

The Standard Bearer

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The Bribing of the Guard

Now when they were going, behold, some of the watch came into the city, and shewed unto the chief priests all the things that were done.

And when they were assembled with the elders, and had taken counsel, they gave large money unto the soldiers,

Saying, Say ye, His disciples came by night, and stole him away while we slept.

And if this come to the governor's ears, we will persuade him, and secure you.

So they took the money, and did as they were taught: and this saying is commonly reported among the Jews until this day.

Matthew 28:11-15

On the third day after Jesus' crucifixion, several women left Jerusalem to see Jesus' sepulcher. As they proceeded to the sepulcher, two unusual things happened. There was a great earthquake. At the same time an angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone that sealed the entrance to the sepulcher.

The women did not see the angel. But the guards posted to secure the sepulcher did. And they fled in fear.

As the women proceeded to the sepulcher and were told of Jesus' resurrection, these guards returned to the Jewish leaders to tell what had happened. After conferring among themselves, the Jewish leaders bribed the guards to say that Jesus' disciples had stolen His body while they slept. This story spread abroad with the result that many of the Jews believed it, even at the writing of this gospel some 30 years later.

How strong the power of unbelief, in blind men, to the obvious fact of the resurrection!

Thank God for the faith to believe the resurrection of Jesus!



The day after Jesus' crucifixion, the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate requesting a detachment of Roman soldiers to guard Jesus' sepulcher. They had remembered Jesus' words that He would rise again the third day. Jesus had spoken of His resurrection at the first cleansing of the temple: destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again. Although the Jewish leaders had falsified Jesus' words all through His ministry, they knew all along the meaning of what Jesus had said.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

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However, Jesus' own disciples had not understood. Neither had they anticipated Jesus' resurrection, even though Jesus had spoken often to them of His impending death and resurrection.

Sometimes the ungodly understand God's Word better than does the church.

This only demonstrates that the unbelief is not a matter of ignorance but of sin.

The Jewish leaders were very uneasy. They had claimed the crucifixion of Jesus as a great victory. Nevertheless, they sensed that this victory was hollow. There were the three hours of darkness that had covered the land in the middle of the day while Jesus was on the cross. There was the violent earthquake that took place just as Jesus died. The veil of the temple had also been torn from the top to the bottom.

So the Jewish leaders approached Pilate. They put Jesus in the worst possible light. Jesus, they said, had been a deceiver, and they were afraid, now, that His disciples would steal away His body and claim a resurrection. Deep down, however, they feared a resurrection and desired a detachment of soldiers to guard the sepulcher.

How foolish! How can a detail of soldiers prevent Jesus' resurrection?

Pilate consented. Evidently Pilate knew the futility of it all. He gave them their watch and encouraged them to make it as sure as they could.

So the soldiers sealed the sepulcher and set a watch.

The next day, the third day after Jesus' crucifixion, these soldiers returned to the chief priests and elders.

It was a very strange and terrifying story the guards told the chief priests. Early that morning as the earth quaked yet again, an angel descended from heaven and rolled away the stone from the sepulcher. They were paralyzed with fear, so that they shook and became as dead men. Then, having come to their senses, they fled and now were come to report to the chief priests.

The chief priests assembled together with the elders. The chief priests together with the elders formed the Sanhedrin, the highest ruling body of the Jews. As they conferred with each other they concluded that the best course of action would be to bribe the soldiers. This they did.

They gave them large (literally, enough) money to change their story. The soldiers must not tell the people

what actually happened but must report that Jesus' disciples came by night and stole away His body while they slept. The chief priests also promised protection should the matter come before the governor.

The soldiers took the money and did as they were told.



Obviously the Jewish leaders did not want the truth of the resurrection known.

There are several points here.

First, the report of the soldiers made it very clear that Jesus had risen from the grave. They spoke of the earthquake and the angel descending to open the sepulcher. This only confirmed the deepest fears of the Jewish leaders that Jesus' word concerning His resurrection had just taken place. Notice that the leaders did not question the truthfulness of the soldiers' report or doubt the fact of the resurrection. Had they doubted the report of the soldiers, they would not have bribed them to fabricate a different story. In fact, they never bothered to check the sepulcher to see whether Jesus' body was missing. On the basis of the soldiers' report, they took for granted that Jesus' body was gone and that He had risen.

Second, without some credible cover-up, the fact that Jesus was raised would become generally known. There was the empty grave that soon would be well known to all. And then there were these soldiers that had been posted to keep the sepulcher. They would be called into question as to the empty grave. To save themselves they would blurt out what they had seen, confirming what the empty grave suggested. Concealing the fact of the resurrection therefore required a cover-up.

Third, the leaders did not want the fact of the resurrection known. Jesus' resurrection was devastating for them. It verified all the claims that Jesus had made about Himself, that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. Furthermore, it condemned the leaders who led the people to demand Jesus' crucifixion. And finally it would turn the hearts of the people away from their leaders to believe on Jesus.

This only serves to point us to the great significance of the resurrection. What the Jewish leaders sensed at this point concerning the significance of Jesus' resurrection is verified by the rest of the Scriptures and much more besides. Jesus, indeed, is the Christ, the Son of the living God, as He had claimed. Fifty days later, on Pentecost,

as the Holy Spirit was poured out on the 120 disciples, Peter not only spoke about Jesus' death and resurrection to the crowd that had gathered in amazement, but he also rebuked them: "let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36).

But there is more, something that even the Jewish leaders did not understand.

Jesus' resurrection is the seal of God's approval on His death. Jesus died on the cross to atone for the sins of God's elect church. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead is God's seal upon Jesus' death, that He did in fact pay the price of sin and obtain a great salvation for the church.

Jesus' resurrection also means that Jesus lives as our Savior. He lives to bring to us the salvation He has earned for us at the cross. We enjoy that salvation now through the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts, and we will enjoy it fully in the day of His return when He raises us from the grave.



The outcome of the bribing of the guard was that many believed the message that the guards were paid to bring. Thirty years later this saying was still commonly reported among the Jews.

This is quite remarkable, especially in light of two things.

First, there is the fact that the story of the guards was absurd. Think about it. It was not just one guard who fell asleep at his post, but, according to this story, an entire company of soldiers fell asleep. Not very credible. Besides, had they all fallen asleep, how could the disciples steal away the body without awakening at least a few of the soldiers? And had the soldiers been sound asleep while the disciples stole the body, how could they know what had happened while they slept?

The second fact that makes it quite remarkable that the Jews believed the report of the soldiers is the fact that there was clear evidence of Jesus' resurrection. Jesus appeared to His disciples ten times. And there was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost with three unusual signs. Peter indicated in a sermon to the amazed crowd that this was from the risen Christ. Then there were the miracles that Jesus' followers did in His name.

Finally, the disciples preached the gospel of the risen Lord even though this caused them much persecution and even martyrdom.

Why, then, the widespread acceptance of the preposterous story of the guards?

Unbelief!!

Unbelief is a horrible thing. Unbelief leads one to reject obvious reality. God has clearly revealed Himself to man. He has revealed Himself to all men in nature. He has revealed Himself more clearly in Scripture. In Scripture He has revealed all that we need to know about Him and the salvation He graciously provides in Jesus Christ. Those controlled by unbelief deny what God has so clearly revealed about Himself. This moves the unbeliever to concoct the most absurd theories to explain away obvious reality.

This power of unbelief was operating among the Jews with respect to the resurrection. Due to their unbelief they did not want Jesus. He spoke of things that unbelief always rejects. A heavenly kingdom rather than an earthly kingdom. God's perfections and man's sin. God's sovereignty and man's inability. All this led them to reject Jesus and, stirred up by their leaders, to crucify Him. But neither, then, did they want Jesus' resurrection. A resurrection would only verify the truth of Jesus' teachings. And so, in unbelief, they blinded themselves to obvious reality and believed the report of the guards.


The same thing is happening to this day. There are several absurd theories that are widely held even today to explain away the resurrection. Jesus never died on the cross but simply went into a coma and then came to in the grave, claiming a resurrection. This is known as the swoon theory. And there is the hallucination theory. Jesus' disciples never did see Him after His death. His disciples only imagined that they saw Him. And, yes, the explanation that the guards were bribed to tell about the empty grave is widely believed to this day. The empty grave is explained as the deceptive work of His disciples, who stole His body away and claimed a resurrection. This is the falsehood theory.

Why all these theories? Scripture reports the resurrection very convincingly and gives several infallible proofs of the resurrection. Yet unbelief compels fallen man to deny and foolishly explain away the resurrection.

By the power of the gospel of the resurrection, however, many do believe.

As many as are ordained to eternal life believe.

By that faith they embrace the resurrection of Christ and therefore also the atoning nature of His death.

