

The Standard Bearer

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Take Heed and Exhort One Another

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Hebrews 3:12-13

Take heed!
Exhort one another daily!
As the name suggests, the church to which this epistle was addressed was primarily Jewish in character. Sadly, some had already left the Christian faith to return to Judaism. Others were inclined to do so. They were disillusioned by the facts that Christ had not returned as yet and they were suffering persecution at the hand of the unbelieving Jewish community. To discourage more from leaving the church, the holy writer demonstrates in this epistle the superiority of the Christian faith over

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Judaism. The bottom line is that salvation is to be found in Jesus Christ, not in Judaism.

In this third chapter the holy writer draws attention to Psalm 95, in which the Lord reminded Israel in the days of David of his dealings with Israel in the wilderness. How Israel had provoked the Lord with their sinful rebellion. How the Lord had been grieved with them and had sworn in His wrath that they would not enter into the rest of the Promised Land.

And now the holy writer exhorts the church.

Take heed!

Exhort one another daily!

Lest any of you follow the sad example of Israel in the wilderness by departing from the living God with an evil heart of unbelief and be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin!



The Scriptures record the sins of Old Testament Israel and the Lord's discipline of these sins for our instruction. This principle is set forth in I Corinthians

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10:11. After reviewing some of the sins of Israel in the wilderness and the terrible judgments that came upon her for her sins, the apostle Paul writes, “Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”

We see the same principle in Psalm 95, which the writer quotes in this third chapter of the book of Hebrews. In this particular Psalm Israel was reminded of the Lord’s dealings with the nation’s unfaithfulness in her wilderness wanderings exactly to warn her not to repeat the same errors.

And now the writer of this epistle to the Hebrews cites this same Psalm as a warning to the early Christian church.

In the passage we consider for this meditation, the writer summarizes what Israel had done in the wilderness as related in Psalm 95.

With an evil heart of unbelief the majority in Israel had departed from the living God.

An evil heart of unbelief is an evil heart that is characterized by unbelief. When the heart is evil, the result is always unbelief. The majority of Israel had such an evil heart of unbelief during the wilderness wanderings. They did not believe in the Lord.

The Lord is called here the living God. That means that, in distinction from the dumb idols of paganism, the Lord is the only true God. As the one true God He also enjoys a covenant life with Himself as the triune God. Still more, for His own pleasure He lives a blessed covenant life of friendship with a people whom He has chosen and saved in Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament, God promised to realize this covenant with Israel in the land of Canaan.

But the majority of Israel did not believe. In spite of His mighty works to deliver them from Egypt, they did not believe that the Lord would see them safely through

the wilderness and give them the land of Canaan. Nor did they believe the Lord’s promise that the joy of Canaan would make all the hardship in the wilderness worthwhile. In fact, the greatest joy of Canaan, which was the blessing of God’s fellowship, held no attraction to them at all.

And so they departed from the living God. They repudiated the covenant of God and the law that the Lord had given to govern their life in the covenant. And they turned to the idol gods of the heathen.

In this departure they were hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The deceitfulness of sin must be understood in the sense that sin deceives. In the sin of idolatry Israel found not only much joy but also a sense of security. In their unbelief they were deceived into thinking that the joys

and security promised by the idol gods of the heathen were genuine, lasting, and thus to be had at any cost. This deceitfulness of sin in turn hardened them. They became stubborn in sin so that they would not heed the warnings of God, whether spoken or in the form of harsh discipline in the wilderness.

What a sad chapter in the history of the church!



Take heed!

Turn your thoughts to what happened with Israel in the wilderness. Contemplate the evil heart of unbelief that characterized so many in Israel and that led them to turn from the living God. Take note of the hardness of their heart. Focus on the fact that they could not enter into the rest God had promised in Canaan. In your mind’s eye see the carcasses of Israel strewn across the desert floor.

Take heed lest there be in any of you such an evil heart of unbelief, in turning from the living God.

Some in the early church had, with an evil heart of

“Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples: and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.”
I Corinthians 10:11

unbelief, departed from the living God. They had forsaken the Christian faith to return to Judaism. There was also involved a hardening process. In hardness of heart they had refused to heed the warnings of the church. They had been hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. They were deceived by the sinful pride of works righteousness that characterized unbelieving Judaism. They were deceived by the sin of covetousness. Returning to Judaism they would be free of persecution and return to a life of earthly ease. These had been for the most part false brethren who never had known the Lord.

And there were others in the church who were inclined to leave. This also included true believers who were weak in faith. It is true that God preserves His people. Yet, in weakness of faith the true child of God can for a time manifest the same unbelief and hardness of heart as the unbeliever.

The same danger exists also today. Idolatry prevails in our country. Our society is given over to the gods of earthly wealth, pleasure, recreation, influence, recognition, and the like. Many in the church leave the living God for these idols. Often they leave the church. Just as often they remain in the church. In some cases this arises out of an evil heart of unbelief that is hardened by the Word of God. Then there are the true believers who in weakness of faith are deceived by the empty promise of sin and idolatry.

To prevent such from happening, the holy writer exhorts the members of the church to take heed. There is another principle we must remember here, and that is that the Lord uses the examples and warnings of His judgment to keep His people faithful. He even uses the examples of His judgments to bring the unbeliever to faith and repentance.

Take heed therefore.

And exhort one another daily.

The word translated "exhort" is a word that means to call another to your side to provide help and assistance. This may come in the form of comfort, instruction, rebuke, or exhortation. This is what we are to do to one another. We are to look out for each other's welfare. So that none follow the way of Israel's apostasy, we are to exhort one another. Sometimes this means that we instruct. Sometimes this means that we encourage or

comfort. Sometimes this means that we rebuke and warn.

This admonition to exhort one another comes to all in the church, young and old alike.

This must not be just an occasional thing but a daily occurrence in the church.

This daily exhortation arises out of taking heed. When the members of the church take heed to the example of Israel, they will exhort one another daily, lest there be found any in the church that follow the example of unbelieving Israel.

And should any church fail in this, she will see many follow the sad way of Israel's history.



There is a sense of urgency about all this.

The urgency is suggested in the fact that we are to exhort each other while it is called Today.

In Psalm 95, which the holy writer has just quoted, God called Israel to hear His voice Today. That means that they should hear His voice at that time. They must not wait or procrastinate, thinking that this is something they can well put off to the future. It was important that they hear His voice then.

The writer to the Hebrews picks up on this word "Today." He indicates that it is called "Today." And we are to exhort one another while it is called "Today."

"Today" must not be understood as meaning just one day. It refers rather to a period of time. Today stands in contrast to tomorrow. Today is the time that the Lord has given you to live on this earth. Tomorrow is the time of judgment and eternal reward.

Today can end at any time for us. At any time, even our next breath, anyone can start the tomorrow of eternity.

Exhort one other daily, while it is called Today.

Lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. 

Financing Our Christian Schools (1)

The members of the Protestant Reformed Churches place a very high value on the covenantal instruction of their children. Each year the members of these churches bring up well over ten million dollars to maintain the four high schools and the thirteen grade schools. That huge sum will pay for the utilities, the teacher salaries, the books and supplies that are required to run the schools for one year. This figure does not include a building payment or building remodeling projects that any given school is financing. Simply the running of the schools for one year. That is a sobering reality. Year after year, God has provided the employment, the income, and above all, the willing hearts to enable these schools to continue.

The bulk of this money comes from hard-working parents. *Parents* have the primary responsibility for the schools' financial support because the Christian schools of Reformed persuasion are *parental* schools. These are schools established by parents. These schools are governed by parents, and they are maintained by the parents.

