced over it. We read that, when God had communion with Adam in the garden, He walked with him, but never does it say He rejoiced over him. In Psalm 104:31 the Scriptures say that God rejoices *in* all His works, but it will not go so far as to say that God rejoices *over* His works. What we are told in Zephaniah 3:17 is a unique act of God. The redeemed of the Lord alone are honored with such great delight from Him that He breaks forth in song over them. There is closeness. He is hovering over us in His delight.



The reason God sings over us, and can sing over us in His holiness, is also given in verse 17: "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; *he will save*." It then goes on to say that He "will rejoice over thee with joy." He has saved us, mightily, and therefore He delights in what He sees in us.

And He saves mightily by being in the midst of us, verse 17: "The LORD in the midst of thee...will save." When the text says that God is in the midst of thee, it is a prophecy of the coming of Jesus Christ. God is the mighty one, who is powerful to save. And He will do what it takes to save His people, even by coming into their midst in the person and work of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 15 explains what His coming into our midst effects: "The Lord hath taken away thy judgments." The Lord Jesus will come into your midst to take your punishment for sin away. He will be the sacrifice that can

represent you and will be able to bear your guilt, because He is God Himself come into your midst.

The whole first part of Zephaniah speaks of judgments that fall upon the unbelieving in Judah. God threatens with wrath and destruction for sin. There will be no substitute to take the judgments away. Those judgments will fall directly upon the impenitent in the church.

But then in our text in chapter three, God says that for the remnant, those who are repentant and believing, God Himself will take away the judgments. He will do it by coming into the midst of His people and bearing away the judgment for sin. That's the gospel in Zephaniah. And it is on this basis that God rejoices over His people. As verse 17 says, He *rests in His love*. His wrath is satisfied. All offense is taken away, there is only peace and rest—no fury, no wrath, in the love of Jehovah our God.

This comes for God's own in the way of repentance. In 3:9 the remnant will "call upon the name of the LORD." That calling on the Lord's name was for repentance. "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD." The pure language of God's people is the language of repentance. This too was a gift from God himself. Zephaniah 3:9: "For then *will I turn*."

Repentance—pure language—is the means by which we too experience the closeness of the text. Without the means of repentance, you know no sacrifice for your sins, and you are exposed to the fiery judgment of God. If you hold on to your sin, you will not know a loving Father but a merciless Judge. But no matter your sin, in the way of repentance and faith a man knows the sacrifice of

Christ as His own substitutionary sacrifice. This will be the means by which we experience the Father rejoicing over us.



And knowing His joyous love sung over us, we will heed the pleasant command of verse 16: "In that day it shall be said to Jerusalem, *Fear thou not*: and to Zion, Let not thine hands be slack." A child is secure in the father that delights over him; so too by this text, we must have all fear taken away. Whatever anxieties are in our life, whatever questions are left unanswered, whatever troubles confront us, the greatest problem in life has been solved. Your God rejoices over you with joy, and He joys over thee with singing. Do not fear.

And secondly, the command in Zephaniah 3:16 is "Let not thine hands be slack." Slack hands are hands that are not working, are not active, have no life in them. This is a figure for the child of God who is bound by fear and therefore cannot praise and worship and live unto God with a heart full of joy. Fear paralyzes a person. He cannot live with a joy in the service of God. Hope takes away all fear. It animates the child of God to vigorous worship. It fuels a life of service to Jehovah. Hear by faith a Father singing over His children, and let this lift up the slack hands to a life of service and love for God. Let it fuel worship and praise. The Scriptures bring it back around full circle in verse 14: "Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem." Lift up the hands, delight, joy, praise, sing, to your God, for your God delights, joys, and sings over you.

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Our Church Order, Psalms, and Hymns

This article is in praise of our Church Order, the CO of the great Synod of Dordt (1618-19), its wisdom, its balance, in particular as evidenced

by Article 69, the article that governs which songs may be sung in our worship services.

The occasion for this editorial is a follow-up on an article by the

undersigned that appeared in the April 1, 2014 issue of the *SB*, an issue devoted to Psalm-singing. The article was entitled *A History of Psalm/Psalter-Singing in the*

PRC. For the PRC the two are tied together. The 1912 Psalter is the one songbook used in our worship services and is the means we use to sing the Psalms.

At the conclusion of that article we indicated that we intended to say a bit more about Article 69 as it now (still) stands in our CO.

As the *SB* article pointed out, in our ninety-year history there have been a number of attempts (reaching the synodical level) to ‘improve’ the Psalter. Certainly that’s what those who brought the overtures were seeking to do. In fact a committee appointed by a synod in the mid-1940s did a great deal of preliminary work on this project, though its proposals were never implemented due to the doctrinal crisis that came to dominate the denominational landscape in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

As well, as the reader may recall, in our history a couple of attempts were made to add synodically-approved hymns to the “psalmody” of the PRC, one coming by overture to the 1959 Synod, the other brought by a committee (in 1949) seeking revision of its synodical mandate. The committee requested that, in addition to its mandate to come with proposed improvements of the Psalter versifications and tunes, it be mandated to recommend for synod’s consideration hymns suitable for worship. Following lengthy and energetic debates, both attempts failed.

These last mentioned proposals would, of course, have required a change of Article 69 of our CO, which article, with its present word-

ing, goes back to the great Synod of Dordt itself.

The article (as we still have it in our CO today) reads: “In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David, the Ten Commandments, the Lord’s Prayer, the Twelve Articles of Faith, the Songs of Mary, Zacharias, and Simeon, the Morning and Evening Hymns, and the Hymn of Prayer before the sermon shall be sung.”

Interestingly, in 2001 advice was brought to synod (advice that arose in response to an overture proposing wide ranging changes in our CO) to revise Article 69—to revise it, however, not in the interests of *expanding* the list of songs allowed in our worship, but in sharply *curtailing* our approved song list. Everything after the phrase “Psalms of David” would be removed. The newly worded article would then have read, “In the churches only the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung.”

In other words, exclusive psalmody.

Significantly, this too was defeated.

And that was the occasion for our commenting in our April 1 article that perhaps there was something to learn from this history, the Spirit Himself speaking through this history, so that for all the attempts in our history to add to or subtract from Article 69, Article 69 as originally worded still stands, at least in our churches.

In our judgment, that is how it should be.

As stated at the beginning of this editorial, we are writing in praise of our CO, its wisdom and its balance,

and in particular as that is reflected in Article 69, the article on singing—singing ‘in church’ for sure (that is, in our worship services), but, by implication, what is to be allowed to be sung by God’s people outside divine worship as well. Namely hymns, doctrinally-sound hymns—not something to be forbidden, nor for that matter discouraged, but to be used with discernment and discretion.

What is striking about Article 69 as it presently stands is that it does not insist on exclusive psalmody, not even in divine worship. Neither the Ten Commandments nor the Lord’s Prayer are psalms. The Morning and Evening Hymns were not versifications of the Psalms, nor for that matter was the Hymn of Prayer sung at the beginning of the service.

That is not exclusive psalmody, no matter how you cut it.

The great Synod of Dordt did not bind the Reformed churches to exclusive psalmody.

But the Synod of Dordt was wise, ever so wise, and, we are convinced, biblically sound.

Good brothers may disagree with us on this. Some certainly do, energetically in fact.

Regardless, we are *not* convinced that the great Synod that led Christ’s church through so many issues of controversy and of error at that time suddenly lost its sound theological judgment when it came to songs appropriate for God’s people, songs appropriate for worship, songs pleasing to God triune, songs that might even make explicit reference to God as the great Three-in-One, mentioning Father, Son,

and Holy Ghost by name.

We are convinced Dordt's good judgment, biblically-based throughout, remained intact, also in Article 69 of the CO.

The wisdom displayed in Article 69 is, in our judgment, threefold.

The first two aspects apply to what is to be sung at our worship services.

First, Article 69 establishes the primacy of the Psalms in the psalmody of Christ's church, even in the New Testament age. It lists the Psalms of David first, the 150 of them, many of which are anything but brief. And then it lists a mere nine additional songs that can be sung in the divine worship service.

That is not primacy by a slim margin; that is an overwhelming majority.

In Article 69 Dordt's Synod was by no means putting the singing of the Psalms in worship at risk. Their primacy shouts at one.

As an aside, this is transparent to visitors to our worship services. More than once 'outsiders' have remarked to us, "So, all that your churches sing are the Psalms, evidently." To which our reply has been, "Basically, yes. Although there are a handful of other songs you can find at the back of our Psalter." We do not recall their having been impressed by the size of the 'allowed' list.

If singing hymns in worship services was an itch they had, the PRC was not the place to scratch it.

Hymns swallowing up the Psalms in our worship is not an issue. Not as long as one sticks with Article 69 of the CO.