In that faith they know the forgiveness of all their sins in Christ's death. They enjoy a new life in Jesus' resurrection. And they have a certain hope of eternal life in the day of Jesus' return. 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

The Reformed Witness Hour: Still Proclaiming the Truth of God's Sovereignty

As all regular readers of the *Standard Bearer* know, this Reformed magazine is an independent publication. It is not the official magazine of the Protestant Reformed Churches, although closely associated with them, and it is an unashamed defender of the truth that is, by God's grace, still maintained by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

A similar (though not identical) kind of relationship exists between the Protestant Reformed Churches and the Reformed Witness Hour. The Reformed Witness Hour (RWH) is a program broadcast weekly on over twenty-one radio stations in the USA and Canada. It is also heard weekly in Northern Ireland and in the Philippines. The RWH is in its seventy-third year of broadcasting. The message of the RWH is also unashamedly Protestant Reformed—the sovereignty of God in all things.

The RWH recently held a rally after an evening worship service in First PRC in Grand Rapids. The

hour plus program was informative and uplifting. If you have opportunity to attend such a rally in the future, do attend. You will not be disappointed.

The history of the RWH is fascinating. It began as the "Protestant Reformed Radio Hour" in 1941. The Young Men's Society of First PRC sponsored the project. They printed fliers and placed advertisements in the local Grand Rapids newspaper. In the *Standard Bearer* there was little notice given. However, the "News From Our Churches" in the October 15, 1941 issue devoted a fair amount of space to the new program. It begins:

I am sure that you agree with me when I make the statement that it is good news for every Reformed thinker that the Rev. H. Hoeksema now speaks over the radio, and promised to do so, D. V., for a period of 39 weeks. Remember the time—every Sunday afternoon from 4:15 until 5:00, over station WLAV, 1340 on your dial. This radio hour is sponsored by the Young Men's

"The supreme and, in a sense, the only task of the Church is to preach the Word of God. But if there is a Word of God to be proclaimed by the Church, it must needs be a Word which God Himself speaks, and which He speaks concerning Himself. And if God speaks concerning Himself, the basic and all-pervading note of that speech must inevitably be: I am God! Unless the Church proclaims this truth in all its implications, in all its purity and without compromise, she cannot preach, she has nothing to say. Unless she proclaims this truth, not as one of the tenets of her faith but as the truth of all truths, not occasionally but always, she forfeits the right and lacks the power to say anything at all about man, the world, Christ, salvation, life and death, sin and grace. We hope to make this the theme of our radio broadcasts, whatever may be the particular subject of discussion, whether we speak of Him directly or of man, of Christ and salvation, of the Church and the world, of sin and grace, of life and death. God is God!"

Rev. Hoeksema,
Radio message, October 12, 1941.

Society of the First Protestant Reformed Church.

Although he originally committed to only 39 weeks, Rev. Hoeksema would serve as the speaker for some twenty-three years! On the first broadcast (October 12, 1941), Rev. Hoeksema gave a powerful message entitled “God is God.” (This message can be found in *Knowing God and Man*, published by the Reformed Free Publishing Association, pp. 3-12.) A specially assembled radio choir and the Men’s Chorus from First PRC provided music.

The excitement caught on in the Protestant Reformed Churches also in the West. In the March 1, 1942 *SB*, the “News From Our Western Churches” reported on a similar use of radio west of the Mississippi:

Also here, it will soon be possible for one to listen to a Protestant Reformed Radio Hour. It will be sponsored by the Western League of Protestant Reformed Young People’s Societies, over KSOO, the 5000 watt station at Sioux Falls, South Dakota. Sixteen young people selected from the various societies will provide for the music and local ministers will do the speaking. The broadcasts will be given from 4:15-4:45 on Sunday afternoons throughout the months of April and May. They will be given by transcription since this proves to be more economical. All the programs can be recorded at home at less cost than the travelling expenses would be if all those participating in the program were to travel to Sioux Falls for each broadcast. And this also makes it possible for the minister that takes part in a broadcast

to preach for his congregation that same afternoon, which otherwise could not possibly be done.

The Protestant Reformed Radio Hour became the Reformed Witness Hour in 1942. In 1945, First PRC took the oversight of the program. At that time a Radio Committee was formed to oversee the broadcast, which it still does. Representatives of the consistory of First also serve on the committee.

When a radio station was founded in Grand Rapids that was devoted to Christian programming (WFUR), the RWH switched to the new station. Initially WFUR came to the church for live broadcasts. Later a direct feed to the station was set up for broadcasting.

The RWH was devoted to proclaiming the truth far and wide. The committee often worked hand in hand with the PRC mission program. With the influx of Dutch immigrants to Canada after World War II, a special Dutch version of the RWH was produced, with Rev. Gerrit Vos as the speaker. Broadcast only in Canada, it lasted from the late 1940s through the early 1950s. At one time the RWH was also sent out via shortwave radio to various places in the world.

A number of things are worthy of note in this history. The first is that the Young Men’s Society and the Young People’s Societies were the sponsors of what became the RWH. The *youth* in the churches—late teens and early twenties—were energetic for the cause of broadcasting the Reformed faith to the world. These were youth, I have to believe, who were from families still in their

first love. They came out of homes where the truth was discussed, and they took part in society life that included debates and discussion on the Reformed faith. These youth wanted the world, also the Reformed church world, to hear the gospel of sovereign, particular grace set forth antithetically.

These youth were only barely coming out of the depression. If they worked for minimum wage, they earned 30¢ an hour. They did not have automobiles, extra spending money, or loads of time. They worked long hours, perhaps also studying in college. Many of the young men faced the real possibility of being drafted into the military—war loomed large. But they had enthusiasm for, expended their energies toward, and contributed financially to broadcasting the truth on the radio.

Second, it is interesting that they wanted to use the *radio*. Radio was just coming into its own in America. The technology for radios in the home was available from the 1920s, but few Americans had money for a radio through the depression years. By 1941, the price for a radio had come down to around \$20, and in the northern states (like Michigan), the percentage of homes with a radio was well over 50%. The primary use of radio in that day was news and entertainment. Yet, they, Rev. Hoeksema and many members of the PRC, were convinced that they ought to use this increasingly popular medium to proclaim the truth given to them. (The Christian Reformed Church, much larger, had begun

to transmit the Back to God Hour only two years earlier.) The youth and Rev. Hoeksema were not hesitant to use this new means to send forth the gospel.

The use of modern technology is crucial for the RWH. Things have changed much in that regard. Just twenty years ago, a pastor outside of Grand Rapids who agreed to record a few messages for the RWH would be required to record them in a local radio station, and then send the cassette tapes by mail to Grand Rapids. In those days radio stations complained of the poor quality of the RWH recordings. Today, the messages are recorded on MP3 players, sent electronically to the Radio Committee, combined with music and announcements, and made available to radio stations by download from the “cloud.”

Third, the seventy-two-year history of the RWH conflicts with the common caricature of the Protestant Reformed Churches that they have little interest in missions. Clearly there was a zeal for this work in 1941. For over 72 years the Protestant Reformed Churches have been privileged to send out the gospel over the radio waves. And although the Radio Committee and First Protestant Reformed Church have “run” the program all this time, the Protestant Reformed Churches have used the RWH to broadcast into areas where the mission committees are working, or hope to generate interest in the Reformed faith.

In that connection, the *radio broadcasts* of the RWH might well be the least part of getting the mes-

sage out. The radio messages are printed and mailed upon request. And all the programs are available for downloading on the Internet. People search for and download messages by the thousands each month. From where? You might be surprised. Some of the larger numbers are from Singapore, Russia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, the Netherlands, and there are many more countries. Some download radio messages in oppressive communist countries, others in Muslim-controlled areas of the world.

As you can see, this is exciting work! Through the RWH the Word goes to many places not readily accessible by missionaries. The RWH is casting the bread upon the waters (Eccl. 11:1). In the Lord’s good time, it will be found.

Fourth, the intent of the RWH is to proclaim the same truth as that proclaimed in the initial message of Rev. Hoeksema—God is God. Looking at the list of the latest messages on the RWH website, I see such titles as “Alpha and Omega,” “By Faith Looking for a City,” and “God’s Everlasting Glory.” Some are more practical, but all the messages are exegetical, expositions of a verse or passage of the Bible. And this is crucial for the RWH. The unflinching determination of the Radio Committee must ever be to deliver that same message. Not man, not his plans or purposes or feelings, but God is to be proclaimed. The sovereign power of God in all things, including salvation, must be set forth over against the sinfulness and helplessness of

man. If the RWH fails to do that, it has no purpose and no reason to exist.

However, in these evil days, such a message will not be long tolerated. Man grows increasingly bold in his defiance of God and His standards. The Reformed witness must go forth clearly and boldly. Such a work is worthy of our financial support, our prayers, and our labors.

And just a word about financial support. The RWH depends almost entirely on contributions—church collections and other gifts. The Radio Committee runs a tight ship financially, the labors of the committee are all volunteer, and still it is not unusual for the committee to be operating in the red. I urge you to consider this worthy cause and give generously.