This is right and proper because the responsibility for the rearing of children lies squarely upon the believing parents. At the baptism of their children, believers promise to see to it that their children are in-

structed and brought up in the Reformed faith, or help or cause them to be instructed, to the utmost of their power (the third question of the form for the administration of infant baptism). This is in harmony with the Lord's demands laid specifically upon the individual parent in such passages as Deuteronomy 6:7: "And thou shalt teach them diligently to thy children...." (Notice the singular pronouns thou and thy.) And in the New Testament nothing changes, as the father is admonished to bring up his children "in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:4).

Whenever possible, parents band together to get assistance in this divine calling to instruct their children. They form a school society and elect a school board to oversee the school for the parents. Upon these parents lies the responsibility to finance and govern the school.

These schools are covenantal in essence. For God establishes His covenant with believers and their seed in their generations. Obviously believers have much interest in the covenant seed in subsequent generations. The Bible often speaks of the believers' children and their children's children. Parents have an intense desire to instruct their children in the fear of the Lord so that they will, in turn, teach their children in the same way. This is

the expressed desire of the inspired psalmist, who promises, "We will not hide them from their children, shewing to the generation to come the praises of the LORD, and his strength, and his wonderful works that he hath done" (Ps. 78:4). The psalmist goes on to show that this desire is also an obligation. For God "established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which he commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children: that the generation to come might know them, even the children which should be born; who should arise and declare them to their children" (5, 6). And the highly desirable goal: "That they might set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments" (7).

Due both to this demand of God and the earnest desire of godly parents, school societies include more than parents. Their membership always includes men whose children have already gone through the school. Many of them are grandfathers. The membership includes also uncles and unmarried men young and old. It is very good for the school that its governing includes the wisdom of grandparents both in the society and on the school board.

For the same reasons (God's demand, and the godly desire) the

financial support of the school is borne by more than parents. Deficit drives, church collections, and many voluntary contributions from grandparents, uncles and aunts, single believers young and old contribute significantly to the financial basis that gives the Christian school the money needed every year to fulfill its high calling.

The astute reader will notice that the financial basis of the Christian school does not include government money or church contributions. This we will address later.

The arrangement described is familiar to most of us. It is the way Christian schools in the Reformed branch of the church have operated all our lives. It might be good to realize that this is a relatively new arrangement, something that began to develop in the Reformed churches in the Netherlands about 140 years ago. In the Christian Reformed Church in America, from the beginning of her history, the Christian schools were consistory-governed and the church officially determined the budget and contributed money to the school. About 120 years ago the shift began to society-governed schools. By 1914 the transformation was officially recognized in the change of Church Order Article 21. Formerly it read: "Consistories shall see to it that there are good schoolmasters...." That indicates the consistory's rule in the school. The new reading was: "Consistories shall see to it that there are good Christian schools in which the parents shall have their children instructed, according to the demands of the covenant." The new reading

clearly indicates that parents, not consistories, have the responsibility to establish and maintain the schools.

But what about Christian schools before the CRC, in the history of the Reformation?

Luther strongly supported Christian schools for the children. In the Middle Ages (prior to the Reformation) most schools were found in the monasteries or in the cathedrals. With the coming of the Reformation, that changed drastically in the lands where the Reformation overthrew the domination of Roman Catholicism. The monasteries closed, and the schools with them. Cathedrals were closed or converted to Lutheran churches. The result: no money for schools, very few teachers, and no existing structure for Christian schools for the children.

Luther's response was twofold. First, he taught the people that the responsibility for the education of their children rested on the parents. He used every opportunity to remind parents in the most emphatic way of their calling before God. Second, he wrote a lengthy treatise to the German nobility, the magistrates in the Lutheran territories, demonstrating that they would need to establish and finance Christian schools. The people, largely uneducated, could not begin to know how to organize or run a school. And, being extremely poor, they could not pay for such schools. The only hope was that the Christian magistrates would do it for the poor, uneducated parents. Thus it was that the schools were essentially

public schools, established by the Christian magistrates on behalf of the people.

Calvin found a similar situation in Geneva. Under Roman Catholicism, the schools had been the domain of the church. With the Reformation coming to Geneva, that changed. Calvin, like Luther, emphasized that the responsibility for educating children lay on the parents. Yet, the magistrates had to be involved if schools would be available to the parents. Accordingly, the magistrates of Geneva maintained control of the schools, financing them and requiring that parents send their children. The church would find the teachers (approved by the magistrates) and determine the content of the instruction.

The Netherlands followed the model of Calvin in Geneva. The schools in the Netherlands had been Roman Catholic institutions. The government more or less gave the schools to the Reformed churches. The understanding was that the churches would appoint the teachers and determine the content of the instruction. The government paid the teachers.

Accordingly, the Synod of Dordt in 1618-'19 adopted several provisions regarding the instruction of the youth. First, the synod insisted on the principle of parental responsibility:

The office of parents is diligently to instruct their children and their whole household in the principles of the Christian religion, in a manner adapted to their respective ca-

pacities; earnestly and carefully to admonish them to the cultivation of true piety; to engage their punctual attendance on family worship, and take them with them to the hearing of the Word of God.

Second, the synod called upon the government to establish schools throughout the Netherlands:

Schools, in which the young shall be properly instructed in the principles of Christian doctrine, shall be instituted not only in cities, but also in towns and country places where heretofore none have existed. The Christian magistracy shall be requested that well-qualified persons may be employed and enabled to devote themselves to the service; and especially that the children of the poor may be gratuitously instructed, and not

be excluded from the benefit of the schools.

Third, the supervision of the schools and the instruction was placed under the consistory:

[It is]...the duty of the ministers, with an elder, and, if necessary, with a magistrate, to visit all the schools...frequently, in order to excite the teachers to earnest diligence, to encourage and counsel them in the duty of catechising, and to furnish an example by questioning them, addressing them in a friendly and affectionate manner, and exciting them to early piety and diligence.

This arrangement worked for a time. The government was friendly to the Reformed churches. The

churches were faithful to the Reformed faith. Parents could send their children to the schools knowing they would be instructed in harmony with the Reformed truth.

But over time, all that changed. The churches apostatized. The government did not remain friendly to the Reformed faith, or even to Christianity. And the schools necessarily changed with them.

Reformed parents learned the hard way, that Christian schools were not to be left to the magistrates, nor to the church. Rather, in harmony with the principle that the instruction of the covenant children rests on the parents, so also must the schools be established, maintained, and financed, by the parents. Not the church. And not the government. This history teaches us.

... to be continued. 

LETTERS

More on Esther and Mordecai

Having read Rev. Richard Smit's article on Queen Esther [see December 1, 2013, p. 116], I would like to raise a few questions and comments. At the outset I wish to make it quite clear I am in overall agreement with his response to Prof. Lee Beach's article. I quite agree that deliberately to deceive and lie can never promote the truth of the gospel. I do however think Queen Esther and her uncle Mordecai come under an undue and severe criticism. I will make the following comments and observations as I understand the story.

1) It does not seem at all likely that Esther sought to become queen to King Ahasuerus. Esther 2:3a says, "And let the king appoint officers in all the provinces of his kingdom, that they may gather together all the fair young virgins." More than likely to the dismay of Esther, she was spotted by these officers, as they went about their ungodly purpose to appease the wounded pride of

a despotic king. Esther would have been helpless to resist such tyranny in the society and customs of the day.

2) Mordecai shows deep concern to know what is to become of Esther trapped now in the court of the women's house. "And Mordecai walked every day before the court of the women's house, to know how Esther did, and what should become of her" (Est. 2:11).