Which brings us to the second evidence of wisdom expressed in the article. It made plain that any songs to be sung in the federation of the Reformed churches had to have synodical approval. The songs sung had to be agreed upon by the churches in common. It was not left to each congregation to decide for itself which songbook it was going to use, nor, for that matter, what songs each congregation might like to add to the songbook. Rather, such matters were to be decided in denominational concert. Harmony in the approved song list was to be the rule.

Wisdom indeed. Every consistory can be thankful. Else, they can be assured, there would be no end of petitions suggesting that this or that old-time favorite be added to the approved song list, or a more recent composition. Endless debate, feelings hurt, anything but harmony flowing from the unsettled nature of the 'approved song list' issue.

So the approved list.

And all a consistory has to do with a request to add a new song or two for worship is to point to Article 69 and say, "The list of songs approved for worship has been set by our CO. It is not to be added to except by 'an act of congress.' This is what we intend to live with. You would like these changes? You will have to persuade synod of the need."

Thanks to Article 69, precious time needed for other pressing matters is not spent considering another request to add another new song, the making of which there is no end.

But there is also a third element of wisdom clearly implied by

Dordt's Article 69, wisdom as it applies to the 'song life' of believers as it extends beyond the worship service. What is plain is that the synod did not oppose the singing of hymns as such. Hymns, too, could have their place in the lives of the people of God, that is, doctrinally-sound, biblically-faithful hymns, hymns that reflect the great truths and confessions of faith found in Scripture.

Obviously Dordt was convinced such hymns could be found (and composed by believers), or it would not have included any hymns in Article 69 at all.

It is evident what Dordt's perspective was, namely, "In the worship service, let such songs as are directly tied to (are versifications of) Scripture be the prevailing rule. Hence, the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer are listed with the 150 Psalms. If believers desire to sing other spiritual songs, songs faithful to the truths of Scripture and as expressions of the Christian life and confession, we do not forbid that. Only, if such songs are to be sung, let that be in homes and gatherings outside the worship service."

If that were not its perspective, surely Dordt would not have tolerated mention of any hymn in its own Article 69. That it allowed for the singing of a hymn or two in worship demonstrates it did not condemn the singing of hymns as such.

You ask, why raise and address this issue in the *SB*?

Why?

Exactly because this issue of

exclusive psalmody vs the use of hymns has been an issue throughout New Testament church history. And it is an issue that continues to confront us as Protestant Reformed believers living with each other, as well. There are some who lean one way—Who needs hymns? Exclusive psalmody is the only way to go. The Psalter is all we need. And there are those who lean the other way. We do enough Psalter singing, many of which are not even the best versifications of the Psalms available. We need to expand our psalmody. And by that we mean the inclusion of more hymns.

I will be so bold as to say there can be a danger of leaning too far in either direction.

A danger in pushing for what amounts to exclusive psalmody?

Yes, if that means that one looks with suspicion upon those who have a high regard for good hymns and enjoy singing them at this function or the other. Let us be careful. Old HH (the Reverend H. Hoeksema) obviously had a high regard for certain hymns. “Amazing Grace” thrilled his soul. He could not sing it at worship. But he did quote it from time to time, as is well known.

And some others as well. His spirituality is suspect? His love for the Psalms?

His orthodoxy? He was being led astray by his affection for selected hymns?

We demur.

Exclusive psalmody across the board has a fine pedigree. But that is not our heritage going back to the Synod of Dordt. And that has not been our practice as Protestant Reformed people.

The reality is this: the presence of hymns, the use of hymns, is going to remain part of who we are. Sing-spirations and school programs bear this out. The question is, “Which hymns, and hymns to what extent?”

And therein lies the danger of leaning too far in the ‘hymn direction.’ One becomes so enamored by the ‘singability’ of many a hymn, that discernment of the words is lost. And then orthodoxy can be at stake. Care must be exercised.

Or, so attractive are hymns and other melodies that the Psalms go begging.

Neither ‘evil’ may gain a foothold.


And here is where our Christian schools come into play.

School programs are an occasion

for teaching our children various hymns to be sung, but hymns with substance—like our prayers, echoing scriptural truths. It is in this way that the youth can be taught to discern between hymns of substance over against the shallow and the superficial. In our day and age, overrun with superficial ‘feelings’-centered hymns, learning such discernment is important.

But in the morning, as the school day begins, the students are singing and familiarizing themselves with the Psalms and Psalter. So it was at Hope School (in Riverbend) when I was growing up. And so versified Psalms become part of our souls, who we were and still are. So the Psalter, looming large in our schools, carrying benefits for church and Sabbath worship, as well as for making melody in our hearts during the week.

We say again, our CO has wisdom and balance—in Article 69 too. It lays down sound principles to govern our song life as twenty-first century Protestant Reformed believers.

It has served us well. We judge it to be fine just as it stands. 

LETTERS

More on Ken Ham Debate

I appreciate the discussion between Brendan Looyenga and Rev. Spronk regarding our critique of evolutionary science (*SB*, July 2014). Dr. Looyenga argues: “the problem with atheistic science is *not* its failure at logic, but rather its failure to comport with the truths of Scripture.”

I suggest the problem with atheistic science is *both* its failure at logic *and* its failure to comport with Scripture. Atheistic science, in common with empirical science as a whole, has for its fundamental premise that true

knowledge of the physical world is based on sense experience. The fundamental axiom of empirical science is that truth (or true knowledge) about the world can be gained through sense experience (our observation of the physical world). But this claim is self-contradictory in that the claim itself cannot be verified by sense experience! And anything self-contradictory is by definition illogical.

Philip Rainey
Grand Rapids, Michigan

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (30)

The Disastrous Consequences of Postmillennialism (3) (concluded)

Introduction

The preceding article in this series demonstrated that postmillennialism is guilty of explaining the biblical signs of the end of all things as applicable only to the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. The signs and their reference are past. The signs do not signify, for postmillennialists, the second coming of Jesus in the future and its nearness.

The reason for this preterist (that is, “past”) explanation of the biblical signs in Matthew 24 and other places in Scripture is that the biblical signs portend the increase of lawlessness, the building of the kingdom of Antichrist, and the persecution of the saints. All of these coming events contradict the fundamental postmillennial doctrine of the building in the near future of a carnal kingdom of the saints, in which Christians will enjoy earthly peace and prosperity and themselves wield total earthly power over all the world and its inhabitants.

Ignoring the Signs

Therefore, postmillennialists ignore the signs of the nearness of the coming of Jesus Christ. They ignore the signs in the world of the nations: the increase of lawlessness; the forming of the world kingdom of the beast, which deifies Man and is virulently and violently anti-God and anti-Christ; the coming together of the nations.

They ignore the signs in the nominal churches: the great falling away from the truth of the gospel, as forecast in II Thessalonians 2:3 and in II Timothy 4:1-5, including in our day the almost unbelievable acceptance of the heresy of the federal vision (justification by works) by the most conservative churches in the tradition of the Reformation of the sixteenth century, and the uniting of the false churches in the service of an antichristian, this-worldly kingdom of Man (Rev. 13:11-18).

With their dismissal of the biblical signs of the end—theologically, their “preterism”—postmillennial churches and theologians empty the mind of the churches and their members of the truth of the second coming of Jesus Christ and its nearness. It no longer lives in the consciousness of the churches and their members that Jesus is coming quickly. What is coming for the postmillennial churches, rather, is the earthly victory and dominion of the saints—the “golden [earthly] age.” Jesus’ coming is at least one thousand years in the future, to hear the postmillennial theologians perhaps as much as hundreds of thousands of years in the future. There is, therefore, absolutely no need to think of, and expect, the soon coming of Christ. Indeed, it is folly, even doctrinal error, to do so.

Unprepared for the Second Coming

Thus, postmillennialism renders churches and their members totally unprepared for Christ’s coming. They are unprepared for the second advent itself. Coming, as He will, without a preceding millennium of the carnal dominion of the saints, Jesus Christ will take the postmil-

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Previous article in this series: May 15, 2014, p. 373.

lennialists completely by surprise. The day of the Lord will come “as a thief in the night” (I Thess. 5:2), not only for the ungodly, but also for the postmillennialists. And this is both contrary to the will of God for His chosen, believing people, and spiritually and eternally dangerous for those thus taken by surprise (see I Thess. 5:1-11).

Postmillennialism also renders churches and their members unprepared for the Christ’s coming *in and by the signs of the end*. Christ does not come only finally on the world’s last day, when the heavens are rolled back and He descends in the body with all the holy angels (I Thess. 4:15-18; II Thess. 1:7-10). He is coming constantly throughout the present age. He comes in and by the signs of the end, that not only show the fact and nearness of His actual appearance in the clouds on the world’s last day, but that also make all things ready for His actual, bodily advent.

Jesus Christ *comes!* He *is coming* at present! He is *on the way* by means of the unfolding in history of the signs!

Seeing and taking to heart the signs, we amillennialists are made ready for the coming of Christ.