It is my hope and prayer that God will stir up young men and women to assist in this work. I know there are many—very many— young men and women in the PRC who have a zeal for the Reformed faith that God has entrusted to their churches and thus to them. The witness of the RWH can expand if the Radio Committee membership swells to include many more members, especially younger members with time, energy, and new ideas. More innovation, new opportunities, more hearers. Who knows what the Lord has in store for us in the end of the ages? It remains for us to continue the work begun by the Young Men’s Society over 72 years ago, faithfully sounding forth the gospel by every means available. ☺

[See next page for station-listings.](#)

Reformed Witness Hour

Station Listings

Station	Location	Frequency	Time/day
KARI	Blaine, WA	550AM	8:00 P.M./Sunday
KCWN	Pella, IA	99.9FM	3:30 P.M./Sunday
KDCR	Sioux Center, IA	88.5FM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KGDN	Tri-Cities Walla Walla, OR	101.3FM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KLOH	Pipestone, MN	1050AM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
KLTT	Denver, CO	670AM	1:30 P.M./Sunday
KPRO	Riverside, CA	1570AM	11:30 A.M./Sunday
KSPO	Spokane, WA	106.5FM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTAC	Moses Lake, WA	93.9FM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTBI	Wenatchee/Moses Lake, WA	810AM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
KTRW	Spokane, WA	630AM	9:30 A.M./Sunday
KYAK	Yakima, WA	930AM	5:00 P.M./Sunday
WFDL	Fond Du Lac, WI	930AM	6:30 P.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI	102.9FM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
WFUR	Grand Rapids, MI	1570AM	4:00 P.M./Sunday
WORD	Pittsburgh, PA	101.5FM	10:00 A.M./Sunday
WPGF	Carlisle, PA	91.3FM	8:00 A.M./Sunday
HOPE Radio			
	Nassau & West Suffolk County	101.5FM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	West/Central Suffolk County	94.5FM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central Suffolk County	104.5FM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central/East Suffolk County	96.5FM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central/East Suffolk County	96.9FM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
	Central/East Suffolk County	107.1FM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
UK			
GOSPEL	Northern Ireland	846AM	8:30 A.M./Sunday
Philippines			
DYSB	Philippines	1197AM	6:30 P.M./Sunday
Canada			
CKNX	Wingham, ON	920 AM	7:00 A.M./Sunday

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (7)

What the Bible Says about the Bible: The Testimony of the Old Testament

Introduction

A recent post on the Young Calvinists blog informed readers of the depths to which our godless society and the apostate church have sunk in their depravity. At the

same time the post demonstrates the extent to which God's Word is contradicted, corrupted, twisted, and thoroughly distorted by one of the most powerful self-interest groups of our day: homosexuals and lesbians.

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

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2014, p. 222.

We have grown up in homes where God's word is treated with reverence and respect. The Bible is received as God's revelation to us His people.... Not everyone, how-

ever, holds the Scriptures in such high regard. A pro-gay translation of the Bible called the Queen James version recently came off the presses. This version has removed all negative references to homosexuality in order comfortably to adapt the word of God to people engaged in a homosexual lifestyle without bothering their consciences with the fact that they are sinning....¹

“What is this world coming to?” was my first thought, while shaking my head vigorously as I finished reading the rest of the blog entry. The fact is that we Christians know what this world is coming to. The same Scriptures that are being denied and subverted tell us what this world is coming to. It is not improving as a common-grace Christianizing of society and its institutions moves forward conquering and to conquer. Rather, an ungodly world that is outside of God’s grace develops in iniquity more and more until the very foundations—the foundations of marriage, home, family, church, and society as prescribed by the will of God—are overturned and the Man of Sin comes into his own. Along the way the beauty of holiness is converted—or rather perverted—into the ugliness of the grossest unholiness. And always appeal is made to the Scriptures in defense of such unholiness! Evil is called good, and those living in disobedience to God’s commandments are left at ease in Zion. Just as the devil once tempted our Lord to sin by quoting Scripture—Scripture out of context, Scripture misquoted, Scripture misapplied—so is Scripture appealed to in our day in order to justify what in reality the Scriptures condemn.

We are, in our current series of articles, busy establishing what the Bible says about itself. We have examined key passages of Scripture that teach the Bible’s divine inspiration, infallibility, and authority. We have looked at the two classic New Testament passages on inspiration: II Timothy 3:15-17 and II Peter 1:19-21. And we have taken note of two other significant passages that contribute to Scripture’s self-authentication. The first is Jesus’ word in John 10:35 that “the Scripture cannot be broken.” And the second is Paul’s word in Romans 3:2, where the apostle speaks of Scripture as “the oracles of God.”

¹ Kevin Rau, “The Gay Bible, The Young Calvinists Blog, entry posted March 11, 2014, <http://youngcalvinists.org/2014/03/11/the-gay-bible/> (accessed March 11, 2014).

I want now to turn to the Old Testament Scriptures in order to discern what the Old Testament teaches about itself. I want to examine the Old Testament according to the arrangement of the books in the Hebrew Bible. In Christian Bibles of all languages, the Old Testament consists of thirty-nine books. These same thirty-nine books are also found in the Hebrew Scriptures, although they are numbered differently and placed in a different order. Both by the Jews of the Old Testament and by Christians in the New Testament, these books and these books alone are revered as the very Word of God.

The Hebrew Bible is sometimes referred to as the “Tanak.” Tanak is an acronym made up of the first letter of the three traditional subdivisions of the Hebrew Old Testament: the law (Torah), the prophets (Nevi’im), and the writings (Kethuvim). Jesus and the apostles recognized this threefold division of the Old Testament canon. To the disciples after His resurrection Jesus said, “These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses [the Torah, what we often refer to as the Pentateuch], and in the prophets [Nevi’im], and in the psalms [the writings, Kethuvim], concerning me” (Luke 24:44). Frequently the Old Testament is referred to by means of a twofold division: “the law and the prophets,” or, “Moses and the prophets.” (Cf. Matt. 5:17; 7:12; 11:13; 22:40; Luke 16:16, 29, 31; 20:42; Acts 1:20; 3:21, 22; 7:35, 37; 8:28; 26:22, 27; 28:23; Rom. 1:2; 3:21; 10:5; etc.)² What is the testimony of the Old Testament concerning itself? The answer to that question is that, without reservation or qualification, the Old Testament considers itself to be the very Word of God.

The Five Books of Moses

We begin our examination of the Old Testament’s

² One of the reasons on account of which Moses appeared with Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration was that together they represented the whole Old Testament: the law and the prophets. Together the law and the prophets pointed ahead prophetically to Christ and His saving work on the cross. The other reason was that Moses and Elijah were in heaven not only in their souls, but also in their bodies, Elijah being translated before he died and Moses raised up by God after he died. After His resurrection and ascension, Christ would also be bodily in heaven, as He is now. Their appearance on the Mount of Transfiguration had as its purpose encouragement for Christ as He faced the cross.

testimony concerning itself with the first five books of Moses, also called the law (Torah) or Pentateuch. The fact that these books are called “the law” implies that they are to be regarded as the Word of God. For the law is the law *of God*. Not only is the moral law (the Ten Commandments, found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5 of the Pentateuch) the law of God. Nor is the law made up only of the civil and ceremonial laws. But the five books of Moses together—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy—are the law of God. That designation of the Pentateuch, found both in the Old and in the New Testament, bears testimony to the truth that the Old Testament Scriptures are the Word of God.

The human writer of the first five books of the Old Testament was Moses. He is recognized in both the Old Testament and the New Testament as the human writer of these books. Passages in the Pentateuch itself include Exodus 17:14: “And the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua”; Leviticus 26:46: “These are the statutes and the judgments and laws, which the Lord made between him and the children of Israel in Mount Sinai by the hand of Moses”; and Deuteronomy 31:24-26: “And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished.” There are passages elsewhere in the Old Testament that recognize Moses as the human writer of the first five books. In Joshua 8:31 we read: “...as Moses the servant of the Lord commanded the children of Israel, as it is written in the book of the law of Moses.” And in II Chronicles 35:6 the children of Israel are exhorted to “do according to the word of the Lord by the hand of Moses.” Besides the passages in the Pentateuch and in other parts of the Old Testament, the New Testament confirms that Moses was the human writer of the Pentateuch. Jesus says in Mark 7:10: “For Moses said, Honour thy father and thy mother; and, Whoso curseth father or mother, let him die the death.” The apostle Paul says in Romans 10:5: “For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them” (a quotation of Leviticus 18:5).

Moses the Prophet

Clearly, the Bible teaches that Moses wrote the first five books of the Bible. At the same time, the Bible

teaches that Moses was a prophet, in fact that Moses occupied a unique place among all the prophets of the Old Testament, as Exodus 33:11 makes plain: “And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend.” As a prophet, Moses was uniquely a type of Christ, as God Himself made plain in His word to Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18: “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him.” At the same time, this passage makes plain what a prophet was. A prophet was one who received the Word of God immediately from God. Usually that reception of the Word of God took the form of a vision or dream, or of God speaking directly to the prophet. Having received the Word of God, a prophet was one who in turn spoke to God’s people the Word of God that he had received.