3) Does Esther 2:10 really prove Esther lied about her racial identity? "Esther had not shewed her people nor her kindred: for Mordecai had charged her that she should not shew it." The King and the Persian empire over which he ruled with absolute authority had proved their hostility and cruel, merciless antagonism to the Jews. To withhold her true identity with discreet silence rather than lies was true wisdom to prevent unnecessary hostile reaction within a seriously dangerous situation, which mysteriously providence had brought Esther to. The Jews were living in exile in a foreign land. Fully to appreciate

the nature of their captors see Habakkuk 1:6-11. To Mordecai and Esther the horror of the Jewish captivity was now turning worse and worse for them.

4) Does not Esther 4:14 reveal Mordecai as a man of faith: "For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place." His belief in a deliverance must be from the God of the Jews. There are reasons why God is not mentioned in the book.

5) The fast requested by Esther was by no means some Pharisaical, traditional fast based on a faulty interpretation of the law. It was requested by Esther in an attempt to save the situation by a very dangerous proposal by Mordecai, which could well have resulted in Esther's own death. See Esther 4:15-16.

6) How can Rev. Smit be so categorically sure Mordecai never returned to the land of promise. In Ezra 2:2 and Nehemiah 7:7 there is a list of the prominent men who returned with Zerubbabel, both of which record a man called Mordecai. Can he prove this was some prominent person other than the Mordecai of the book of Esther?

Richard Holt.
South Wales, U.K.

Response

Due to limited space, it is not possible to give an exhaustive answer to Mr. Holt's questions. The questioner disagreed with the evaluation of Esther and Mordecai as unbelievers. He is not alone in that regard. It is commonly held that Esther and Mordecai should be considered as heroes of faith.

With that view, I still disagree. Here are some more things to consider in further support of my "severe criticism" of Esther and Mordecai.

It should be noted that my description of Mordecai as uncle to Esther was incorrect. According to Esther 2:7, Esther was "his uncle's daughter." This fact is one reason why some commentators have concluded that cousin Mordecai could not have been the Mordecai of Zerubbabel's day (Ezra 2:2). They argue that if he were the same person, then the estimates of his age, from 83 to over 100 years old, indicate that he and Esther could hardly have been first cousins. In spite of that discussion about the age of cousin Mordecai, our criticism of his unbelieving ways remains the same.

Mordecai's rebellion against the king's commandment (Est. 3:2) was the cause for Haman's wicked decree to destroy the Jews, not a deep-seated, empire wide, racist persecution towards Jews that kept them in poverty and oppression throughout the empire. The Jews lived in relative comfort in Persia and Babylon in the days of Esther, which was exactly what many Jews did not want to give up for repatriation to the harsh realities of the rebuilding of the temple and Jerusalem and of post-captivity life in Judea.

Esther was not an innocent victim of the king's lustful, despotic desires. She participated willingly under the foolish demands of her cousin in an immoral beauty contest for a depraved king. Her reprehensible actions are clearly not evidence of chaste godliness in obedience to the seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery."

Not for fear of death, but for disqualification in a wicked contest, she willingly hid her Jewish identity, which is equivalent to being ashamed of Jehovah, the God and King of the Jews, and not testifying of Him before men, which was her solemn duty. This compromise is not evidence of honesty and of faith that speaks the truth in love, humility, and godly fear.

Her concluding words in Esther 4:16 were: "If I perish, I perish." These are the words of fatalism. They are not evidence of faith in Jehovah, our covenant God, who is faithful to His promises in Christ.

As I mentioned in the original article, we find a godly model for foreign missions in Daniel and his three friends in a time period about 100 years prior to the story of Esther. Even before the prospect of death in a fiery furnace or in a lion's den, these men of faith were, by the grace of God, uncompromising, honest, bold, loyal to Jehovah, humble, and even submissive to depraved kings. That is a godly example of how the church today must proclaim the gospel among the nations of the earth, even among those who may be very hostile to the truth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Of course, much more could be written, and probably should be written someday by someone, about the book of Esther. However, I trust that this brief response may help in the meantime.

—Rev. Richard J. Smit

The Reformed Worldview: Truth and Its Consequences (7)

The History of the Concept *Worldview*

While considering the New Testament perspective of the Christian life, we have seen that this new life that is ours in Christ Jesus is the foundation for a life of thankfulness to God. That underlies our entire perspective as Christians in relationship to this world.

To belong to Jesus Christ is not merely to look to Him as our example. It is to live in a covenant union with Him, being *in* Him. The expression “in Christ” or “in Him” is in fact the most succinct definition of being a Christian. He is the Vine; we are the branches (John 15:1-5). He is the Head; we are the body and members of the body (Eph. 4:15-16; I Cor. 12:12-27).

The New Testament, therefore, reveals our Christian life in this world not as a matter of fulfilling laws, let alone accomplishing great things on God’s behalf or bringing the world into subjection to Him, but as a vibrant expression of our Christianity, our life in Christ. It is the life of Christ that comes to expression in us also when it comes to the Reformed worldview.

That means, for one thing, that we know Christ as He reveals Himself in Holy Scripture (John 17:3). It is impossible to have a Reformed worldview, a biblically-grounded worldview, if we do not know Christ in truth.

That also means that the Reformed worldview recognizes with gratitude the exalted Christ’s Lordship. “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool” (Heb. 10:12-13).

Philippians 2:9-11 expresses it this way: “Wherefore

God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

Our worldview is governed by the fact that Christ is Lord over us in every aspect of life. As Reformed believers we confess in the first Lord’s Day of our Heidelberg Catechism that even our bodies belong to our Lord and Savior. He has a power over us, even a right to our bodies and souls, that no one else has. He owns us! He owns us whom He has redeemed with His precious blood.

Moreover, all power has been given Him for the sake of His church. To Christ alone belongs all dominion. That is why Scripture refers to Him as Lord of lords and King of kings. He rules over all the world.

The manner in which He rules over all things must be carefully distinguished according to Scripture. Christ rules over His church in His grace and by His Word and Spirit. By that grace Christ writes His law in the inmost hearts of His people, so that it becomes their delight to do His will.

But He rules also over the whole world by the power of His might, accomplishing His purpose in all things. As we are told in Ephesians 1:22, all things are subjected under His feet, for the sake of the church.

There are some astounding examples of this in Scripture.

One of those examples is Pharaoh, of whom God said, “Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared through all the earth” (Rom. 9:17).

Another example of God ruling the world by the power of His providential government is found in His raising

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Previous article in this series: January 15, 2014, p. 175.

up Cyrus, king of Persia, for the explicit purpose of issuing the decree for the children of Israel to return to the promised land from their Babylonian captivity. We read in Ezra 1:1, “Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom....” That proclamation was the decree that the children of Israel return to the promised land to rebuild the house of God. What is even more amazing is the fact that Scripture tells us that Cyrus issued that decree without knowing Jehovah, that is, without knowing Him with the knowledge of true faith. History confirms that this action of Cyrus was done out of political expediency.

These are but two examples confirming the truth of Proverbs 21:1: “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will.”

So God rules over all things by His exalted Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Everything, therefore, must focus upon Jesus Christ. Everything in our lives as Christians must flow from gratitude for the riches that are ours in Him. Our entire walk, our direction in life, all the decisions we make as we stand before the various choices in life, are to be made according to the dictates and will of Him who is higher than we.

There are profound implications with this truth.