Rejecting the signs, postmillennialists are unprepared for Christ’s coming. They are unprepared with regard to the great apostasy that now is taking place in the Christian churches, in fulfillment of the biblical prophecy of II Thessalonians 2:3. What enormous, appalling departure from the Christian faith is evident in the churches at the beginning of the twenty-first century! There is denial of the historicity of Genesis 1-3, *in conservative churches*, by the explanation of the days of creation as enormous periods of time, in order to accommodate the lie of evolution. There is denial of particular, sovereign grace in salvation by the teaching of a universal, resistible grace in the popular theory of the “well-meant offer.” The “well-meant offer” makes the salvation of the sinner his own accomplishment.

There is today also the open denial of justification by faith alone, and with this truth the denial of all the doctrines of grace as confessed in the Canons of Dordt, by the heresy of the federal vision. And the source and nature of this rejection of the gospel of the Reformation are significant. The federal vision arises from and develops the false doctrine of a conditional covenant with all baptized children. According to this heresy, the salvation of children in the covenant depends, not upon the electing

grace of God, but upon the acts of the children fulfilling conditions.

As for fundamental Christian holiness of life, divorce for reasons other than sexual unfaithfulness and subsequent remarriage are as accepted by, and common in, the supposedly conservative Protestant churches as in the liberal churches. Indeed, divorce and remarriage are as common, and accepted—and *vehemently defended*—in the churches as in the world of the openly ungodly.

In the midst of this apostasy, often affecting their own churches, postmillennialists go on painting the rosy picture of the world’s becoming increasingly Christian and law-abiding. The only “error” they warn against is that of denying postmillennialism. As demonstrated in previous articles in this series, their fiercest polemics are against “pessimistic” amillennialism. They live in a dream world—the dream world of the coming “golden age” of the carnal victory of the church in this world.

There is great danger in living in a dream world. The danger is that the postmillennialists are unprepared for the real world of a great falling away, of increasing lawlessness, and of the rising of the kingdom of Antichrist. Such unpreparedness is fatal.

Unprepared for the Church’s Last Battle

Rejecting the signs of the end, postmillennialists are unprepared for the all-out assault on the kingdom of Christ—the church—by Antichrist. This assault is now underway. Satan is presently being loosed from his prison to launch his last and greatest attack on the camp of the saints and the beloved city (Rev. 20:7-9). The world kingdom of the beast is forming (Rev. 13; Rev. 17). In the nations of the West, formerly influenced by and outwardly favorable towards Christianity, are frightening developments of godlessness and lawlessness, for instance, the murder of the unborn and partially born for the sake of the material ease of the parents. The states officially legitimize these murders, by decree of the supreme courts and with the backing of the executive branch of governments, thus manifesting themselves as monstrous creatures of the devil, inasmuch as states that are the servants of God wield the sword to “execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Rom. 13:4). Execution of wrath upon evildoers is certainly not the explanation of the state’s murder of the unborn or partially born infant.

Another significant development of godlessness and lawlessness is the sanction of sodomy and lesbianism by the governments and societies of the West. These perversions, sins against *nature* (Rom. 1:26, 27), which always betoken, not only the end of a society, but also God's awful working among an apostate people to shame and destroy them (Rom. 1:18-32), the nations of the West now approve, indeed sanctify, as a form of honorable marriage.

At the same time as these developments of wickedness in its grossest forms, there is, not in Communist countries, not in the nations dominated by Islam, but in the formerly Christian nations of the West the increase of sheer, palpable hatred for the Christian faith and its defenders. The president of the United States evinces this hatred. The media are saturated with this hatred. The learned, popular teachers of the masses in the United States and in the other nations of the West spew forth this hatred.¹

Perceptively, Peter Hitchens announces the West's rage against God: "The rage against God is loose and is preparing to strip the remaining altars when it is strong enough." His analysis of this rage is also correct:

God is the leftists' [understand by "leftists" educated unbelievers in the West who hate the one true and living God—the God of Christianity, despise God's righteousness, and plot the extermination of the true church—DJE] chief rival.... If God is not dethroned and his laws not revoked, he represents an important rival to the despot's authority, living in millions of hearts. If he cannot be driven out of hearts, total control by the state is impossible.²

The postmillennialists apparently see nothing of these

¹ See Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2007).

² Peter Hitchens, *The Rage against God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 214, 134, 211.

As this lawlessness intensifies in the formerly Christian West, the postmillennialists continue to babble of the progressive coming of the earthly kingdom of the saints...

godless, antichristian, lawless developments. As this lawlessness intensifies in the formerly Christian West, the postmillennialists continue to babble of the progressive coming of the earthly kingdom of the saints, and to criticize the amillennialists, who warn of these dreadful developments, as unchristian "pessimists." The rise to power of the beast out of the sea, helped by the beast out of the earth, will take the postmillennialists completely by surprise (Rev. 13). To be taken by surprise, by *Anti-christ*, is a very weak, if not fatal,

spiritual position, especially when one has his heart set on the rising in history of an earthly kingdom of Christ.

As Satan gathers Gog and Magog to battle against the church, and as the heathen hordes compass the camp of the saints, in AD 2014, postmillennialism not only gives no warning, but also assures the camp of the saints that it is in the process of conquering the whole world of nations (see Rev. 20:7-9).

Postmillennialism is unprepared for the second coming of Christ. A more serious charge against professing Christians, to say nothing of would-be *teachers* of Christians, it would be hard to find.

Reformed amillennialism, in contrast, teaches the reality, *today*, of the signs of the end. It exposes the current lawlessness (Matt. 24:12, where the AV's "iniquity" translates the Greek "*teen anomian*," 'the lawlessness'). It warns against the antichristian spirit of the present age, the "mystery of iniquity [that] doth already work" (II Thess. 2:7). It forewarns the people of God of the coming of the personal Antichrist, "whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thess. 2:9, 10). It puts the saints on their guard with regard to the forming in the near future of a world kingdom of Satan, membership in which is damning (Rev. 13). In starkest contrast with postmillennialism's fancy of a coming earthly rule

of the saints, which would involve the saints' punishing the ungodly, amillennialism warns believers and their children of coming persecution for those who will not take the mark of the beast (Rev. 13:15-17).

Postmillennialism is not an innocuous teaching in the Christian church. It is not a tolerable eschatology in the Reformed churches. It is not mere theory about the end, devoid of practical, hurtful consequences. Postmillennialism has disastrous consequences for the churches and professing believers who embrace the error. It strips them of the biblical hope: the second coming of Christ.

It also renders its adherents unprepared for the second coming of Jesus Christ. They do not see the coming of Christ in and by means of the signs at the present time. Dreaming of the establishment of a glorious earthly kingdom of Christ in the near future, they are deliberately blind to the rearing up of the world kingdom of Antichrist, with all its allurements and threats for believers and their children.


How this weakens the Christian life of the postmillennialists, and is detrimental to the covenant of God, is illustrated, concretely, by the refusal of professing Presbyterians in Scotland to establish good Christian schools for their children. Knowing full well the godlessness of the

state schools, and their threat to the faith, obedience, and salvation of the children of the godly, these Presbyterians decline to establish Christian schools, on the ground that soon will come the millennium, solving the problem of the antichristian education of their children.

Postmillennialism does not, and cannot, admonish its people, "Watch therefore" with regard to the coming of the Lord Jesus (Matt. 24:42), "be ye also ready" with regard to the coming of the Son of man (Matt. 24:44). The result is that postmillennialists are neither watchful nor ready. They admit this lack of watchfulness and readiness. They exhort this lack of watchfulness and readiness.

This is damning for a doctrine of the last things.

It is also fatal to the spiritual welfare of professing Reformed and Presbyterian Christians who heed the doctrine.

The Reformed faith of Holy Scripture and the creeds rejects and condemns postmillennialism as false doctrine—false doctrine specifically with regard both to the Christian hope and to the Christian calling to be watchful and ready for the return of Jesus Christ. "We expect that great day with a most ardent desire.... 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus' (Rev. 22:20)."³ 

³ Belgic Confession, Art. 37.

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA

"To Teach Them War"

An Introduction:

Warfare—A Clear Scriptural Imperative (2)

Unavoidable is the theme of, and even imperative, for warfare that runs throughout all of Scripture and therefore also our Psalter, our Three Forms of Unity, and the doctrinal terminology taught us in catechism class. If the Bible were a book I had never

seen, and upon my first encounter with it I read it through from beginning to end and thereafter someone asked me what were some things that struck me about that book, whether I had saving faith or not, I would surely conclude, among other things, "Warfare. Much warfare. So much warfare." What do individual believers and true churches do? They war a good warfare. What does God in Scripture require of us? Warfare. We read this. We sing this. We confess this. We teach and learn this in catechism. As

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was emphasized last time, we must be *conscious* of this. The Christian life is one of *warfare*.