That Moses was a prophet has the most profound implication for the books of the Bible that he wrote. The implication is that what he wrote he received from God, directly from God. God made His Word known to Moses, and Moses in turn made known to God’s people what God had revealed to him. Thus what he made known to the people, what he made known to them in his capacity of prophet, what he made known to them in his writings, was the very Word of God. Through him, God spoke His Word to His people, fulfilling His promise to Moses: “And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man’s mouth? Or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord? Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say” (Ex. 4:11, 12). God “made known his ways unto Moses,” and through Moses “his acts unto the children of Israel,” according to the psalmist in Psalm 103:7.

“The Lord Said Unto Moses”

Over and over throughout the Pentateuch, we encounter the formula: “The Lord said unto Moses,” or “the Lord spake unto Moses,” or “Moses told the people all the words of the Lord.” Many chapters begin “Then [or And] the Lord said unto Moses....” The majority of chapters in the book of Exodus begin this way: 6:1; 7:1; 8:1; 9:1; 10:1; 11:1; 12:1; 13:1; 14:1; 20:1; 20:22 (which introduces the section that ends with the last verse of chapter 23); 24:1; 25:1 (which introduces the section

containing the plans for the tabernacle, the priestly garments, and the sacrifices); and the last chapter of the book, chapter 40, verse 1: “And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying...”

The book of Leviticus picks up where the book of Exodus leaves off: “And the Lord called unto Moses, and spake unto him out of the tabernacle of the congregation, saying...” (Lev. 1:1). And the book of Numbers picks up where the book of Leviticus leaves off: “And the Lord spake unto Moses in the wilderness of Sinai, in the tabernacle of the congregation, on the first day of the second month, in the second year after they were come out of the land of Egypt, saying...” (Num. 1:1). After the introductory chapters of the book, Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:1 and 2: “Now therefore hearken, O Israel, unto the statutes and unto the judgments, which I teach you, for to do them, that ye may live, and go in and possess the land which the Lord God of your fathers giveth you. Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.” Not only did Moses write down the Word of God, but he was conscious of the fact that what he wrote was the very Word of God.

Israel’s Reverence for the Law of Moses

The reverence that Israel had for the law of Moses as the law of God is evident from a number of things. That reverence was indicated by the fact that a copy of the law was placed in the sanctuary, in the ark of the covenant. For this reason, the ark was sometimes called “the ark of the testimony.” “Take this book of the law, and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee” (Deut. 31:26. Confer also Ex. 25:22; 38:21; 40:20, 21; Deut. 31:9; Josh. 24:25-28; I Sam. 10:25). This explains why later, under certain good kings of Judah, a copy of the law was found in the temple. There was always a copy of the law stored in the temple, although it was often, for long periods of time under the rule of wicked kings, forgotten.


A second indication of Israel’s reverence for Moses’ law as the law of God comes out in the fact that every seven years, in the year of release, the law was to be read before the gathered congregation: “And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the so-

lemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles, when all Israel is come to appear before the Lord thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law” (Deut. 31:10-12).

And yet another indication of Israel’s reverence for Moses’ law as the law of God was that every new king was to write out his own copy of the law, that it might be with him and that he might read it all the days of his life. This requirement was laid down in Deuteronomy 17:18 and 19: “And it shall be, when he sitteth upon the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write him a copy of this law in a book out of that which is before the priests the Levites: and it shall be with him, and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes, to do them.”

And finally, that Israel was to reverence the law of Moses as the law of God is plain from the prohibition—reminiscent of the prohibition with which the Scriptures end in Revelation 22:18 and 19—of Deuteronomy 4:2: “Ye shall not add unto the word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish ought from it, that ye may keep the commandments of the Lord your God which I command you.”

Clearly, it is the testimony of the Pentateuch (the Torah, the law) that it is the Word of God. This is how the Jews of the Old Testament regarded the Torah. This is the view that the Christian church has always had of the five books of Moses. From the account of the creation of all things recorded in the opening chapters of Genesis to the bondage and exodus of Israel, to all the Old Testament laws, to the history of the wilderness wanderings—the “church in the wilderness” (Acts 7:38)—it is all God’s Word, Holy Scripture. As sacred Scripture, it is inspired by God, infallible, and therefore authoritative.

Next time we want to look at Old Testament prophecy and its testimony to the truth that it too is the Word of God. 

Shame

Shame is a form of suffering. Shame is essentially the painful feeling, in one's soul, of disgrace, embarrassment, disappointment, anxiety, and confusion. And there are many causes. Although we usually associate shame only with guilt, Scripture does not. As with all suffering, shame certainly does have its ultimate source in sin—without sin there would be no shame. But, biblically, one can suffer shame for many more reasons than guilt over sin or foolish deeds.

All shame is basically due to humiliation—one's lowly state or condition, especially when compared to any honor and glory had before, expected in the future, or that others enjoy. Thus in his suffering the psalmist cried, How long will the wicked turn my glory into shame? (Ps. 4:2), and prayed, Let them be ashamed and confounded who rejoice in my hurt (Ps. 35:26). And shame is a very painful thing. Most of us would much rather endure bodily pain than the pain of reproach, ridicule, consternation, and rejection.

Poverty brings shame (I Cor. 11:22). Lacking the power, honor, and influence that riches bring, the poor are scorned, oppressed, or must secure food by the humiliation of begging or scavenging dunghills (Ps. 113:7). Public nakedness brings shame because it exposes poverty, weakness, foolishness, or lust (Gen. 2:25; Rev. 3:18). Slavery or imprisonment is shameful due to loss of freedom and subjection to others (Jer. 22:22)—one reason Paul told believers not to be ashamed of bonds, either of Caesar or Christ (II Tim. 1:8). And for all the above reasons, defeat at the hands of the enemy is especially shameful (Is. 20:4), and explains why we often feel shame when others sin against us or do violence to us or our property.

Sin is shameful because it reveals foolishness and powerlessness over our flesh. But in Scripture, idolatry brings most shame. First, because idols always allow or promote particularly shameful deeds of excess, forni-

cation, and uncleanness—as at Mt. Sinai (Ex. 32:25). Second, because idolaters suffer the shame of having all hope and expectation in their idols dashed (Is. 42:17). Third, because God always punishes idolatry with defeat, which shamefully exposes the idol as a fraud and the idolater as wicked (Jer. 6:15). Because the wages of sin is death, death is the greatest shame, and brings the greatest degree of suffering from humiliation, disappointment, disgrace, reproach, and consternation. Death is the ultimate defeat, and by the Almighty. Death impoverishes us, strips us bare of all glory, dignity and gifts, possessions, riches, and life, to go naked into the grave. Hell is the place of shame (Dan. 12:2), the smoking refuse heap where the poor find nothing, dead are burned, idols heaped, and idolaters are without hope (Ezek. 32:24).

What good news Christ came in a state of humiliation, turning His own glory into shame (Ps. 4:2)! The suffering of His impoverished birth was shame. The suffering He endured of innumerable reproaches was shame (Ps. 69:19). The bitterness of His death was its shame (L.S. Form). The inexpressible anguish, pains, terrors, and hellish agonies into which He was plunged all His life was shame (L.D. 16). And despising the shame, especially of being rejected, publicly reproached, stripped naked, imprisoned, and defeated on the cross, He endured (Heb. 12:2).

What benefits for us! First, He delivers us from suffering the shame we deserve. Wherefore, He is not ashamed to call us brothers (Heb. 2:11) or to be called our God (Heb. 11:16). Second, there is no shame for sin we need suffer. He that trusts in the Lord shall never be ashamed (Ps. 31:1). Our hope “maketh not ashamed” (Rom. 5:5). Thirdly, we may expect to suffer shame for trusting a “shameful” Christ. Therefore, if any suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed of the gospel of Christ but glorify God, for it is the power of God unto salvation (I Pet. 4:16; Rom. 1:16). And whoever is ashamed of Him, the Son of man shall be ashamed of when He comes into His glory (Luke 9:26). So, “abide in him; that when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming” (I John 2:28). ☺

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Can Religious Freedom Be Restored?

In past articles, we have looked at the trend in the law relating to society's ever increasing acceptance of sins such as homosexuality. The law has changed from the point that homosexuality was illegal, to the point that homosexuals are a protected class. Individuals who refuse to provide goods or services to homosexuals on the basis of conscience may open themselves up to legal actions. The government also increasingly makes requirements that might conflict with the religious beliefs of citizens. In the past, lawmakers who were concerned about government imposition upon religion passed legislation aimed at protecting the freedom of religion. These laws are called Religious Freedom Restoration Acts (RFRA's). An amendment to such a piece of legislation recently passed by the legislature in Arizona created a national media firestorm. We will look at the issues surrounding this legislation, the opposition to it, and the implication for the church.