For one thing, our worldview is governed by the truth that Christ is Lord alone. We do not look to derive benefits from all different religions and to apply them to our daily lives. True Christianity is not one religion among many. We do not recognize the legitimacy of Buddhism or Hinduism or Islam or Judaism as religions on equal footings with Christianity. We refuse to give legitimacy even to those sects that call themselves Christian, but that deny the unique lordship of Jesus Christ, the only true God. Christ alone is Lord!

This confession came to expression in the early New Testament church.

Satan himself, recognizing the significance of this confession of Christ’s exclusive lordship, intensified his attacks upon the church in the attempt to destroy that confession. Many Christians in the early church were placed before the choice of saying, “Jesus is Lord; but Caesar also is Lord,” or being executed. Satan does not want an exclusive Christianity. A worldview with that foundational principle he would fight against! He strives to bring about a false Christianity, one not only destructive to a Reformed worldview, but one that is anti-Christ.

So children of God were told, “You may confess that Jesus is Lord, so long as you also confess that Caesar is Lord.” Their refusal to make that compromise meant for some of them that they were burned at the stake, for others that they were thrown to the lions, for others that they were roasted alive in burning oil.

By faith they walked the way of death, rather than deny the unique and only lordship, which belongs to Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God.

Talk about a worldview with conviction!

Another implication of this truth of Christ’s lordship is that, when we call Jesus Christ our Lord, we are not talking about Him being a lord for one day of

the week, or part of that one day.

The Reformed worldview insists that the lordship of Christ presses upon every aspect of our lives, bringing us into willing subjection to the Lord of glory. He who owns us also lives in us! He rules over us—not by force, but by the impelling power of His love. His is a rule of grace in us who belong to Him.

For that reason His lordship embraces us in our marriages and in our families, at home and in the workplace, at church and in the schools, with all our life and all our possessions.

When we live in the consciousness of Christ’s lordship, it is our earnest desire and endeavor to obey His precepts and to seek out His will in every aspect of our lives. ☺

The Reformed worldview insists that the lordship of Christ presses upon every aspect of our lives, bringing us into willing subjection to the Lord of glory.

The Resurrection of the Body

Lord's Day 22

Question 57. What comfort doth the "resurrection of the body" afford thee?

Answer. That not only my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head; but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and made like unto the glorious body of Christ.

Question 58. What comfort takest thou from the article of "life everlasting"?

Answer. That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life I shall inherit perfect salvation, which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man" to conceive, and that, to praise God therein for ever.

Quite often the Apostles' Creed is recited at the graveside of a loved one, and it ends on this beautiful, encouraging, comforting, and hope-filled last note: "I believe the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen." Physical death is not the end, but for the believer it is a door of hope and the beginning of a new eternal day.

The Intermediate State

This refers to what happens to me after death, and before the general resurrection at the return of Christ. My soul and body belong together, but death tears them apart from each other. The dead body is buried in the grave and deteriorates. "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19). But what happens to the soul?

Some say the soul sleeps, that it enters a state of unconsciousness until the day of Christ's return when the body will be raised again. Others say the soul is annihilated, that death is the end of a person's existence. Still others say that it goes to a place of temporary suffering called

purgatory. None of these is biblical, and all of them are invented by man to soften the reality of death for unbelievers.

At death, the souls of those who do not believe in Jesus Christ pass immediately into the everlasting torments of hell. In Jesus' parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the rich man opened his eyes "in hell," "being in torments" (Luke 16:23). This is what makes death so frightful for an unbeliever. There is no second chance beyond death.

However, at death the souls of believers immediately and consciously enter into the presence of Jesus Christ, their Savior. We know this because this is what God has told us in His Word. "Verily I say unto thee, to day shalt thou be with me in paradise." In these well known words of Jesus from the cross (Luke 23:43), He promised to meet the dying thief that same day in the place of bliss called "paradise." Paul says (Phil. 1:23) that he has "a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." "To be absent from the body" is to "be present with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:8). Knowing this, Paul viewed death as "gain" (Phil. 1:21).

The Resurrection of Our Bodies

The focus of Scripture, when it speaks of the after-life, is the resurrection of our bodies. The intermediate state

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of the soul is temporary. There is coming a great and glorious day when there will be a resurrection of every dead human being, a reuniting of body and soul. In John 5:28-29 Jesus says that “the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

I Corinthians 15:51 calls this resurrection a great mystery. There are a lot of things about that resurrection that we do not know and cannot understand on this side of the grave. That is because the resurrection event, and the bodies that we will be given, will be so remarkable and wonderful.

The Bible tells us, on the one hand, that the very same body that we have now will be raised. Job confesses, “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God” (Job 19:26). The resurrection will be a miracle. After death our bodies decay into dust. Some bodies are torn or blown apart, some are eaten by wild beasts, some disappear in the depths of the ocean—and yet the essence of our present human body will be brought together and raised. That is because my physical body is who I am. I am body and soul, and if I am going to live beyond death, then my body must be raised and reunited with my soul.

This implies several things. First, in glory, we will recognize one another. The things that distinguish me as an individual here on the earth will distinguish me also in heaven. Second, we shouldn’t think of our physical bodies as essentially evil, something like a cage for the soul that will be disposed of in the end, and so can be abused in the present. God has redeemed us, body and soul, and so our bodies too must be cared for and used to His glory (I Cor. 6:20). Third, we should treat with respect the remains of our loved ones when they die, by giving them an honorable Christian burial.

On the other hand, though I will have my very own body, the resurrection will be an amazing transformation. The curse of sin will be lifted from our bodies and “our vile body” will be changed by Christ, and “fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Phil. 3:21). Our resurrection will not be like that of Lazarus and others who rose from the dead in Bible times in the same kind of body in order to live on the same sinful earth. Rather, it will be

like Jesus’ resurrection body, which was transformed and adapted to live in the glories of heaven.

In I Corinthians 15:42-44 a contrast is drawn. Now our bodies are corruptible and will be buried in corruption, but they will be raised in incorruption. The body that now deteriorates and wears out with age will be made to live for ever. Here our bodies are buried in dishonor, but then they will be raised in glory, free from all imperfections, deformities, diseases, and ailments. Our present body is weak, but our new body will be raised in power, without physical, spiritual, and mental weaknesses. Our bodies now are physical, but we will be raised in spiritual bodies something like the mysterious spiritual body Christ had after His resurrection.

Though there is something final about burying human remains, death is not the end for believers. The Bible says that our bodies are “sown,” much as you would sow a seed in the ground in the hope that it will spring up into a plant. Believers who die are described as sleeping in Jesus (I Thess. 4:14), in the hope of waking again when Jesus comes to call us from our graves. We should think about these two illustrations when we stand at the grave of a loved one who has died in the Lord.

Unbelief views the resurrection as absurd and impossible. The resurrection is a uniquely Christian hope. The power and possibility of our being raised is in Jesus Christ, who in the cross vanquished the curse of death, and then arose because death had no power over him. Jesus says, “I am the resurrection and the life” (John 11:25). Jesus has the keys of hell and of death (Rev. 1:18), and His resurrection as the firstfruits means that all who believe on Him will also be raised.

The unbelieving reprobate will also be raised, but rather than receiving a glorious body adapted for life in heaven, they will be raised “to shame and contempt” (Dan. 12:2) in bodies that are adapted to suffer the torments of hell to eternity without reprieve. How fearful that day will be for the unsaved.

Joy Unspeakable

“Everlasting life” is the Bible’s way of describing the experience of living in heaven. The Bible does not tell us a lot about heaven, because it will be spiritual in nature and we would not be able to understand it anyway. Everlasting life is much more than perpetual existence. We

should think of the quality of life in heaven, as well as the quantity. To live eternally is to know God face-to-face and to fellowship with His Son Jesus Christ (John 17:3). That will be the essence of heaven, and it will bring joy forever to the child of God. Heaven's joy will be more intense and complete than all the joys of this earth put together. We can barely begin to imagine how glorious our life in heaven will be (I Cor. 2:9).