Our Bible

Old Testament Israel was a militant nation. After leaving Egypt and being constituted as a nation at Sinai, she was immediately attacked by Amalek in the wilderness. Upon arriving in Canaan under Joshua's leadership, and thereafter if she was faithful, she warred. Her *good* history was one of spying, blasting, blowing, marching, shouting, surrounding, encamping, discomfiting, slaying, slaughtering, avenging, pursuing, hanging, casting down, breaking down, beating down, dispossessing, binding, utterly destroying, cutting, burning, lying in wait, ambushing, tearing, securing, seizing, houghing, spoiling, possessing, driving out, catching, thrusting, subduing, over-throwing, pitching, smiting, chasing, consuming, hurling, drawing, and because the Lord of Hosts was on her side, conquering!

Alas, the son of Jesse became her king, "a mighty valiant man, and a man of war" (I Sam. 16:18), known for his many exploits, from killing a bear and a lion, to felling a giant and slaying his ten thousands. A prefiguration of King Jesus David was, in the establishment of the kingdom of Israel through warfare.

Because Israel's warfare in the old dispensation was typical, we are not surprised to find in the New Testament the reality of and the call to warfare for the church of the new dispensation and her members. Not only as officebearers, but as members of true churches with weapons of warfare that are not carnal but mighty (II Cor. 10:4), our calling is to "abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (I Pet. 2:11); "war a good warfare" (I Tim. 1:18); "fight the good fight" (I Tim. 6:12); "endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ" (II Tim. 2:3); "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3); as those of faith who "quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens" (Heb. 11:34), so that we can say on our deathbed, "I have fought a good fight" (II Tim. 4:7), as we certainly shall, for Jesus said, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33), therefore, "...whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world: and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith" (I John 5:4).

The New Testament begins with Jesus doing battle against the Pharisees and apostate Israel, continues with the apostles warring against the venomously hostile Jews and all manner of Gentile opposition, and concludes with the book of Revelation revealing that the millennium for us who are on earth is anything but perfect peace and rest but rather ongoing hostility with the dragon Satan who in his short time and great wrath assaults us until Jesus returns to take vengeance upon his kingdom of darkness and vanquish it once and for all. Far bigger than any, while at the same time including all of our personal battles with sin, is Jehovah's own war against opposition to His kingdom and covenant, and thus the Bible is from one point of view "The Book of the Wars of Jehovah" (Num. 21:14).

Our Psalter

When we sing the Psalms in our Psalter (a practice worth fighting for) we sing of our life as one of warfare. Representative are these more familiar lines: "...Infant lips Thou dost ordain, wrath and vengeance to restrain, weakest means fulfill Thy will, mighty enemies to still" (Psalter 15.1). "Uplifted on a rock, above my foes around, amid the battle shock, my song shall still resound..." (71.5). "Be thou my helper in the strife, O Lord, my strong defender be, Thy mighty shield protect my life, Thy spear confront the enemy. Amid the conflict, O my Lord, Thy precious promise let me hear, the faithful, reassuring word: I am thy Savior, do not fear" (92.1). "Behold what God has done on earth; His wrath brings desolation, His grace, commanding wars to cease, brings peace to every nation..." (128.3, the tune of which calls to mind the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation"—"Almighty Fortress Is Our God"). "Against us sin has battled hard, for help we look to Thee and pray; Thou our transgressions wilt forgive, yea, Thou wilt take them all away" (166.1). "Christ shall have dominion..." (200.1, the tune of which not only calls to mind "Onward Christian Soldiers" but oftentimes stirs our little ones into a march). "The wicked Thou wilt surely slay, from me let sinners turn away, they speak against the Name divine, I count God's enemies as mine" (383.4). "Blest be the Lord, my rock, my might, my constant helper in the fight, my shield, my righteousness, my strong high tower, my Savior true, who doth my enemies subdue, my shelter in distress" (392.1). What might an

unconverted stranger think should he happen upon one of our school/church programs and hear our children singing such anthems? We sing of war.

Our Three Forms of Unity

When we confess the truth of our Three Forms of Unity, we confess that the Christian life is one of warfare. Because the confessions were penned in days of fierce ecclesiastical warfare for the sake of the truth, they not only set forth the true doctrine but “reject all errors that militate against this doctrine” (to borrow the language of our Formula of Subscription, which when signed by an officebearer indicates his pledge to conduct warfare for the truth’s sake). Thus in the Belgic Confession, for example, we “reject and abhor the error of the Sadducees” (Art. 12), “reject that damnable error of the Epicureans” (Art. 13), and “detest the error of the Anabaptists” (Arts. 27, 36). In the Heidelberg Catechism we call the popish mass “an accursed idolatry” (L.D. 30). In the Canons of Dordt we reject the heresy of the Arminians as the Pelagian error brought again out of hell (Head 2, Rejection of Errors, 3).

Furthermore, in the Belgic Confession we confess “the devils and evil spirits are so depraved that they are enemies of God and every good thing, to the utmost of their power, as murderers, watching to ruin the church and every member thereof, and by their wicked stratagems to destroy all...” (Art. 12).

More significantly, our confessions explicitly define the Christian life as warfare. When asked, “But why art thou called a Christian?” we reply with the Heidelberg Catechism, “Because I am a member of Christ by faith, and thus am partaker of His anointing; that so I may confess His name, and present myself a living sacrifice of thankfulness to Him: and also that with a free and good conscience I may fight against sin and Satan in this life, and afterwards reign with Him eternally over all creatures” (L.D. 12, Q.A. 32). Only that young person who fights sin and Satan may be called a Christian. To demonstrate our gratitude for certain victory, we pray. When we pray, we say, “And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil,” that is, “since we are so weak in ourselves that we cannot stand a moment; and besides this, since our mortal enemies, the devil, the world, and our own flesh, cease not to assault us, do Thou therefore preserve and strengthen us by the power of Thy Holy Spirit, that we

may not be overcome in this spiritual warfare, but constantly and strenuously may resist our foes, till at last we obtain a complete victory” (L.D. 52, Q.A. 127). Warfare! And what according to the Belgic Confession are the “marks of Christians”? They “avoid sin, follow after righteousness, love the true God and their neighbor, neither turn aside to the right or left, and crucify the flesh with the works thereof. But this is not to be understood as if there did not remain in them great infirmities; but they fight against them through the Spirit all the days of their life, continually taking their refuge in the blood, death, passion, and obedience of our Lord Jesus Christ...” (Art. 29).

Our Doctrinal Terminology

When we go to catechism class we learn doctrinal terminology that reflects the truth of the Christian life as one of warfare. Two examples we give. First, the word “antithesis” refers to our spiritual separation from the ungodly world (II Cor. 6:14-18). However, we have not fully grasped the truth of the antithesis if we understand it merely as separation. For, as every catechumen knows, Jehovah of the covenant of grace did not say to the serpent, “I will put separation between thee and the woman....” Jehovah said “enmity!” “I will put enmity.” War was declared. The antithesis is not merely passive separation from but active opposition to the kingdom of darkness. We are not strong enough to engage in mere separation, for the attraction to evil is too strong, as it was for Israel when they tried to live near but apart from the Canaanites instead of routing them. Antithesis means “warfare.”

Second, the term “church militant.” We speak of our deceased loved ones in heaven as members of the “church triumphant,” while we here on earth are members of the “church militant.” There is an identification we do well to ponder in our hearts. Church *militant*.

The scriptural imperative to war is unavoidable, appearing in the Psalter, the Three Forms of Unity, and our catechism books. In fact, when we were but babes in arms in one of the front pews of church with the sacramental water still trickling off our crown, the minister, together with the whole congregation, prayed that we would grow up in the Lord Jesus Christ and “manfully fight against and overcome sin, the devil, and his whole dominion” (Form for Baptism). ☞

The Qualifications of the Office of Elder (6)

The Elder's Relationship to His Wife and Children

In our last article we began treating those qualifications of the office of elder that relate to his family life. The elder must be “the husband of one wife” and have “his children in subjection with all gravity” (I Tim. 3:2, 4; Titus 1:6).

In that article we asked whether God requires the elder to be a married man and a father. We concluded that God does permit unmarried men, as well as married men without children, to be elders.

But more must be said about these qualifications. What, positively, do they require?

“The Husband of One Wife”

As we already saw, this phrase can literally be translated “of one woman the man.” The phrase indicates that the relationship of the elder to his wife must be one of sexual purity and of holy and faithful devotion.

The emphasis falls on the word “one.” In Paul’s day, polygamy was common. Some converts from heathendom had more than one wife; others with only one wife had a mistress or two on the side. Is it any different in our society? It is the nature of sinful males to seek many female lovers, both *literally* and in *fantasies*.

The elder may not be such a man.