Although RFRA's have gained attention in the news only recently, many have been around for some time. The federal government passed the federal Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993, with unanimous support in the House of Representatives and near unanimous support in the Senate.¹ Previously, cases had held that the government could not burden religion unless there was a compelling government interest.² A trend developed in United States Supreme Court cases that allowed the government to enact laws that only incidentally burdened a person's exercise of religion as long as the law generally applied to all citizens. The RFRA was enacted to reverse that trend and return to the position that a government is required to demonstrate a compelling government interest in any legislation that interferes with or burdens one's exercise of sincerely held religious beliefs.

A subsequent ruling by the United States Supreme

¹ Pub. L. No. 103-141, 107 Stat. 1488 (November 16, 1993); 42 U.S.C. §2000bb et seq.

² *Sherbert v. Verner*, 374 U.S. 398 (1963).

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Court held that RFRA was unconstitutional when applied to state and local governments, and that the federal government did not have the authority to make laws that restrict local governments in this context.³ However, the federal RFRA still applies to actions taken by the federal government itself. In the past, the public has paid little attention to the federal RFRA, as the federal cases affected by RFRA have been primarily cases dealing with the exercise of religion by Native American churches. In past articles under this rubric, we have discussed these cases and the fact that RFRA could have more significance for believers in the future as changes in the law start to affect traditional Christianity.⁴ This has proven to be the case, as demonstrated by the current litigation pending before the United States Supreme Court involving the Affordable Care Act. In that case, Hobby Lobby and other businesses are challenging the federal mandate under the Affordable Care Act that requires them to provide contraception for employees, including abortive contraception.⁵ Lord willing, we will discuss that case in greater detail in a later article, after the Supreme Court issues its decision.

Eighteen states have passed their own version of RFRA. Many of these statutes follow the same principle as the federal RFRA, and require state and local governments to have a compelling government purpose for any actions or legislation that restrict individual citizens' free exercise of sincerely held religious beliefs. Although the federal RFRA was declared unconstitutional as it purported to apply to state and local governments, this ruling does not apply to the state RFRA's, since they are imposed upon the state governments by the states themselves, instead of by the federal government. Many of these RFRA statutes have been around for years, but because they have not been the basis for any high profile court rulings, they have not garnered much attention.

³ *City of Boerne v. Flores*, 521 U.S. 507 (1997).

⁴ Brian Van Engen, "How Far Does Freedom of Religion Extend?" *Standard Bearer*, Volume 84, Number 5 (2007).

⁵ *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, 723 F.3d 1114 (10th Cir. 2013).

The general apathy towards state RFRA's changed recently when the Arizona legislature passed an amendment to its RFRA. Arizona had adopted an RFRA nearly fifteen years ago, but recently a bill was proposed that basically sought to clear up two questions that had arisen under other RFRA's. The first question is a question raised in the *Hobby Lobby* case, which is whether a person operating a business can assert RFRA protection when a law requires them to violate their religious principles in their business. The second question is whether RFRA protects a person if another private citizen brings a legal action, based on state law, demanding that they violate their religious beliefs. Several cases have made the news in recent years that illustrate the issue raised in this second question. In one, a photographer was sued for refusing to take wedding photos of a same-sex couple. In another, a baker who refused to bake a wedding cake for a homosexual couple was sued. In these cases, the claim is generally that state or local law prohibits discrimination against homosexuals, and that the business owner should be forced to provide goods or services to the same-sex couple or be penalized. The amendment to Arizona's RFRA would have ensured that the answer to both questions was affirmative.

The Arizona amendment passed the legislature, but the bill was widely portrayed in the national media as simply allowing business owners to discriminate against gays.⁶ In response to the media's portrayal, groups began to boycott the state, and the National Football League even threatened to cancel its plans to hold the Super Bowl in Arizona next year. The bill was ultimately vetoed by Governor Jan Brewer due to the immense public pressure. Since the backlash in Arizona, similar RFRA legislation in other states has been put on hold.

In light of the outcry against the Arizona RFRA amendment, we will look at what the bill actually did, in contrast to the way it was portrayed by its opponents. The first observation we can make is that Arizona had an RFRA in place for nearly fifteen years prior to the amendment. The amendment was designed simply to clarify that its protections extended to citizens acting in their capacity as business owners, and that they also extended to citizens who were sued by other private citizens.

The other interesting observation about what the Arizona bill did not do is that it did not say that a person claiming RFRA protection would win a legal battle. RFRA

⁶ Fernanda Santos, "Arizona Governor Vetoes Bill on Refusal of Service to Gays," *New York Times*, Feb. 26, 2014 at A1.

simply requires the balancing between religious beliefs and the government's interest in enforcing its laws. If a person discriminated against a gay person, that person would first have to demonstrate that the discrimination was due to a sincerely held religious belief. The court would then weigh whether there was a substantial burden on that person's exercise of religious belief. The court might say that there is not substantial burden on a grocer who has to sell groceries to a gay person because the person's sexual orientation is not evident from his grocery buying. On the other hand, a photographer might be excused from photographing a gay wedding because his presence there could be construed as condoning a wedding to which he is opposed.

The fact that this legislation was ultimately vetoed and similar bills in other states were tabled, all due to inaccurate portrayals in the media, is troubling. The portrayals of the effect of this legislation were so erroneous that a group of eleven law professors wrote to Governor Brewer, urging her not to veto the bill, and stating that the bill had been "egregiously misrepresented."⁷ These professors noted that the bill simply clarified the Arizona RFRA, and that much of the Arizona RFRA was copied verbatim from the federal RFRA. The irrational hostility towards this bill underscores the growing hostility of the world toward the biblically-based beliefs of the church.

Why would opponents expend so much energy opposing a bill that merely clarifies a statute that has been on the books for nearly fifteen years? Even some in the homosexual community have noted the reaction to the bill. Political commentator Tammy Bruce, who is homosexual herself, described the veto of the Arizona bill as "alarming." The following excerpts are from her explanation of the reason for the opposition's reaction:

Having been a liberal "community organizer" in my past, I immediately recognized the strategy being employed. This is an effort to condition the public into automatically equating faith with bigotry.

...

Horribly, the gay civil rights movement has morphed into a Gay Gestapo. Its ranks will now do the punishing of those who dare to be different or dissent from the approved leftist dogma.

...


⁷ John McCormack, "Top Law Professors: Arizona Religious Freedom Bill has Been 'Egregiously Misrepresented.'" *The Weekly Standard*, February 26, 2014.

Why would the Gay Gestapo suddenly need to convince everyone that any act of faith must be viewed suspiciously as discrimination and “hate?” Forcing a bakery, Hobby Lobby, Chick-fil-A or a photographer to either violate their religious beliefs or be destroyed is simply a test run. The real target is the church and temple. If the left can convince our society to force people of faith to violate their sacraments in the name of “equality,” why would we allow that to stop at the church door?⁸

Scripture tells us that Ms. Bruce is correct in this regard, that the church is the ultimate target and that the world will eventually silence the church, the “two witnesses” described in Revelation 11. They will be successful when they are able to convince the courts that the government has a compelling state interest in preventing our churches from preaching against sins such as homosexuality. Our schools will be even more susceptible, because the First Amendment Freedom of Religion applies to churches more clearly than to schools.

⁸ Tammy Bruce, “Why the Veto of Arizona’s Religious Freedom Bill is Alarming,” *Washington Times*, Feb. 28, 2014.

In the meantime, we can expect cases under the state and federal RFRA to become more common. The upcoming decision from the Supreme Court in the *Hobby Lobby* case may clarify some issues at the federal level. Since the federal RFRA does not apply to state and local governments, the Supreme Court’s decision won’t directly affect state cases, but state courts may tend to follow the Supreme Court’s lead.

In summary, the legal discussion in the United States has shifted so that the question is no longer whether homosexuals can marry or individuals can use abortive contraception. Instead, the question is whether Christians can be forced to participate in gay weddings as photographers or bakers, and whether Christian business owners can be forced to buy abortive contraceptives for their employees. We have gone from twenty years ago when the federal RFRA was passed nearly unanimously and signed into effect by a Democratic President, to a point that people are driven to a frenzy by its provisions. We can take comfort in the fact that all this unfolds as we were told it would in Scripture, and only according to the will of our heavenly Father. 

Giving Our Sons and Daughters in Marriage— Our Covenantal Responsibility (2)

Since I wrote the first article on the above mentioned subject, my wife and I have read again through the book of Ezra for our family devotions. We were impressed especially by chapters 9 and 10, in which Ezra speaks of the serious crisis that occurred among the returned exiles when it was reported that many of God’s covenant people had committed the sin of giving their covenant sons and daughters in marriage to the heathen. Ezra grieves concerning this, saying: “For

they have taken of their daughters for themselves, and for their sons: so that the holy seed have mingled themselves with the people of the lands, yea, the hand of the princes and the rulers hath been chief in this trespass. And when I heard this thing, I rent my garment and my mantle, and plucked off the hair of my head and of my beard, and sat down astonished” (Ezra 9: 2, 3. See also verse 12 of the same chapter). When this was reported, there was mourning and weeping among the people. “Now when Ezra had prayed, and when he had confessed, weeping and casting himself down before the house of God, there assembled unto him out of Israel a very great congregation of men and women and children, for the people wept

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sore” (Ezra 10:1). What a reaction to something of such grave concern in Israel!