Everlasting life is not something we have to wait to receive after we die. Just as the unregenerate already today are dead in sin and experience God's wrath, so the regenerated believer has in his heart the beginning of eternal joy. The Holy Spirit, who is the earnest of our inheritance and the giver of life, has already given us the first installment of eternal life. We feel and enjoy this in a life of love, intimacy, and walking with God today. When we die, it will simply get better. Think of Enoch, who walked with God, and then was taken. He went from glory to a greater glory.

When I in righteousness at last
Thy glorious face shall see,
When all the weary night is past,
And I awake with Thee
To view the glories that abide,
Then, then I shall be satisfied.
(Psalter 31)

Questions for Discussion

1. What happens to the soul of the believer immediately at death? Prove this from Scripture. How is this a comfort for you?
2. What happens to the soul of the unbeliever immediately at death? Why are the bodies of unbelievers also raised?
3. Describe what will happen on the day of Jesus' return (see Matt. 25; John 5:28-29; Phil. 3:20-21; I Thess. 4:13-18). Do you long for that day?
4. What will your resurrection body be like? Will it be the same body that you have today?
5. If this body will be raised, how should I view and treat it today?
6. The Bible speaks of the resurrection as a "change" and "transformation." What are some of the changes that you expect in the resurrection?
7. What two biblical illustrations should we think of when we stand at the grave? How are these comforting to us?
8. Use a concordance to find Bible passages that describe what heaven will be like. Discuss what some of these passages say about heaven.
9. How do we enjoy already in this life some of the joys of heaven? 

The Qualifications of the Office of Elder (4)

The Elder's Blamelessness

Having emphasized in previous articles that elders must be male, we turn now to examine the qualification of the office of elder that governs all others: his blamelessness.

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The Fundamental Qualification

This qualification of blamelessness is first.

It is first in order. In both Scripture passages in which the qualifications of the office of elder are listed, "blameless" begins the list. I Timothy 3:2 reads: "A bishop then must be blameless..."; and Titus 1:6 says, "If any be blameless...."

It is first in order, because it is first in priority. That an elder be blameless is the fundamental qualification of the office. This is also why the word “blameless” appears twice in the list in Titus 1—in verse 6, and again in verse 7.

The other qualifications for the office of elder flow out of this one. The negative qualifications (see below) indicate sinful conduct that would make the elder blameworthy. The positive qualifications show how blamelessness is to manifest itself in an exemplary way in the life of the elder.

What, then, is blamelessness?

In I Timothy 3:2, the Greek word translated “blameless” means “cannot be laid hold of.” In Titus 1:6 and 7 a different word is used, one that means “cannot be called to account.” The two words have a different emphasis: that used in I Timothy 3 suggests that no other person—whether in the church or without—would have reason to charge the elder with a grievous fault, while the word used in Titus 1 indicates that no authority (such as the consistory) would have reason to investigate an elder because of charges brought against him.

Essentially, however, the idea of both words is the same. To be blameless is to be free from any grievous fault or sin that would cause the church to lose respect for the man, give the ungodly reason to blaspheme, and indicate that the man is not morally fit to hold office in Christ’s church.

Being blameless is not the same as being sinless. No elder is, or will ever be, sinless.

Nor is being blameless the same as being free from criticism. Sadly, some people will be quick to criticize their elders—either one elder in particular, or the whole body of them.

The blamelessness of the elder of which God’s Word speaks is a blamelessness, not according to the standard of the people’s expectations, but according to God’s qualifications for the office.

Sins That the Blameless Elder Is to Avoid

The addition of the list of “nots” in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 gives us a concrete idea of some of the sins that make the elder blameworthy.

Sitting long at his wine

He must be “not given to wine” (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7).

More literally, the Greek word thus translated tells us that the elder must not be the kind of man who sits alongside his wine, or sits long at his wine. Of course, what is here said of “wine” must apply to every other alcoholic beverage as well. The elder may drink a wine or a beer or a cocktail on occasion; Scripture does not forbid God’s people ever to drink alcoholic beverages. But the elder must not be the kind of man who, at every turn, has an alcoholic beverage in his hand.

The reason for this qualification is not difficult to understand. First, too much alcohol affects one’s ability to make good judgments. Both in his personal life, as well as in the office of elder, he is required to make good, sound judgments. And second, drunkenness leads to immorality. If the elder will be above reproach, he must not let down his guard against sin.

Striking, brawling, quarreling, soon angry

The elder must be “no striker” (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7). A striker is one who is ready in an instant to fight with his fists. The elder must have the ability to restrain his hands.

He must also restrain his words. The elder must not be contentious, always ready to fight with words. This is the idea of “not a brawler” (I Tim. 3:3). True, he must be a soldier; the good fight of faith he must fight against the devil and the powers of darkness. But he must not be the kind of man ready for a fight to advance himself, defend his cause, or get his way. And he must understand that the good fight of the faith is fought not with hands and angry words, but with the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17).

And he must restrain his heart. At the root of the sins of striking and brawling is a heart that is “soon angry” (Tit. 1:7). The kind of man who is quickly moved to anger at a word he did not like, or the tone of other’s voices, or their failure to do what he thought they should do, is not a candidate for the office of elder.

Some who are prone to quarrel think that this stands to their advantage, if elected to be elder: they are ready to tackle issues, to straighten those who are crooked, to set right things that are wrong in the church. Their mistake is to forget that the imperfect church on earth must still dwell together in peaceful unity, and that a sinful way of addressing a problem is no better than the problem itself.

The work of the elder is to build up the church and to promote God's glory in all he says and does. Quarreling and fighting do not accomplish this goal.

Greed for filthy lucre, and covetousness

Blamelessness also regards the elder's view of money and possessions. He must be "not greedy of filthy lucre" and "not covetous" (I Tim. 3:3; Tit. 1:7).

Filthy lucre refers to money or possessions that are obtained in a dishonorable way. Prohibited are stealing in every form, gambling in every form, and being interested in any opportunity to make a quick dollar, even when it involves shady practices.

Again the inspired apostle states the heart-sin that is at the root of greed for filthy lucre—covetousness, lust, desire for what God was not pleased to give.

Covetousness and greed for filthy lucre must not characterize the elder, because they indicate that he seeks himself. The elder must be one who serves Christ's church willingly and readily. He must deny himself, be ready to go without, for the sake of others.

Self-willed

To Titus only, and not to Timothy, Paul says that the elder must be "not self-willed" (Tit. 1:7). Literally, he must not be a "self-pleaser."

Self-will can be a matter either of one's goal or of one's method, or of both. A man can make pleasing himself the goal of his life—he exists for his own happiness. Or a man can pretend he has other goals (God's glory and the church's well-being, for example), but in aiming toward those goals he does things that still appear to be to his advantage. Either way, his self-will comes out in arrogance, tyranny, manipulation, or in some other way.

The office of elder requires men who do not please self, but who will deny themselves for others. In this way

elders give evidence that they serve Christ, their King and the church's King. And in this way the elders show that they truly seek the good of God's flock.

Positive Expressions of Blamelessness

The positive requirements for the office set forth ways in which the elder's blamelessness is to show itself positively.

We will not examine each of these now. Those that relate to the elder's family life, to his relationship to others, to his ability to teach, and to his being not a novice, we wish to treat in more detail in the future. For now we focus on the man's personal spiritual characteristics. The bishop must be . . .