Positively, the elder must have the high view of marriage that it is a sacred institution of God. In a day in which this holy institution is undermined, the church must speak highly of marriage, and consistories must promote it in accordance with God’s Word. This calling of the consistory is emphasized in Article 70 of our Church Order: “the consistories shall see to it that those who marry, marry in the Lord....”¹ The elder must have a high view of marriage also because he will have to work with married couples who are considering divorce,

or with unmarried people who argue that cohabitation and premarital sex are not sin in God’s eyes. He must be convinced of their error, in order to admonish them regarding it.

(As an aside, but worthy of more than a footnote, it might once have been unthinkable that some in Reformed churches would argue that premarital sex is pleasing to God. But Harry Van Belle’s contribution to the article “Sex, Intimacy, and the Single Person” [*The Banner*, July 2013, <http://www.thebanner.org/features/2013/06/sex-intimacy-and-the-single-person>] destroys any such illusion. Van Belle says: “Whether Christian single people should or should not practice premarital sex is a question that may have been relevant two or three generations ago, but the situation today has changed.” And: “Better criteria for evaluating people’s sexual behavior, I suggest, are maturity and commitment. Whether or not to engage in premarital sex should depend on the strength of the personal maturity of single people and on their level of commitment toward one another.” Also, see Prof. Barry Gritters’ comments in his editorial “The Persistent Sanctioning of Sexual Sins by Reformed Churches,” in the September 1, 2013 issue of the *Standard Bearer*.)

Now do you see why an elder must have a high view of marriage in general?

Furthermore, the elder must have a high regard for his own marriage. He must realize that his marriage vows bind him for life to his lawful wife. He must give evidence that he loves her with a kind, patient, selfless love, patterned after Christ’s love for His church. This means he must be faithful to his wife not only sexually, but also in all other areas—supporting her physically, fi-

¹ *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), p. 400.

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nancially, and emotionally, dwelling with her according to knowledge (that is, knowing her well), and being patient with her in her weaknesses and afflictions.

In the very lives of her elders, to say nothing of their work, the church must see men who stand against the devil's attack on marriage and the family, and who enjoy the blessings of the man described in Psalm 128.

The Elder's Rule of His House

Another qualification is that the elder be "one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity" (I Tim. 3:4). The latter phrase explains the first: he who has his children in subjection with all gravity is one who rules his house well. At the same time, although the text doesn't say it explicitly, the elder must also rule his wife well.

The house-rule of the elder may not be the rule of the iron fist. Some men imagine that the silent obedience of their wife and children testifies that they rule their own house well. In three ways, God indicates in verses 4 and 5 that He does not have in mind this kind of rule.

First, such men do not rule "well," that is beautifully and honorably, because they insist that *their* will be done in their home—regardless of whether their will is reasonable, follows from biblical principles, and is best for the family. The inspired apostle speaks in I Timothy 3:4 of the kind of rule that manifests itself in *serving* those whom one is ruling. The Greek word translated "ruleth" indicates that one is a superintendent, but also that this superintendent is a guardian or protector, one who is ready to care for the weak and give aid to the needy. The elder must not be the kind of man who says, "Be quiet and do as I say; I'm the boss," but one who makes decisions based on what is best for his wife and children, having investigated their needs. Thus he serves them.

Second, the kind of man described above does not rule "well," because he does not promote a happy home. Sometimes men mistake the prompt obedience of their wife and quietness of their children for meek submission, when in fact these reveal their unhappiness and even their fear of the husband and father.

Third, God gives the reason for this qualification in verse 5: how a man rules his house indicates how he will rule in the church of God. God's church needs elders who attend to the needs of God's people, and who seek

to administer Christ's rule, rather than men who seek to impose their own will on the people.

It follows that the house-rule of the elder must be one that promotes peace and harmony in his family life. His children are "in subjection," that is, obedient and submissive. They honor and respect their husband and father (the idea of "with all gravity"); and while their obedience is not perfect, it is willing rather than forced.

The house-rule of the man that indicates that he will rule well in God's church:

- must proceed from the experiential understanding that as he rules his house, so does Christ rule him: not harshly and self-seekingly, but lovingly and gently. His experience of this motivates him to rule others this way.
- will be according to God's Word, with its teachings and law. The elder will require that his wife and children conform to God's will for them, and will promote their obedience for God's glory.
- will manifest gentleness and love, mixed with firmness, when addressing the sins and weaknesses of the members of his household. His goal in addressing the sins and weaknesses of his wife and children will be that they grow in a life of gratitude to God, and enjoyment of covenant fellowship with God.

A man whose house-rule is not this sort should not be considered for the office of elder.

The Elder's Children

I Timothy 3:4 says that the elder's children must be "in subjection." That is, they must be obedient and submissive children. Even so, the point of the verse is not to say what kind of children they must be, but what kind of father they must have. The father must act in such a way as to promote submission.

Titus 1:6 speaks more directly to the kind of children they must be: "having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly."

The meaning is not difficult. "Faithful" children are believing children who are faithful in a life of obedience and gratitude to God. They must not be riotous, giving themselves over with pleasure to the base sins in which the ungodly live. And they must not be unruly—unable to be controlled. The idea is not just that they cannot be controlled physically, but that they refuse to be guided by God's Word.

While the meaning is not difficult, this does give rise to some questions. Why is a man's qualification for office affected by how his children live? And, how bad must a child be before a man cannot be considered qualified?

To answer these questions, we must see again that the children's behavior is *sometimes* an indicator of how their father raised them, and their sins are an occasion to see how he deals with sin in others.

The point of this qualification is not to say that a man who has an unbelieving child is unqualified for office. We recognize that even to believing parents, God at times gives children who cast off the faith of their fathers and are ungodly. When a man has such a child, but has other children who are faithful and godly, the church has evidence that the man has taught his children. And when the man does not ignore or defend the ungodliness of his child, but responds to his child's unbelief and ungodliness according to biblical principles, the church may judge such a man to be qualified for office.

When the unbelief of a child is a result of the parents' noticeable lack of diligence in instructing or raising the child, or when the parents do not condemn the ungodliness of the child, the church is to judge the father unfit for office.


Some Disqualifications Are Temporary

These qualifications for office also underscore the wisdom of not putting in office *for the present* a man who is experiencing some turmoil in his family life. Perhaps the man served well in the past. Perhaps, in time, he will again serve well in the future. But if at the moment he is dealing with an unruly child at home, or if his relationship with his wife is under some obvious stress at the moment, the church does well to pass him by as a potential elder for the time being.

For one thing, the man has enough to deal with in his own personal life. The church will not be helped by giving him more troubles to deal with at the moment.

And, if it comes to the point that the consistory must deal with his home situation or his unruly child, it helps neither the man nor the church to have the man present as an elder at a consistory meeting.

Some men, for reasons known only to God, will never be an elder in the church on earth. Others ought never to be elders because they are unfit, by the standard of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1. Still others are not fit for a time.

With that, we conclude our examination of the elder's relationship to his wife and children. But Scripture also speaks of his relationship to others, those outside his home. To that we turn next. 

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

The Movie *Son of God*

At the time of year called Lent, Reformed believers remember the death of Jesus Christ for their salvation. They do not remember His death legalistically by putting ash on their foreheads or by giving up some favorite pleasure, but by listening to a series of sober sermons that expound the biblical doctrine of the death of Jesus Christ. Nor are the few Sundays before resurrection Sunday and on Good Friday the only times they remember His death, but they remember it whenever the gospel is preached by believing it. Especially they remember the Lord and show His death till He comes by their obedient partaking of the Lord's Supper after carefully examining themselves. "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink

this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26).

Remembering Jesus' death in these ways is very different from the ways in which the false church, in concert with the world, remembers the death of Jesus.

Ten years ago the world released *The Passion of the Christ*, a movie purporting to portray the suffering of Jesus. The film was wildly successful: "with conservative Christian leaders across the nation urging their flocks to turn out, *The Passion of the Christ* brought in \$83 million in its first weekend.... The film went on to take in more than \$611 million worldwide."¹ Conservative Christian leaders and their followers, who turned out in droves, drove the economic success of that movie.

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¹ Todd Cunningham, "Jewish Leader Hopes Son of God Will Be Antidote to the Passion of Christ," Feb. 25, 2014, <http://www.thewrap.com/>.