In nominally Christian America there would not be very many that would marry those who were heathen as in Ezra’s day. There are, however, in America, many who live like practical atheists (as though there is no God at all and no law of God to guide their lives), even though they profess to be Christians. These could hardly make good covenant partners for our sons and daughters.

In my last article I stated that parents have the covenantal obligation to supervise carefully the dating and courting of their young people. Our covenant young people are greatly in need of guidance, wisdom, and encouragement from their parents in this area of their lives. Our covenant young people should be thankful for such godly concern and should not consider this concern to be a wrongful invasion of their private lives. They must not imagine that already in their youth they are so mature, so independent, that they are not in need of good and wise counsel from their godly parents.

As Reformed believers we know the biblical requirement for all of Christian life is that we must always put God first. Everything in our life should be guided by the principles of the Word of God. The Bible gives clear and strong principles for Christian marriage. Our young people must be warned not to make boyfriends and girlfriends idols in their lives who might draw their hearts away from the Lord and lead them to violate very important godly principles of life.

As God’s covenant people we experience the great blessing of having God among us, knowing His truth, and enjoying the great blessing of communion and fellowship with God. We enjoy this blessing only in the way of separation from this ungodly world. For us as parents and for our covenant children, there is hardly a more important area concerning which to heed the call to separation than that of determining whom we fellowship with in marriage. Marriage is the most intimate of all human relationships. Two become one flesh. There can be no real Christian unity in our marriage without unity in the truth.

Our young people must not allow their hearts to be drawn away by members of the opposite sex because they see a strikingly beautiful girl in the world or a strong and handsome young man, or a man who could provide a life

of worldly success and pleasure and glory. Worldly people can have exciting and interesting personalities. They can be very nice and very friendly. Maybe they even seem to be more friendly than fellow young people in church. But as long as they are of the world, they tempt us to make friends with the world. The friendship of the world is enmity against God.

Romantic attraction stirs up deep feelings of great excitement, which feelings are mysterious and powerful. These can serve for the good to lead a Christian young man and woman together and for finally establishing a happy Christian home. Strong feelings toward the opposite sex come from an aspect of our makeup that God created in us. But these feelings can also lead someone to being strongly attracted to the wrong person, to a partner who does not have the spiritual qualifications for living with a spouse in a godly marriage in God’s covenant of friendship.

Covenant parents should be strong enough at times to tell their young people that they ought not to be dating certain persons because it is obviously friendship and fellowship with the world. The warnings concerning this must be given by parents to their covenant young people very early. These warnings must not be turned away by the argument so often heard from young people, “Don’t worry, we are just friends, this is nothing serious, there is really nothing between us.”

In the discussion under consideration in this article, the question often comes up whether our Protestant Reformed young people should be dating persons outside of our churches. I realize there is an area of Christian liberty regarding the rules we set for our children for their life in the world. We certainly should teach our children that differences with members from other churches are long standing and run very deep. These differences are often much more serious than young people at their age might imagine. Romantic attractions can easily cloud one’s thinking, so that he justifies his actions and attachments. Differences in what churches teach and maintain or do not teach and maintain will inevitably seriously affect how we live in marriage. Not only are there often serious doctrinal differences, but there also are many very important differences in practical Christian living. Ignoring the reality and seriousness of these when earnestly seeking

to find a partner with whom we can live in marriage could in later life have serious consequences. This neglect could become the occasion later in marriage of great strife and anguish when one who is now our partner for life refuses to walk in the same godly ways we have been taught in our covenant homes.

Our young people should be strongly encouraged to seek dating partners from the young people in our own churches and through fellowship and friendships promoted with them. Why do our young people still have to look in other places, even when they live in areas of several of our churches, and in the midst of many young people of like-minded faith? Even when this is not the case, there are, for most of our young people, many opportunities for fellowship with young people from our other churches.

God has created men and women with strong and mysterious desires to find a life partner. When properly directed, these feelings are beautiful ones that God Himself created in us and that can lead us to the great joy and blessing of marriage to a person whom God has brought to us in our lives.

Some of the things that I say in this article are obvious. They are well known. Yet they can easily be ignored if our young people are not careful. One of these things is that mere outward beauty and attractiveness do not in themselves translate into the potential of a dating partner making a good husband and wife or person one will be able to live together with in a real and blessed covenant home. Parents need to urge young people to be sober-minded and self-controlled through the grace of God in their hearts, in this important matter in their lives, in the hope and prayer that by such godly behavior they will find the right life partner and not be led astray.

Who would deny that the modern-day world in which we live is becoming more and more liberal regarding sexual activity among its young people? This is the development of the ungodly culture of the world foretold so many times in Scripture. The media of this world constantly portray life between men and women in such a way that the most exciting event that is expected to take place between two people of the opposite sex is the passionate embrace of sexual love. Very soon after the two have met and come to know each other, even in the most casual way, this should happen. The media glories

in this great wickedness and tempts our covenant young people to go along with all the excitement without regard to where it will all lead.

God's Word clearly teaches that sexual love, as God ordained it, is to be reserved for the holy bond of marriage. Sexual love is a joy and blessing for marriage. It is a beautiful expression of the intimacy of love between husband and wife. What is intended by God to be the intimacy of love in marriage is corrupted and perverted by wicked men when it is used outside of marriage. Because of the power of this sin even for those who are Christians, we all need to be on guard against its powerful temptations. We all still have a sinful nature, with which there is great potential for corrupting that which God has made beautiful. Covenant young people should not underestimate the power of this sin, or overestimate their own power to be able to resist these temptations, and thus spoil a beautiful, godly relationship between a young man and a young woman. Premarital relationships have great psychological and spiritual consequences for the relationship between a man and woman. They change the character of the whole relationship. They often lead them into patterns of life that grow more and more sinful. Furthermore, when such sinful activity is engaged in before marriage, this often makes it even more difficult to be faithful to one's own God-given spouse through the years of married life together.

Daily instruction has to be given. Our own marriage is closely observed and experienced by our covenant children. Our marriage must be a great example and pattern for our children to follow in preparing them for strong and lasting Christian marriages in their own lives.

In conclusion, there are many subjects that we can and must discuss with our young people in the years when they are dating. This ought not to be considered a violation of the privacy of our children. This belongs to what, in our modern culture and times, is part of giving our sons and daughters in marriage and guiding them in very important areas of the truth in their lives, and the future of Christian marriage in the church.

What a great joy it is when our covenant young people marry in the Lord and are truly one in the faith! What a blessing this will be, not only for themselves but also for the unity of the broader covenant family in years to come.



Church Extension, Church Reformation, and Domestic Missions (4)

The Form for the Ordination of Missionaries in the Protestant Reformed Churches is employed to ordain missionaries to be sent either to the heathen or to the dispersed. A mission work directed “to the heathen” has become synonymous with foreign mission work. A missionary sent “to the dispersed” labors in our own country or other Christianized lands. From the Form it is clear what is meant by those who are dispersed. They are the scattered (dispersed) sheep of Christ’s pasture. These sheep had ancestors that were faithful members of the church of Christ. But because of the rampant unbelief of society and the apostasy of the church where they were members, these sheep left the church and have been absorbed into the unbelieving society of which they are a part. This is why we can say that a home missionary is sent to the dispersed. At one time many, if not most, in our country had membership in a church. They were more or less faithful members of that church. Now their generations no longer belong to a church, or perhaps their names are on a church roster, but they never darken the doorway of that church.

The preamble of the Constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee refers to them as the “unchurched.” This is a fitting description of the general condition of the dispersed in our day; they have no desire to be a part of the church. This is not an indictment against those few scattered sheep who do believe, yet due to circumstances in their lives find themselves desperately seeking but not finding a church home. But it is self-evident that the vast majority of the unchurched, though they may

have a superficial knowledge of Christianity, are unbelievers. If it were not for this superficial knowledge, and that their forebears at one time belonged to the church, we would call these people heathen, that is, a people who know nothing of salvation in the cross of Jesus Christ. As it is, these dispersed or unchurched people of our land can be likened to the Kingdom of the Ten Tribes of Israel. They have departed so far from the truth of God and His Word that they have become worse than the heathen nations that know not God.

The preamble to the Constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee clearly differentiates between labor among the unchurched and heathen, on the one hand, and the work of church reformation, on the other. We quote one last time the paragraph of the preamble to the constitution that does this. “We believe that this missionary activity includes the work of church extension and church reformation, as well as the task of carrying out the gospel to the unchurched and heathen. However, we are convinced that our present duty lies primarily in the field of church extension and church reformation.” We already noted that the division of labors among the heathen, unchurched, and church reformation is a good one. Domestic Missions includes all three.

But there are two assumptions in this paragraph of the preamble that have limited us in our view of home missions. The first of these assumptions we already addressed in our first article on this subject. It is that church extension and church reformation are one and the same. We need not repeat the reasons these two ought to be separated from each other. The reader need only reread the first article.