- "vigilant" (I Tim. 3:2). This English word has the idea of being watchful. The Greek word that it translates refers to temperance. Primarily it refers to the temperate use of alcohol. Rather than sitting long at the wine, the elder must be vigilant. But temperance with regard to drink implies an ability to control oneself with regard to all immoderate use of earthly things. This is a fitting qualification for an elder: his mind must be on spiritual things, and he must be an example of godliness and modesty regarding his use of earthly things.

- "sober" (I Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8). Referring to one who is of a sound mind, this word develops further the idea of vigilance. Not only with regard to his use of earthly things, but also with regard to all of his choices and decisions, the elder must show that he is of a sound mind. Physically and mentally, he must have a healthy mind; but even more, he must be spiritually sober and sound. One who acts impulsively, without considering the wisdom of a course of action, is not a good candidate for the office of elder.

- "of good behavior" (I Tim. 3:2). The elder must be "or-

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derly,” to give a more literal idea of the Greek word. The point is that he must conduct himself in accordance with who and what he is: as a child of God, his conduct must glorify God; as an elder, his conduct must bring honor to his office.

- “patient” (I Tim. 3:3). He must be fair and gentle. This word is inserted in the middle of the list of “nots” (“no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but *patient*, not a brawler, not covetous”). It emphasizes that the elder must be the very opposite of a brawling man—a gentle man.

- “just” (Tit. 1:8). The word means “righteous,” and refers here not to his experience of the imputed righteousness of Christ (though an elder certainly must have that), but to his own punctual obedience to the law out of gratitude. If he will be blameless, the elder must have a high regard for God’s law, and strive to keep it in the power of Christ.

- “holy” (Tit. 1:8). Again, while the elder must be a saint in whom God has worked the grace of sanctification, this is not primarily the idea here. The word here translated holy refers to one who is pious. Such an elder regards all

of his obligations before God, and seeks to carry out those obligations in the service of God. The word is to be taken with the previous word “just,” and indicates that the elder’s life is not to be one of merely *outward* obedience, or a keeping of the law only so far as the letter of the law requires; his is to be a complete, heartfelt obedience in all things.

- “temperate” (Tit. 1:8). The Greek word here translated indicates that the man is to show his strength by controlling himself. This is the chief way in which a man shows that he possesses the power of Christ: “He that is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city” (Prov. 16:32). By contrast, “He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls” (Prov. 25:28).”

God willing, next time we will turn to those qualifications that regard the elder’s family life. 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. WILBUR BRUINSMA

Church Extension, Church Reformation, and Domestic Missions (2)

In our first article on this subject we defined what church extension and church reformation were. We concluded that article with the thought that many in our churches believe that church extension (or domestic missions) may be accomplished only by means of church reformation. The result has been that in the past we have, for the most part, limited our domestic mission work to church reformation. We are going to pursue this more in coming articles. But there is one more matter in our

definition of terms that needs addressing. This has to do with refining the idea of church reformation. This will also lead us into an examination of what our Form for the Ordination of Missionaries designates as preaching the gospel to the dispersed.

In the strictest sense church reformation deals with the task of re-forming a church that is apostatizing. It is working with an existing congregation in an attempt to turn it from error and into the way of truth again. Such work is generally initiated by the officebearers of that church. Either the officebearers themselves perform the work of reformation or these officebearers request assistance from a faithful denomination of churches to

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perform the work. In our last article we mentioned that the Protestant Reformed Churches and Rev. Herman Hoeksema engaged in this type of work in the early years of our denomination. We also have followed this method with several of our mission fields in the past. We worked with a local church or churches until such time that we could organize them into a congregation in our denomination. This is church reformation in the narrow sense.

But from the outset our churches also have worked with small groups of believers that, on account of apostasy, decided it was time to leave their church(es), and after some searching asked us to work with them towards organizing them into a Protestant Reformed congregation. Historically, we have viewed this work as church reformation as well. And rightfully so. Abraham Kuyper viewed such small groups seeking to institute a church in their locale as the work of reformation. In his *Pamphlet on the Reformation of the Church*, Kuyper addresses the subject, "Concerning Reformation by Means of a Break with the Existing Congregation." In this section he writes,

Now, however, we will let the question rest for a bit and proceed in this paragraph on the assumption that a child of God is a member of a church which actually has become a false church. Our purpose is to investigate further how such a child of God must then participate in the *work of reformation* [italics mine—WGB].

We purposely write how he must engage in the work of reformation and not how he must walk out of the church. That last is an unspiritual conception of the matter.

Kuyper offers his advice to these saints engaged in such work of reformation a little later in that same section of his pamphlet. He suggests two possibilities:

[Either] you find in your locale another church which does not imitate the marks of the true church, but shows them in her life.... [Or] you do not find such a church in your locale. Then you would be obliged, along with those that are equally convinced as you are, to institute the church of God in your locale on the basis of your common confession.

Such groups, involved in what Kuyper calls "the work of reformation," have frequently contacted our Domestic

Mission Committee in the past in order that we might assist them in organizing as a congregation in the Protestant Reformed Churches. Working with such groups, then, is church reformation in a broader sense.

That our churches have always considered their working with groups of believers to be church reformation is evident from the constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee. According to the constitution there are only three categories of people with whom we do domestic mission work: the unchurched, the heathen, and believers who are interested in the work of church reformation.

The unchurched are (with some exceptions) those whose parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents at one time were faithful church attenders, but who themselves have drifted from the church and no longer see any need for belonging to a church. The vast majority of unchurched are, therefore, unbelievers who have a vague knowledge of the Christian faith because of their believing forbears but who reject that faith. In today's society this is by far the largest category of people.

The heathen are those who, according to the Form for the Ordination of Missionaries, have never heard or received the gospel. Many such people have immigrated to our country carrying with them their pagan religion. Because they now live in a country that has been influenced by Christianity, they know of it but are content to pursue their false religion. Rev. Thomas Miersma calls attention to this category of people in a *Standard Bearer* article in which he reported the work that Trinity Protestant Reformed Church in Houston, Texas (now closed) was performing. In the article, "Reaching the Nations with the Gospel of Grace" (*SB*, vol. 72, p. 426), Rev. Miersma explains:

...yet in North America there are enclaves of immigrants from heathen lands who have never known the gospel with whom we must work.

...As part of its official work of church extension as a congregation, our church in Houston has been given an opportunity to preach the gospel to the Hindu community of Sindi descent in Houston and to the Chinese immigrant community as well. While many today who have had the gospel in their generations will not hear, and will shrug off the Word in indifference, God has given Trinity an open door to speak His Word among those who have never heard the gospel in their generations.

According to the constitution of the Mission Committee, these heathen form the second category of people to whom the gospel must be preached. This too belongs to domestic mission work.

The third category is the work of church reformation. This labor is performed among believers who desire to re-form the congregation of which they are a part, or who break from their church in order to establish another congregation that is true to the Word. What distinguishes church reformation from the other categories listed in the constitution is that the objects of church reformation are those *who are already believers*. That is a given: a concerned church or a concerned group of people interested in church reformation do not need to be converted from unbelief. They already believe. This is why they seek reform. Even when our churches investigate an area where we have several contacts in the hopes of developing a mission work, we are eyeing people who have already shown interest in the truth and therefore are more than likely believers. Though this scenario perhaps stands on the edge between laboring with the unchurched and church reformation, for lack of a better distinction this can properly be called church reformation in the broader sense, simply because these people are believers.