These Christian leaders are at it again with *Son of God*, a new movie that claims to show the life of Christ. Among those who are promoting the movie is Jim Daley of *Focus on the Family*, and well-known author and minister of Saddleback Church in California, Rick Warren, who hosted a private premier at his church.²

According to *Forbes* the movie took in \$26.4 million its first weekend.³ As of this writing *Son of God* has earned nearly \$58 million, as many flocked to what the producers called a “church-like” experience in the theaters.⁴ Many moviegoers have reviewed *Son of God* for the benefit of their fellow Christians. Many people will be swayed by the hype and by the promotion of this movie as being good for evangelism, such as Jim Daley’s promotion:

Some Christian leaders, including Pastor Rick Warren, are using “theater buyouts” to help draw people to see the film in an attempt to evangelize. Many churches are actively promoting the film, hoping that, like *The Bible* miniseries that preceded it, people will once again be prompted to talk about faith, Jesus Christ and salvation.⁵

This article is not a review of *Son of God*. A review would mean that I watched the movie, which I have not done and will not do because it is sinful. I am analyzing the phenomenon of biblically-based movies and the promotion of them by those who call themselves Christians. *Son of God* is the most prominent recent example. There are others. *Noah*, released on March 28, took in an estimated \$44 million. Those who protested that movie were not flocks of evangelical Christians, but the Muslims.⁶ *Heaven is For Real* was released in April. These movies follow in the footsteps of *The*

Passion of the Christ and other earlier biblically-based movies.

These are the most recent examples of what one movie industry expert calls a lesson for Hollywood that “there is real money to be made target[ing] audiences who aren’t used to being targeted.” It comes down to the dollar! Apostatizing Christianity has lots of them and will spend them on anything, from mugs to movies, that has a tinsel of Christianity attached. Getting dollars from apostatizing Christians has been an ongoing effort of Hollywood and one that another industry reporter feels “they have gotten right” with *Son of God*. To Hollywood, getting it right means that Hollywood has taken the Bible’s message “mainstream.”⁷

It is no easy task to mainstream the Bible’s message, especially not the message of the cross. The apostle Paul says the cross is foolishness to the Greeks, a scandal to the Jews. The Bible teaches that the cross is the condemnation of the world and teaches a God who loves His elect and hates the reprobate. Mainstreaming the message of the cross means removing the cross’s offense, either its folly as the only ground of salvation and thus its exclusiveness, or its condemnation of all the works of man as the basis for salvation.

The producers of *Son of God*, Mark Burnett and Roma Downey, who were both born of Roman Catholic parents (Roma Downey in particular insists that she is a Roman Catholic), made considerable efforts to pull off this mainstreaming of the Bible and were helped by many religious scholars and consultants.

From start to finish, theirs is a much more sensitive effort. Burnett and Downey have done everything Gibson [the producer of *The Passion of the Christ*] failed to do. They consulted with religious scholars. They sought guidance from Catholic, evangelical and Protestant leaders. They reached out to me and others in the Jewish community before production commenced. We engaged in healthy dialogue and conversation and offered some recommendations on their original script. We asked them to incorporate those recommendations, and they have.

In the end, Burnett and Downey did a great deal to show historical perspective and sensitivity. Their film makes it very clear that Jews were occupied by the Romans

² “Signs and Wonders Churches Welcome Son of God to Theaters Nationwide,” February 2014, <http://www.worldmag.com>.

³ Scott Mendelson, “Son of God Earns 26-5m, March 2, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com>.

⁴ www.aintitcool.com/node/66327 and http://www.boxoffice.com/statistics/alltime_numbers/domestic/data/2014.

⁵ Jim Daley, “Son of God Jesus Epic Opens Tomorrow,” archive February 27, 2014, <https://community.focusonthefamily.com>. “The Bible” miniseries is the series that gave rise to the movie, Son of God.

⁶ “Us Islam Film Censorship,” March 8, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com>.

⁷ Scott Mendelson.

in biblical times, that the Romans engaged in crucifixions every single day, and that Jesus was Jewish and loved by the Jews.⁸

This quote is from Abraham Foxman, national director of the Jewish Anti-defamation League, who was pleased with the “sensitive” way in which the producers told the story.

In the producers’ own words:

We worked across denominations and reached out to the Jewish community through national director Abe Foxman at the ADL to make sure that we told this movie sensitively, setting up political and historic context, presenting the story in a way that really just emphasized the love of Jesus, and Mr. Foxman gave us a great endorsement from the ADL.⁹

This mainstreaming, according to the producers, would enable the movie to reach members from many denominations, to introduce the story to legions of kids, and to entertain unbelievers by the “greatest story ever told.”

I suppose not too different from the Roman soldiers who sat down to watch or the crowds that passed by to gawk and to toss a blasphemous jibe in Jesus’ teeth, the world and the false church still make the cross into a spectacle. Legions of so-called Christian leaders and their followers enthusiastically approve of, promote, and attend the spectacle.¹⁰

When Pilate was producing his spectacle, Jesus and the cross brought unity between those who were enemies in the world as they gathered against the Lord and His Christ so that Pontius Pilate and Herod became friends. The world always unites against Christ. Unity was also a big part of the directors’ purpose with this film.

It [*Son of God*] feels like a movement, and we’re also deeply encouraged by what is also happening across denominations; they’re coming together. We’ve had

⁸ Abraham H. Foxman, “Son of God Is the Anti Gibson,” <http://www.huffingtonpost.com>.

⁹ “Son of God: Roma Downey Knew During Bible Ministries We Had Something Spectacular,” February 26, 2014, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com>.

¹⁰ www.aintitcool.com/node/66327. This is the transcript of an interview with the directors of the movie.

endorsements from all the major faith leaders, from all the major churches, and from the Jewish community as well.... The intention of the movie always was about drawing people together.... It’s a message of inclusion.¹¹

Being Roman Catholics, the directors are one with Rome’s dream of one-world religion with herself at the head.

The above are some reasons Reformed Christians may not watch *Son of God*; there are others. The movie is a violation of the second commandment of God’s law that forbids both making an image of God and attempting to worship Him by it. Jesus is God, and to portray Him by means of an actor is to make an image of Jesus. That *Son of God* was produced by two Roman Catholics is perfectly natural. Rome has been and still is an enthusiastic promoter of images as “books to the laity” (Heidelberg Catechism, Lord’s Day 35).

Furthermore, promoting images was part of Rome’s rejection of and assault upon the Word. Being an image made after the imaginations of men, *Son of God* is a deliberate rejection of the Word of God as the revelation of God by which God will have His people taught. The producers promote and their supporters parrot assurances about the fidelity of the movie’s details to the Bible, but the exact opposite is true. In making an image they deliberately reject the Word.

Being an image and designed to bring the gospel, *Son of God* is also a very calculated assault on the Word of the Bible as God intended it to be preached to all nations as the means whereby God Himself brings the Word of the cross to His elect people to save them effectually by it. How shall they hear the saving voice of Jesus Christ “without a preacher”? (Rom. 10:14). The preaching of the truth of the cross of Jesus Christ is also the way—the only way—in which Jesus is *evidently*, that is vividly, portrayed for the believer that he may believe on Him unto salvation. The apostle says, “O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?” (Gal. 3:1). The apostle did that by preaching the truth of Christ, not by showing movies.

¹¹ www.aintitcool.com/node/66327.

Being an image, the movie also teaches lies. Images always teach lies. That was God's condemnation of images in the Old Testament:

What profiteth the graven image that the maker thereof hath graven it; the molten image, and a teacher of lies, that the maker of his work trusteth therein, to make dumb idols?" (Hab. 2:18).

The dumb images taught lies. So does the dumb image the *Son of God*. It teaches the lie that the Son of God may be without consequences the object of entertainment—a spectacle. It teaches the lie that a person may entertain himself with this spectacle. It teaches the lie that the Son of God may be worshiped in that spectacle and by means of it. It teaches the lie that this spectacle may replace the preaching as the means to teach Jesus Christ.

It also teaches the lie of Roman Catholic theology. The producer Downey says about her movie, "You get an opportunity to fall in love with him," which is a popular way to express the classic Roman Catholic doctrine of the natural man by free will choosing Christ.¹² It teaches the false doctrine that Christ, in the words of the producers, "suffered for all of us," Rome's universal atonement. It teaches Rome's lie that the cross can be reproduced by men as Rome does blasphemously in every mass. It teaches that the suffering of the Son of Man can be portrayed as well. *Son of God*, like Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*, wickedly attempts to portray on a screen for the entertainment of millions the suffering of the Son of Man, which was not exclusively physical, or even mainly physical, but was the suffering of all the eternities of wrath that the elect deserved so that Jesus took away wrath for His elect and them only by making satisfaction for sin. That cannot be portrayed. That is to be preached by means of sound doctrine and believed unto salvation.

The Christian leader who promotes it to his flock promotes a lie.

The confessing Christian who watches *Son of Man* joins himself with the world in making the cross a spectacle, supports those lies, and is corrupted by them.

Likewise, that movie will convert no one, but it will be responsible for the perishing of many. Analyzing this phenomenon of Satan's den of iniquity on the West

coast, producing movies from the Bible that it hates, about the Christ that it loathes, movies that are promoted as spiritual and evangelical and that are greedily taken in by millions who call themselves Christians, many of whom will never repent of that sin—what explains that? They reject the preaching of the Word, are bored with sound doctrine, flock to be entertained by a blasphemous movie, take in and believe lies, and suppose in the course of it that they are being worshipful and spiritual? How is that to be accounted for?