The second assumption in the constitution is the idea that “our present duty lies primarily in the field of

Rev. Bruinsma is Eastern Home Missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, stationed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Previous article in this series: March 15, 2014, p. 278.

church extension and church reformation.” In this article we wish to address this assumption. It is true that it was the “present duty” of the Mission Committee in 1942, given the particular circumstances of our churches at that time. Twenty-three years later this “present duty” was still seen to be the most important part of our domestic mission work when the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in 1965 adopted their “New Policy” on mission work.

...historically our labors have in the past been directed chiefly toward the immediate Reformed community, that is, toward those of a historically Reformed position and background—particularly, of course, the Christian Reformed constituency. This was continued, in the main, until the split of 1953, except that for a time efforts were concentrated on the Liberated immigrants.

Your sub-committee believes that this should still be the main goal of our mission efforts, and so recommends. This should not be misunderstood, as though this is our exclusive goal; but it should be understood as our main goal and as the direction in which our efforts should go. (Adopted by Synod 1965, Art. 197, p. 35. The section of the New Policy referred to is found on pp. 113, 114.)

But that word “present” has now followed us through seventy years of existence as churches. Is church reformation still today the primary “present duty” of the Mission Committee and local evangelism? Or can we finally say that, though church reformation remains an important task of domestic missions, the preaching of the gospel to the unchurched is just as urgent as church reformation, if not more so? Is the “present duty” today primarily in the field of church reformation, as the Constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee states, or is it now our primary duty to preach the gospel to the unchurched?

Here are three considerations.

First, we live in a post-modern society. There are few who believe in objective truth. It is an age of tolerance of every sin and heresy under heaven. Toleration and acceptance is the new catchphrase of our land. This attitude reveals itself not simply in the wicked world of unbelief but within Christianity itself. Many Evangelical churches, as well as mainstream Reformed and Presbyterian churches, have been swept away by the swift current of apostasy and have embraced the tolerance of our modern

age. The result of this trend in society and the church is that there is no more knowledge! Churches see no need to instruct their members in the Word of God. People who belong to churches today do not even know simple Bible history, much less Bible doctrine. There is a denial of the objective standard of truth set forth in Scriptures. Among church members there is a famine of the hearing of the Word of God.

It is little wonder that the people of our society stop going to church. The modern church has nothing to offer them anymore, other than social programs and an alternate form of entertainment. Observance of the Lord’s Day is no longer required. Sunday worship is optional, not a necessity. Why belong to a church? Society has become antagonistic toward and critical of the church. What was true of society in Europe in the 1950s is even more true of our society in America today. J. H. Bavinck, in his book *An Introduction to the Science of Missions*, writes on pages 75 and 76,

...In our day there are many around us who certainly had believing forebears but who are so woefully ignorant of the gospel that it is impossible to address them on the basis of the covenant. Such stand in the midst of the stream of our modern Godless culture; they are without religious conviction and regard as fools any who would speak to them of Jesus Christ. The ignorance of the Bible that is abroad today is so great that to preach the gospel one must begin at the very beginning.

This is an accurate description of our present society and nation. There is such horrible ignorance “one must begin at the very beginning.” Because this is true, the predominant work of domestic missions is that of preaching the gospel to the unchurched.

In the second place, we live in a pluralistic society. Pluralism is “that state of society in which members of diverse ethnic, racial, religious, or social groups maintain an autonomous participation in and development of their traditional culture within the confines of a common civilization” (Webster). There has been a constant influx of people from different countries into our land. They carry with them their particular culture and pagan religions. There are large communities in almost every major city that actively practice their pagan religions. Our society has become not only unchurched but also,

in many instances, pagan. The church is able to preach the gospel to the heathen in our very own land. Again, this emphasizes the need to preach the gospel to the unchurched and heathen.

In the third place, we live in an unbelieving society. Robert Putnam and David Campbell, authors of the book *American Grace*, undertook the task of gathering statistics and evaluating them as they pertain to churches and religion in the United States. They write:

Americans overwhelmingly, albeit not universally, identify with a religion. Identity, however, does not necessarily translate into religious activity because not all who identify with a religion frequently attend religious services, or engage in other religious behavior. (p. 8)

Jesus Himself condemns this behavior as unbelief: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 7:21). Putnam and Campbell continue their assessment of religion in America on page 17 of their book.

The third largest “religious” group in the United States [behind that of Evangelicalism and Catholicism—WGB] is actually defined by the absence of a religious affiliation—the “nones.” There are more nones (17 percent) than mainline Protestants (14 percent), a striking fact given that the mainline wing of Protestantism once represented the heart and soul of American religion and society. Significantly, the ranks of the nones have been growing, while the mainline Protestants’ share of the population has been shrinking.

Consider the evidence. The largest denomination in the United States is Catholicism—an apostate church. The second largest is the Evangelical churches, whose membership consists, for the most part, of those who see no or little need to gather in worship or engage in religious behavior. The third largest is the “nones.” Mainline Protestantism is rapidly shrinking. The only conclusion we can draw from this is that we live in an unbelieving society.

This is why the church’s (present) duty is to call those lost in sin and unbelief to faith and repentance. When the church concentrates her attention predominantly on church reformation, as we have done in the past, she

labors among a very small segment of our society. Then, to limit our mission work even more, “our labors have in the past been directed chiefly toward the immediate Reformed community, that is, toward those of a historically Reformed position and background—particularly, of course, the Christian Reformed constituency” (1965 Policy). The people among whom we labored were not only *believers*, but *Reformed* believers. It is true that the Protestant Reformed Churches have more recently labored among groups of people or with churches that were not of Reformed persuasion at the start. But usually the people with whom we have worked had a certain level of knowledge in Reformed doctrine and the confessions. To focus our domestic mission work predominantly on church reformation today, given the situation of our present society, severely limits the work we are called to do.

The time has come—is long overdue—that we become much more involved in preaching the gospel to the unchurched. This was the foresight of those men who originally drafted the Constitution of the Mission Committee: “We look forward to the time that the way will be opened for us to labor among the heathen, both here and abroad, and among the dispersed” (1942 Acts of Synod, Appendage V, pp. XXIV, XXV). Well, the way is now opened. Without neglecting church reformation we ought now to press forward into the work God is plainly revealing to us.

This does not mean that all of a sudden there will be an explosion in church membership and in the growth of our denomination. We live in the last days. The church that does not cave in to the pressure of compromise is not suddenly going to bring large flocks of dispersed sheep into the fold. Preaching the gospel to the unchurched will not necessarily bring glowing results. But if we move beyond the limitation expressed in the Preamble to the current Domestic Mission Committee Constitution, then the focus of our witness to this world will be where it properly belongs. It will be much broader. This will, in turn, affect the methods of our witness. Instead of waiting for people to ask the church to help them, we will seek out the lost sheep. Instead of *always* focusing our attention in lectures and pamphlets on those who have a knowledge of the Reformed faith, we will also address the unchurched. Especially will this be true as far as domestic missions is concerned.

It would be quite a change if the Preamble to the Constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee would be revised to read, "We believe that our missionary activity or church extension work includes the work of preaching the gospel to the unchurched and heathen, as well as the

task of church reformation. However, we are convinced that our present duty now lies primarily in the field of preaching the gospel to the unchurched."

Interesting thought! ☞

CLASSIS WEST REPORT

REV. DOUGLAS KUIPER

March 5, 2014

Two debuts characterized the March 5, 2014 meeting of Classis West. Rev. Cory Griess served as president for his first time, proving himself capable in leading the broader assembly in its work. And Heritage PRC of Sioux Falls, SD joined the list of churches that have hosted meetings of Classis West. Capably, graciously, with smiles, Heritage's women put on a fine lunch. I shouldn't be surprised if Classis accepts another invite to meet there some year.

In September 1969, Classis West decided not only that its opening devotions should include Scripture reading and prayer, but also that its devotions should last approximately 30 minutes, and include "a brief exegesis of an appropriate Scripture passage...offered by the president of the preceding Classis." In part, the purpose of this was that "a spiritual attitude will be established, the light of the Word of God will be before our minds, and brotherhood will be fostered."

In charge of the opening devotions at this meeting was Rev. Allen Brummel. Addressing Classis from II Timothy 2:1-7, with the theme Perseverance in the Ministry, Rev. Brummel reminded us that the endurance and patience of the soldier, the athlete, and the farmer in their work are examples to the minister in his work. The purpose that the overture of September 1969 envisioned was again fulfilled.

The classical committee, reading sermon library committee, and stated clerk reported on their labors. So did the church visitors for the previous year, who reported that "with thankfulness to God we have been able once again to witness God's work and faithfulness in the churches of Classis West. We found 'unity, peace, and love' prevailing in our congregations, and the ministers,

elders, and deacons faithfully carrying out the duties of their offices."