But is there perhaps a fourth classification—one to which these groups of believers not affiliated with any church could belong? The original proposal for the preamble of the constitution of the Mission Committee to the synod of 1942 made mention of “the dispersed.” Notice: “although we look forward to the time the way will be opened for us to labor among the heathen, both here and abroad, *and among the dispersed* [italics mine—WGB], we are convinced that our present duty still lies in the field of church extension and church reformation....” It seems as though this proposal made the distinction between church reformation and laboring among the dispersed. Perhaps, then, those believers who have separated themselves from an apostatizing church and then seek affiliation with our denomination fit into a fourth category, a category we call “the dispersed.” They are not therefore the object of church reformation, but a labor among dispersed saints.

Upon some study of this idea, however, we find that laboring among the dispersed is not a fourth classification of people alongside of the heathen, the unchurched, and

those engaged in the work of church reformation but is, rather, a general term used to describe all domestic mission work.

According to the Form for the Ordination of Missionaries, the domestic missionary is one who is called to labor among the dispersed, in distinction from a foreign missionary, who is sent to labor among the heathen. It is clear from this division of labors that the term “dispersed” is used to designate in general all the labors belonging to a domestic missionary. It therefore comprehends every category of domestic mission work *with the exception of preaching the gospel to the heathen*. This can be a bit confusing because, whereas the Form speaks of labor among the heathen as the work of the foreign missionary, the constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee includes laboring among the heathen as the work of a home missionary.

This discrepancy can best be explained historically. The Form for the Ordination of Missionaries was written in the very early 1900s, prior to the large influx of heathen people and religions into our nation. A missionary sent to the heathen was viewed at that time as one who was sent to a foreign land where the gospel had not yet been preached. It is even conceivable that when the constitution of the Mission Committee was originally written in 1942 our fathers did not yet realize that the terminology “the heathen” would eventually refer to the heathen in our own land. When our Form for the Ordination of Missionaries assigns to the domestic missionary labor among the dispersed, the implication is that this constitutes the whole of his work. And it does, with the exception that now the domestic missionary may be called to labor among the heathen in our own land as well.

But if laboring among the dispersed was meant to embrace all of domestic mission work saving labor among the heathen, then we must prove that this includes labor among both believers and unbelievers. It must be shown that laboring among the dispersed includes church reformation and work among the unchurched.

Laboring among the dispersed includes, first of all, the work of church reformation in the narrower sense. The word “dispersed” comes from a Greek term meaning “scattered.” In a few instances, for example in James 1:1 and I Peter 1:1, the term “scattered” refers to the Jewish people

who had been scattered throughout the nations because of the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. As a result of this Dispersion there were Jewish communities spread throughout the then-known world. These communities had established their own assemblies or churches that met for worship in synagogues. When the apostle Paul preached in the various cities of his mission journeys, he used a particular method: he went to the Jews first, in an attempt to re-form these Old Testament churches into Christian churches. Paul was thus involved in church reformation in the narrow sense. He was merely following in his work the method Jesus had established for His disciples. When Jesus sent His disciples to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, it was for the purpose of calling the scattered people of the Old Testament church to faith and repentance. In Matthew 9:36 we read of Jesus looking upon these lost sheep of Israel and being “moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.” The point is: laboring among the dispersed encompasses church reformation in the narrow sense.

In the second place, this term “dispersed” also refers to church reformation in a broader sense. Prof. Ronald Cammenga, in his commentary on the Church Order, Volume 70 of the *Standard Bearer*, page 163, demonstrates this in his explanation of Article 39, which reads, “Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be placed under the care of a neighboring consistory.” He writes:

Already the Synod of Emden, 1571, concerned itself with the gathering of scattered groups of Reformed believers. The Synod urged classes and consistories to labor in nearby cities and villages where congregations had not yet been established. Special attention was to be paid to dispersed believers, those who had fled their localities because of persecution. Consistories should do everything in their power to assist these dispersed in the establishment of congregations in their new places of residence.

Prof. Cammenga points out that at times it is not feasible for a group of believers to be immediately organized into a congregation. One reason is the size of the group. It may be too small. Another is that the people of the group may not be “sufficiently grounded in the Reformed faith or informed in the Christian life.” The question then arises,

“What is to be done in the meantime?” The first possibility Prof. Cammenga presents is: “It is possible that the locale where the group is meeting be declared a denominational mission field.” This is church reformation in the broader sense. It too is preaching the gospel to the dispersed.

But, in the third place, so is laboring among the unchurched. It is true that the unchurched are generally (not exclusively) unbelievers who have forsaken the church and rejected the gospel of grace. But this does not number them among the heathen. The ancestors of the unchurched were a part of the church. The unchurched, therefore, belong to the generations of those who had the gospel but who now “shrug it off in indifference.” Some are indifferent because of their own rebellion and hardness of heart. But many are unchurched because the churches to which their forbears belonged were unfaithful and, as Israel of old, turned from the ways of God following in the ways of heresy and sin. When such churches forsake the truth of God’s Word, preaching and teaching the lie, the inevitable result is that they scatter the sheep. The Form for the Ordination of Missionaries targets the unchurched in its lengthy quotation from Ezekiel 34. Certainly, among the unchurched we find the scattered, broken, sick, lost sheep of God. In missions the church preaches the gospel to the unchurched indiscriminately in order that through this powerful work God “will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick” (Ezek. 34:16).

This article is a bit of a digression from the intent of the articles we are writing. Yet, it is an important tangent since we need to define carefully the terminology used in our churches in our evangelism and mission work in order to come to a unified understanding of it. The question still remains: Is there a present need to labor as Evangelism Committees and a Domestic Mission Committee beyond that of church reformation? Perhaps the vastly different environment in which the church finds herself in today’s society requires a reevaluation of the *emphasis* prescribed by the constitution adopted in 1942. Are we to emphasize laboring primarily with those who are already believers, or must we busy ourselves primarily in preaching the gospel to the unchurched and unbelieving of our society? This will require a reevaluation of our methods in order that our witness includes but is also broader than those of Reformed persuasion. We return to these questions in our next article. 

The Death of the NIV

“The NIV Bible is no more,” writes Jesse Johnson in a blog post entitled *Farewell, NIV*. Zondervan, the publishing company that owns the NIV (paid for its translation, copyrighted the material, and receives royalties for every edition of the NIV that is published), continues to publish an English translation of the Bible that it calls the NIV. The Zondervan website lists many versions of the NIV for sale.¹ But according to Johnson the NIV Zondervan publishes today is not the same as the NIV published from 1984 to 2011.² Here is Johnson’s explanation of how Zondervan killed the NIV:

A brief history of the NIV: Translated in 1984 (sic), it quickly became one of the most popular versions, especially in schools. Then in 2002 Zondervan released an update (TNIV), which went over as well as New Coke, and the beloved NIV was resurrected. This time Zondervan learned from their errors, and released an update that they called the NIV2011, and for one year they sold both it and the NIV. But with a name like NIV2011, shelf-life was obviously not in view, and last year they simply dropped the old and beloved NIV, and then shrewdly dropped the “2011” from the updated one. In short, they pulled a switcheroo. What you see on shelves today is the new version which is sold and marketed as the NIV.

Johnson provides statistical evidence for the drastic change between the 1984 and 2011 editions of the NIV.

¹ There are basic versions such as NIV Reference Bible; there are specialized versions such as the NIV for Archaeology and the NIV New Testament for Military Wives; and there are many “kid” versions such as NIV ClearlyU, NIV Pink Chocolate, NIV Thin-line: Stock Car Edition, as well as audio versions of the NIV that dramatize the Bible.

² The NIV New Testament was first published in 1973. The NIV Old and New Testament was first published in 1978. In 1984 Zondervan published a slightly revised edition that has become one of the most popular and widely used English translations of the Bible.