The Bible has an answer. As part of the end of all things and the revelation of that Wicked, the Antichrist, there must come a falling away first so that millions go after him and worship him whose "coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thess. 2:9–10). "And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness" (vv. 11, 12). This is the offensive gospel that this movie denies, a gospel of God's sovereignty in salvation. The lack of love for that gospel explains that millions will watch this gospel-denying movie. Furthermore, these deceptive and lying movies are part of the mystery of iniquity working in the world by the power of Satan himself and under the sovereign control of God for the falling away of many. The gullible acceptance of them is the strong delusion that God sends that they should believe those lies in preparation for believing the greatest, which is Antichrist and his kingdom.

Reformed believers, if they were swayed by the hype, must repent. Reformed believers with their eyes wide open to what these movies, including *Son of God*, represent and how they function in the world must "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11).

They will also remember the Lord and believe on Him unto salvation through hearing and believing the preaching of the sound doctrine of the cross of Jesus Christ because they received, graciously and sovereignly, "the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (II Thess. 2:10).



¹² www.aintitcool.com/node/66327.

The Relation of Good Works to Justification

Lord's Day 24

Question 62. But why cannot our good works be the whole or part of our righteousness before God?

Answer. Because that the righteousness which can be approved of before the tribunal of God must be absolutely perfect, and in all respects conformable to the divine law; and also, that our best works in this life are all imperfect and defiled with sin.

Question 63. What! do not our good works merit, which yet God will reward in this and in a future life?

Answer. This reward is not of merit, but of grace.

Question 64. But doth not this doctrine make men careless and profane?

Answer. By no means; for it is impossible that those who are implanted into Christ by a true faith should not bring forth fruits of thankfulness.

In the previous Lord's Day we learned that our righteousness is in Christ alone. The justice of God requires perfection from man, and only Christ's righteousness is perfect. Lord's Day 23 also showed us the relationship of faith to justification, faith being the gift of God by which we receive and rest in Christ's righteousness. We are not righteous because of the worthiness of our faith, and faith is not a substitute for righteousness.

In this Lord's Day we are taught what the relationship of good works is to justification. Good works are essential in the life of every one who is saved, but good works are not the reason for our justification, not even in part.

Lord's Day 24 answers three common objections to the truth of justification by faith alone in Christ alone. Each of these objections is asked from the point of view of our good works.

A Proud Objection

The first objection comes from a person who is rather proud of his achievements and thinks that surely his works deserve some recognition from God. This is not only the objection of false teachers who want to attribute some part of salvation to man, but is often an objection that will come up in our minds too. Perhaps we think that our lives, which are "more holy," distinguish us from

the world of the ungodly and make us more worthy of salvation than others. Or maybe when God brings suffering and pain into our lives we ask, "Why me?" as though we deserve something better.

All false religions teach that man can help to save himself by doing good things. For example, Islam teaches that if you do enough good things, they will outweigh your evil deeds. Only true, biblical Christianity teaches that man cannot save himself, not even in part, by doing good deeds. This teaching has been under constant attack throughout history, and is still being assaulted today by those who teach conditional theology.

There are three reasons our good works cannot be of any help in making us righteous and acceptable with God. The first is that God Himself is perfectly righteous, and so our righteousness, if it is to be accepted by God, must also be "absolutely perfect" and "in all respects conformable to the divine law." And the law is inward, so for a work to be perfect it must be done with perfect love to God and with absolutely no trace of sin in our hearts either towards God or man. It is impossible to find such righteousness among man.

The second reason is that, even though by grace we do do good works, our best works are still "all imperfect and defiled with sin." We sing God's praises, but not always from the heart. We pray, but our minds wander. We ask for forgiveness and the power to overcome a particular sin, and then turn to it again. All our best works are as "filthy rags"

Rev. Kleyn is pastor of Covenant of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Spokane, Washington.

(Is. 64:6). The only person whose works were perfect in God's sight was Jesus Christ, and we can be righteous only by the gracious imputation of His righteousness to us.

The third reason is that good works are the fruit of salvation (sanctification follows justification), and so good works cannot be the reason that God justifies us. If our works were the reason or foundation of our justification, then salvation would be man's work, and man would have reason to boast. But because salvation is all of free grace, all human boasting is excluded (Eph. 2:8-10). Our works only make us more corrupt and defiled, and so to trust in them as a ticket to heaven is absolute folly.

A Second Objection

The second objection comes from the camp of false teachers who want to insist that man is saved, at least in part, by his works. Every heretic has his proof texts, and so the argument is that the Bible says we will be judged according to our works, and that our good works will be rewarded by God with eternal life (Matt. 5:10-12; Rom. 2:6-11; II Cor. 5:10; Rev. 11:17-18). If God rewards our good works, then doesn't that mean that our good works have earned a part of our salvation?

How do we answer this objection?

First, the Bible teaches very clearly that the power to do good works comes from God. We never do a good work by our own strength. Jesus says, "Without me, ye can do nothing" (John 15:5). Paul tells us that "it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). And so our Belgic Confession says in Article 24, "We are beholden to God for the good works that we do, and not He to us." God planned our good works (Eph. 2:10) as the fruit, evidence, and purpose of our salvation (Titus 2:14). If our own good works are not produced by us, then God owes us nothing for them.

Besides, the Bible teaches that if we would live a perfect life without any sin, still when we would come to the end, we would not have earned anything from God. Jesus says to His disciples, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10). God created the birds to sing. Do they earn something by singing? God created fish to live in water; does He owe them a reward for staying in the water? God created man as His friend, to love Him

and to serve Him perfectly; does He owe man anything should he fulfill his created position? No! God is in no way indebted to man.

And yet, God does reward His people for their good works. The reward, then, must be of grace, undeserved and yet freely given. Just as the ability to do the good works is of grace, so the reward is gracious. The rewards are never earned. Our good works are always deficient and insufficient, and yet God rewards them. With his father's help and coloring supplies, a little child colors a picture. It's far from perfect, and yet the father praises the child and rewards him. Similarly, God rewards us, though we are unworthy.

A Careless Christian?

The third objection is again both theological and practical. The theological objection is that the teaching of salvation by grace alone makes it impossible to teach the requirements of the law of God with any weight. The practical objection, which can sometimes arise in our minds as an excuse for sin, is that if salvation is all of grace and I can contribute nothing to it, then it does not really matter at all how I live; I am saved any way, so I can go right along with the world in its sin, satisfying my every sinful pleasure—why do we even bother to talk about good works?


People who argue like this are not Christians, do not understand the gospel, have not personally experienced the work of God's grace in their lives, and are despisers of the requirements of God's Word.

The sinner who is justified is also sanctified. When God saves a sinner, He sets him free not only from the penalty of sin (justification), but also from the power of sin (sanctification). The Bible has as much to say about our sanctification and godly living as it does about our justification and forgiveness.

The experience of salvation—knowing that I personally am justified and forgiven—produces a heart of gratitude and love for God in the sinner. As Christians, we not only see that obedience to God in the life of good works is necessary, but we want to do good works. These are the "fruits of thankfulness."

And further, this argument presents an impossibility. It is impossible that a saved child of God would use free grace as an excuse to sin. It is impossible that a regener-

ated believer not produce works of love to God. It is impossible because we are implanted into Christ. As Paul says in Romans 6:2, "How shall we that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Saved by grace, I am free from the guilt of sin, and my heart swells with thanksgiving and love to my God, and so I love to live to Him! And when I sin, I don't say, "Oh, it doesn't matter, I'm justified." No, then I say, "Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner." 

Questions for Discussion

1. What are the three objections to the truth of justification by faith presented in this Lord's Day?
2. Where do you hear these objections? Do you recognize them also in your own proud and sinful heart?
3. How do you answer each of these objections?
4. What is the attitude of the natural (unsaved) man towards his works? How does this contrast to the attitude of the child of God toward his good works? (See Matt. 7:22 and 25:37.)
5. Is it correct to speak of God "rewarding" us for our good works? How does this reward come? What does this teach us about God, and how is it an incentive to good works?
6. Why does the Bible talk about God judging us according to our works on the Last Day? (II Cor. 5:10)
7. Can a person be saved if he has no good works?
8. How does Romans 6:1-13 help us in the struggle with sin? How, according to verse 12, should we think of ourselves?
9. In light of this lesson, how do you evaluate modern funerals and their extensive eulogies concerning the dead? What should our focus be at the funeral of a believer?

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

With apologies to our Wingham, Ontario PRC, we include this bit of information taken from their church bulletin of April 27. Even though it's about three months old, the news is still interesting enough to include here.