The saddest part of the otherwise enjoyable meeting was the treating (in closed session) of the request of two consistories for advice in discipline matters. Lest any who have never attended Classis think that Classis simply "rubber stamps" the decisions of consistories regarding discipline, bear in mind that the deliberation on these two matters took the better part of an hour, during which time the delegates heard full reports from those consistories on their labors with these individuals and asked numerous questions of the delegates from these consistories. In the end, convinced that the members were worthy of church discipline, and that the consistories had done their work thoroughly, Classis advised both consistories to proceed with discipline.

Classis provided classical appointments to Doon PRC, the only vacant church in the classis, for the next six months.

Seven of the fifteen churches in Classis West have fewer than 30 families. Of these seven churches, five requested subsidy for 2015. Classis approved these requests, totaling \$240,900, and forwarded them to Synod for its approval. Committing itself to be self-supporting for 2015, Immanuel PRC of Lacombe, AB, did not submit a subsidy request.

Bethel PRC asked for \$10,000 more in subsidy for 2014 than last year's Synod had approved. Convinced by Bethel's reasons for asking for additional subsidy, Classis approved this request and forwards it to the synodical finance committee for its approval.

Voting for various officers and functionaries is always part of the agenda of the spring meeting

Classis appointed Rev. C. Griess to a three-year term

on the classical committee, reappointed Rev. D. Kuiper and Rev. J. Marcus to three-year terms as classical stated clerk and assistant stated clerk, and appointed Revs. A. Brummel, S. Key, R. Kleyn, and D. Kuiper to be church visitors for the next year

Assisting these church visitors, if needed, will be Revs. J. Laning and J. Marcus. Rev. S. Key was appointed to a three-year term as *primus* synodical deputy, and Rev. N. Langerak to a three-year term as *secundus* synodical deputy. The work of the synodical deputies is to attend meetings of Classis East, when Classis East treats matters requiring synodical approval.


Delegated to synod were the following ministers: Revs. A. Brummel, S. Key, D. Kuiper, J. Laning, and C.

Sprong. Alternate minister delegates are Revs. C. Griess, R. Kleyn, N. Langerak, D. Lee, and J. Marcus.

Elder delegates are Alvin Bylsma (Calvary), Jack Lenting (Crete), Jim Regnerus (Doon), Don Terpstra (Peace), and Leon Uittenbogaard (Calvary). Their alternates are elders Jim Andringa (Hull), Lou Regnerus (Randolph), Dewey VanDerNoord (Crete), Steve VanDrunen (Crete), and Bob Vermeer (Peace).

The expenses of Classis totaled \$7,287.46.

Classis will meet next on September 24, 2014, at Peace PRC of Lansing, IL.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,
Stated Clerk 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

We here at the “News” have often felt that as congregations we do not express enough thanks to those who lead us in congregational singing each Lord’s Day. Some of these individuals have been playing church organs or pianos for many years. Do we ever take a moment to thank them for that? Well, one congregation did just that on Sunday morning, February 23, when the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI held a surprise celebration for Mrs. Mary Velthouse after their service. After the Council and Pastor shook hands, the congregation remained standing in their spots instead of walking out to Mary’s postlude. Of course, Mary, assuming that she had missed some

announcement, stopped playing, at which time an announcement was read, which began with a quotation of Psalm 33:3: “Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise,” and said, in part, that “February 2014 marked the 50th anniversary of service that Mary Velthouse has given in playing the organ for our denomination.” All her sons and her daughter were present. There was a gift given to her, which was a plaque made entirely of parts from the 1926 Schantz organ that used to grace the old First Church balcony in Grand Rapids, MI, the first organ Mary played for worship services in 1964. After the gift was given, Mary joyously resumed her postlude to walk everyone out to enjoy celebratory cake and coffee. We would also add that Mary is one of many in our churches who do this “work” out of a love for our God and His people and in service of Christ’s kingdom. “[We] thank God upon

every remembrance of you” (Phil. 1:3).

The men of the Byron Center, MI PRC hosted their second biennial Men’s Conference on February 27-28 at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. This year’s conference took as its theme, “The Godly Man,” using the Word of God found in I Timothy 6:11-12 as its foundation. Thursday evening Rev. A. Spriensma, pastor at Byron Center, spoke on verse 11, under the theme, “The Godly Man’s Contest.” This was followed Friday evening with Rev. W. Bruinsma, missionary pastor to the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA, speaking on verse 12, under the theme, “Called to Fight.” Following each speech, the eighty or so men in attendance broke up into smaller discussion groups. The first night some men considered “Raising Covenant Youth,” while others had an in-depth discussion on “Communica-

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

tion/Devotions in Marriage.” This was followed Friday evening with a look at “Servant-Leadership in Marriage” and “Dealing with Family Finances.” Refreshments were served both evenings. Our thanks to Byron Center for another profitable and enjoyable time spent with like-minded men, applying the truth of God’s Word to everyday life.

Thanks also goes out to our congregation at First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI for serving as gracious hosts for this year’s Reformed Witness Hour Rally. This program to help promote interest in, understanding of, and support for, our denomination’s weekly radio and Internet broadcast was held Sunday evening, March 2. Rev. W. Bruinsma, one of our denomination’s radio pastors, spoke, and the musical group “With One Voice” contributed special music. Refreshments and fellowship followed the program.

In a recent bulletin from the Lynden, WA PRC, their Consistory informed their congregation that they had requested from the Consistory of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, that their pastors, Rev. R. Kley and Rev. R. Hanko of Lynden, have a pulpit-exchange once a month (as much as this is possible). This request gives the opportunity for Pastor Hanko, along with his wife, Nance, to see their son, Neal, and be able to take him to church. This request was granted by Covenant of Grace and began already in February.

In other news from Covenant of Grace in Spokane, WA, we read recently that their Building

Search Committee had agreed on a purchase price with the seller of a church and parsonage not too far from where Covenant currently meets. A full proposal from the Council for the purchase of the property was distributed in late February. The Council was also working on arranging a tour of the building prior to any congregational meeting to decide the question. We should also add that, as we are writing this in early March, the congregational meeting has taken place and Covenant voted to purchase the building. This church, the Minnehaha Covenant Church, is located at 4005 E. Marietta, in Spokane, and from the pictures we have seen on Facebook it looks as if it will serve the needs of Covenant nicely. What an exciting step to take for any church, and we share in the joy with their congregation. No news yet on when the move takes place.

We could not help but notice that a recent bulletin from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited their men to a special Congregational Meeting on February 19, after their Prayer Day service, to vote on a proposal to pay off their parsonage mortgage. That, in contrast to Spokane, who just acquired a mortgage for a church and parsonage. That proposal did pass, by the way.

Young People’s Activities

The Young People’s Group of the Wingham, Ontario PRC recently rented nearby Belgrave Arena and invited their congregation to come out and have a good time of skating and fellowship together. The first

hour of skating on February 22 was reserved for general family skating, while the last hour was intended for hockey.

The Young People of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI invited members of other PR congregations in the area to “A Night of Music” on Saturday evening, March 1, at Grace Church. Once again, the evening provided a great opportunity for some excellent musical talent. The program featured musical numbers from: Christa Phelps, Jim Daling and Dan Van Dyke, Lauren Dykstra, Liz Ensink and Abby DeVries, Gabrielle Phelps and Emma Bodbyl, Alan and Tamara Kalsbeek, as well as other special numbers from members of Grace Church, including their choir. A freewill offering was taken to help defray the costs of this year’s convention.

The Young People’s Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, Alberta, Canada invited their congregation to a Black-Tie Dinner on Friday evening, February 28, at the Bethel CRC.

The Young People of the Hull, IA PRC spent an evening, February 21, singing to various members of their congregation. After singing, the young people returned to Trinity Christian High School for pizza and some Glow in the Dark games.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Notice

■ The Council of Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA is soliciting for private unsecured 5-year loans to fund the purchase of a church building. These notes will bear interest at a rate of 4% per annum with principal due in full at maturity. Interested parties should contact either Fred Johnston (f.l.johnston@hotmail.com or 509-638-8438) or Rev. Rodney Kleyn (r.kleyn@prca.org or 509-850-5120).

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Southeast PRC expresses sympathy to Mrs. Pat DeVries and her family, and to Miss Audrey Reitsma in the death of their sister-in-law and aunt,

MRS. THERESA REITSMA.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:3).

Rev. William Langerak, President
Mark Ophoff, Assistant Clerk

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at the Trinity Protestant Reformed Church. Material to be treated at this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by April 15, 2014.

Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

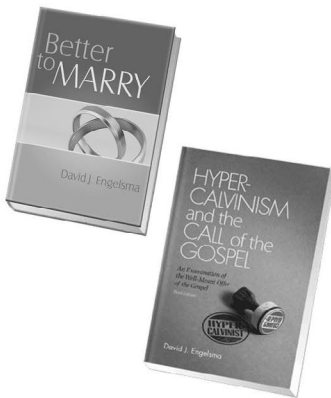
■ The Ladies' Society of Hudsonville PRC express their sympathy to our member Mrs. Dick Venema and family in the death of her mother

HENRIETTA WOLTJER.

“And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

Ryan Barnhill, Leader
Pat Lanning, Secretary

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