Members of Wingham were invited to a COAH (Come Over and Help is an organization of Reformed men and women committed to spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union) meeting. Cees Brouwer, project director of COAH, and Istvan Visky, pastor of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, shared their experiences regarding the work COAH is able to do with the help of generous donations. Mr. Brouwer, who traveled this spring to Ukraine and the Baltic States, was able to answer questions regarding COAH's activities. Rev. Visky

Mr. Wigger is an elder in the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

lives and works in Romania. He is in charge of continuing education programs for children. He regularly visits the three children's homes supported by COAH and monitors Winter help programs to poor families and elderly care programs. He also monitors the work done amongst the gypsy population.

At a recent congregational meeting, the members of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI approved three significant proposals. The congregation voted to replace most of the lights in their building and parking lot with more efficient LED bulbs. They also voted to give Providence PRC an additional gift of \$20,000 for its building fund. And they approved the purchase of a new organ for their sanctuary. The money to pay for all these expenses came from existing funds in the congregation's building fund and general fund.

If you enjoyed an occasional game of basketball, or if you were in need of a little bodily exercise and were a member of the First PRC in Holland, MI, you were invited to play on

Wednesday nights this summer in their church parking lot. Games started at 7:30, weather permitting.

The camping committee of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited members of the First PRC in Edmonton to join them for their annual Church Camp-out, held this summer at Deer Valley Meadows, near Alix, June 30-July 3.

The members of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI enjoyed their annual Father/son/men/boys camp-out on June 20 and 21.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Holland, MI planned to lead a Bible Study at the Holland Rescue Mission on Monday nights in July and August, with the exception of July 14. Rev. Daniel Holstege will be the primary leader, and the study will focus on passages out of Philipians.

The members of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited their community to join them for three summer speeches and studies on

the important and timely subject of "Raising Children in the Fear of the Lord." The nights for these three speeches were Tuesday, June 24, when Rev. Ronald Van Overloop spoke on "Christian Principles Related to the Training Up of Christian Children." This was followed, D.V., Tuesday, July 22 when Rev. Clayton Spronk spoke on "Raising Children from 0-12 Years," and will be followed, D.V., Tuesday, August 19, with Rev. Garrett Eriks speaking on "Raising the Teenagers." There was also opportunity after each speech for questions and answers.

Sister-Church Activities

On June 18, on behalf of the Contact Committee, Prof. Russell and Carol Dykstra left Michigan for eight weeks of preaching and teaching in the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, since Rev. Andrew Lanning and his family will be coming to the United States for a furlough.

Part of Prof. Dykstra's work in Singapore included speaking four times at the annual Church Camp, held this year at Pulau Desaru Resort on June 23-26. This year's camp had a total of 116 campers in attendance, and

they had opportunity to hear Prof. Dykstra speak on the truth of God's covenant as revealed in the Psalms.

Young Adult Activities

The Young Calvinists hosted a recreational event in Kalamazoo, MI on June 21. Plans called for an afternoon and evening of games in the park, swimming, and dinner together afterwards.

Minister Activities

Rev. James Slopsema preached his farewell sermon as pastor of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI on Sunday evening, June 29 and became emeritus, or retired, effective July 1. Rev. Slopsema served our churches for 40 years, the last 19 at First in Grand Rapids. For that last service on June 29, Rev. Slopsema chose to preach from God's Word found in Acts 20:32, under the theme, "Commending the Church to God." Rev. and Mrs. Slopsema intend to remain as members of First Church in their retirement. As churches we give thanks to Rev. Slopsema for the years of his faithful ministry and service. Thanks be to God for giving us such men of integrity and spiritual conviction. May the Slopsemas know the Lord's continued

blessing in the years ahead.


Seminarian Ryan Barnhill, along with wife, Miranda, and daughter, Mya Joy, began a six-month internship in the Edgerton, MN PRC on July 1, under the supervision of Rev. Doug Kuiper. May that internship be a spiritual benefit to Ryan and to the congregation in Edgerton and serve as a powerful means to prepare Ryan for the gospel ministry.

On July 13, congregations from three of our churches will extend calls to various pastors and one candidate to serve their members as either a pastor or missionary.

First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI will call from a trio of Candidate Joshua Engelsma and Revs. C. Haak and C. Spronk.

Faith PRC in Jenison, MI will call from a trio of Candidate Engelsma and Revs. C. Haak and R. Van Overloop.

The Doon, IA PRC will call from a trio of Candidate J. Engelsma and Revs. G. Eriks and J. Marcus.

Doon will also call a missionary pastor to serve in the Philippines, from a trio of Revs. C. Griess, S. Key, and C. Spronk. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Classis West

■ Classis West is scheduled to convene Wednesday, September 24, 2014, at the Peace PRC, Lansing, IL. All material to be included in the agenda must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than Monday, August 25. Delegates who need lodging or transportation to/from the airport should so inform Peace's clerk, Mr. Barry Warner, by phoning (219) 322-9773, or by emailing elderbtwarner@hotmail.com. An officebearers conference is being planned for Tuesday, September 23; delegates should bear this in mind when making travel plans.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With praise and thankfulness to God, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents, **JOHN and THEA BUITER,**

as they celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 4, 2014. We are thankful for their godly example and instruction and for God's covenant faithfulness in preserving them and guiding them by His grace. We pray that God will continue to keep them in His care and bless their remaining years together.

"Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

✿ Ralph and Cindy VanderVeen
Mike and Corrie VanderVeen
Brad and Paula Kuiper
Brad and Cheri VanderVeen
Brett and Emily VanderVeen
Derek

✿ David Buiter

✿ Randy and Deb Gelderloos
Kevin and Miranda Rowe
Jon and Joy Gelderloos
Josh, Nick

✿ Bob and Karen Ensink
Elliot, Elizabeth

✿ Anne Buiter

11 (+4 more, the Lord willing, later this year) great-grandchildren

Wyoming, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ With deep gratitude and praise to our eternal Father in Jesus Christ, who by His Spirit in binding love establishes, with irresistible power maintains, and in merciful faithfulness fulfills His everlasting covenant of grace, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the marriage of our parents,

HARRY and EVELYN LANGERAK

on August 13, 2014. By the grace of God they have been faithful means by which our sovereign Lord has brought us into His own family as sons and daughters, faithfully instructing and leading us in the truth of God's Word, living as godly and holy witnesses in their marriage and family before an ungodly and wicked world, and humbly giving and showing to us the love, grace, wisdom, peace, and joy of the Spirit. We are thankful to God beyond measure for the earthly gifts and spiritual blessings we received through their love, sacrifice, and dedication to Him, each other, and our family, and pray our Father continue to bless and keep them in His love. "Know therefore that the LORD thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- ✿ Rev. William and Karen Langerak,
Jared and Lisa Langerak,
Charlotte, William
Justin and Jessica Langerak
Katrina, Jason, Dorothy, Stephen
- ✿ Timothy and Brenda Bomers,
Luke, Alexander, Cody, Jesse, Samuel, Roseanna, Josiah, Jonathan
- ✿ Jonathan and Lisa Langerak,
Jonathan, Trevor, Emmet, Titus, Lydia
- ✿ David and Carla Langerak,
Emily, Anna, Sara, Rachel, Michelle, David, Daniel, Reuben
- ✿ Joel and Jori Langerak,
Joel, Jacob, Madeline, Evan, Eli, Eloise, Harry, Sophia
- ✿ James and Sara Geerlings,
James, Levi, Silas, Isaac, Laura, Claire
- ✿ Rev. Nathan and Carrie Langerak,
Sadie, Caleb, Ethan, Noah, Simone
- ✿ Jeremy and Kelly Langerak,
Jeremy, Owen, Ava, Dean, Walter, Theodore, Lillian
- ✿ Everett and Michelle Langerak,
Myron, Martin, Evelyn, Will, Elma,

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Grandville PRC express their sympathy to our fellow officebearer John Pols, his wife, Pat, and their children, John and Becky DeVries, in the death of Pat's mother,

LOIS HOLSTEGE.

May they find comfort in the words of the Shepherd's Psalm, verse 4: "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me..."

Rev. Kenneth Koole, Pres.
David Kregel, Assist. Clerk

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, September 10, 2014 at the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than August 11, 2014.

Jon J. Huiskens, Stated Clerk

Seminary Convocation

■ Seminary Convocation will be held in Grandville PRC on September 17 at 7:30 P.M. Prof. Gritters will speak on "Who Trains the Churches' Preachers?" The seminarians will be introduced as well. You are welcome to join the seminary in this convocation for the new year and to fellowship with professors and students alike.

RFPA Annual meeting

■ The annual meeting of the RFPA will be held on Thursday, September 25, at 7:30 P.M., in Grandville PRC.

Reformed Witness Hour August 2014

Date	Topic	Text
August 3	"The Conversion of Pagan Sailors"	Jonah 1:14-16
August 10	"The Second Time"	Jonah 3:1-4
August 17	"The Wonder of Nineveh's Repentance"	Jonah 3:5-9
August 24	"Conviction for Christian Education"	Ephesians 6:4
August 31	"God's Mercy with Repentant Sinners"	Jonah 3:10