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Here are the stats: 40% of verses have been changed from the '84 edition of the NIV. The stat that Zondervan gives is that 95% of the Bible remains unchanged. I assume they are counting words and not verses, but even so I’m not sure how they got that number. When you consider individual words, the new version is 9% new. That might not seem like a lot, but in schools and with curriculum, verses are what is important, and that means that 4 out of 10 passages needed to be updated.

If you view Johnson’s article online you can click on the words “the stats,” which will take you to this web address: <http://biblewebapp.com/niv2011-changes/>. This website provides detailed statistical analysis about how different the 2011 NIV is from the 1984 NIV. Johnson’s conclusion is correct: the 1984 edition of the NIV is dead.

One might ask why we would be interested in the death of the NIV since the Protestant Reformed Churches did not adopt the NIV. We certainly do not mourn the death of the NIV. Rather, we mourned the fact that the NIV became such a popular translation of the Bible.

The NIV was and is an unfaithful translation of the Bible that is based on the flawed theory of Bible translation known as dynamic equivalency. Using the theory of dynamic equivalency, the translators of the NIV did not faithfully translate the words of the Hebrew and Greek Scriptures but felt free to change words in order to convey the thought expressed in the text. We reject the theory of dynamic equivalency because every word of the Bible is inspired and because the only way to convey the thought of a text is to use its words. I will not demonstrate any of the NIV’s weaknesses and errors since these have often been demonstrated since the NIV was published in 1978.

If we do not mourn the death of the NIV, why do we take note of it with interest?

The death of the NIV shows us how the devil is continuing his assault on the Word of God by means of ever changing (modernizing) Bible translations. It is very important that we recognize and admit that the bad modern versions of the Bible are devilish attacks on the Bible. This is especially important in our feeble age when few are willing to call evil, *evil*. Even though Johnson

criticizes the 2011 version of the NIV, he still writes that it is “not a bad translation.” He lumps the NIV with the KJV, NKJV, ESV, Holman, NAS, and NLT, all of which he describes as “good and trustworthy.”

But in the case of the “new” NIV Johnson himself provides the evidence that it is not “good and trustworthy.” Johnson criticizes the NIV’s new rendering of II Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, *the new creation has come*: The old has gone, the new is here!” In the old edition of the NIV the italicized words are rendered, “he is a new creation” (the KJV reads “he is a new creature”). Instead of describing the reality that a saved sinner becomes a new creature in Christ, the text now seems to espouse the post-millennial error that this present world is the new creation of Christ in which Christ’s kingdom will be established. Johnson rightly criticizes this translation because it is not based on the words of the text but on the “errant theology” of the translators. A version of the Bible that incorporates “errant theology” is neither good nor trustworthy, it is evil.

Johnson also notes the other glaring weakness of the 2011 version of the NIV. It is a “gender neutral” translation of the Bible. Where the original Hebrew and Greek use the pronouns *man*, *he*, or *him*, the NIV now freely uses, *person*, *they*, *one*, and other gender neutral pronouns. Such gender neutrality is simply unfaithful to the original Hebrew and Greek of the Bible. Rather than faithfulness to the original languages, the concern of gender neutrality is to satisfy the feminist movement that is devoted to the idea that there is essentially no difference between men and women. The new version of the NIV simply is not a reliable translation when it comes to God’s will concerning men and women.

We take note of the change from the “old” to the “new” NIV because it warns us that modern Bible versions are dedicated to catering to special agendas rather than faithfully translating the Word of God. Special interest groups have taken note of Zondervan’s willingness to twist Scripture in order to please those who have agendas. Shortly after the publication of the NIV2011, PETA clamored for an “animal friendly” version of the NIV. This was reported in an article published by the New York Daily News.

The cry for change comes after the 2011 NIV Bible

was released earlier this month, updated to include more gender-inclusive pronouns like “he or she” and “they” other than the “he” and “him” traditionally found throughout the Old and New Testaments.

PETA said it hopes the switch to include more gender-neutral language will spark translators to readdress the ways animals are referred to in the Bible. Supporters for the change argue that referring to an animal as “it” takes away its special, God-given identity.

Perhaps in the near future Zondervan will publish a version of the Bible that “humanizes” animals, denying the truth of God concerning the dominion of man over the other creatures God has made. The devil would rejoice to see that day.

Yes, the devil is behind the publication of wicked modern versions of the Bible. One can see his handiwork in the publication of the “new” NIV by Zondervan. Johnson refuses in his article to acknowledge that there may be any evil motives behind the changes Zondervan made to the NIV. Specifically he rejects the idea that the publishing company is driven by a profit motive. Nevertheless, Zondervan’s carefully orchestrated “switcheroo” has at least some appearance of deceit. Even though the company publicized the switch to some degree, one wonders how many people have purchased the new NIV without knowing it is radically different from the previous edition. But the greatest evil is that Zondervan publishes a book under the name *Holy Bible* that is in fact an *unholy* translation of God’s Word that twists and obscures the truth. This is the evil fruit (and a pet peeve of mine) of publishing houses controlling the translation as well as the publication of the Bible.

Why take note of the death of the NIV? Because it confirms for us that *faithfulness* is the most important criterion for the translation of the Bible. The NIV, perhaps more than any other modern version of the Bible, forced those who use the KJV to consider switching. The NIV presented the English-speaking world with a very readable version of the Bible, backed by many reputable scholars. Why not replace the KJV with it? Because the NIV simply cannot compare to the KJV when it comes to faithfulness to the Word of God. The KJV is a *faithful* translation of the Word of God, and therefore truly is *good and trustworthy*.

I was in the presence of another family on New Year’s

Day. A great-grandfather read Proverbs 26 from the KJV after the noon meal and closed with prayer. After he finished, four of his great-granddaughters prayed as they were taught by their parents, "Heavenly Father, we thank thee for this food and drink and for thy *holy word*, please forgive my sins for Jesus' sake. Amen." Knowing that the devil is constantly and craftily attempting to take God's Word away from us and our children, it is right that we

thank God for His holy Word, which we know we still have in the KJV.

It strikes me as a bit ironic that 2011 is the year Zondervan planned the death of the NIV. That was the year we celebrated the 400th anniversary of the KJV, which lives on as the most faithful translation of the Bible into English. Happy 403rd birthday KJV!! ☺

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA, review editor

Why Christ Came: 31 Meditations on the Incarnation. Beeke, Joel R. and William Boekestein. Reformation Heritage Books, 2013. 100 pages (paper). [Reviewed by Sarah Mowery.]

If someone asked me, "Why did Christ come to earth?" I would likely answer, "To save sinners"—with I Timothy 1:15 running through my mind. While true, my answer would hardly begin "to communicate the richness of Christ's incarnation" (quotation from the preface). Joel Beeke and William Boekestein's little book of 31 meditations on the Incarnation reminded me that there are many reasons why our Savior came into the world. These reasons include: to do the will of the Father, to bear witness to the truth, to destroy the devil and his works, and to receive worship. Each of the 31 meditations in this book focuses on one particular reason for Christ's coming.

Though the meditations are brief and certainly not exhaustive, they are replete with Bible texts. While some Christian writers cite from an array of Bible translations, in this book Beeke and Boekestein consistently quote from the KJV. They also include references to the confessions

Mrs. Sarah Mowery is a member of Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado.

and to a variety of Bible commentators and theologians, including John Calvin and Matthew Henry, and Christian classics like *Pilgrim's Progress*. Some of the meditations end with a stanza from the Psalter that is so familiar to us in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Beeke and Boekestein's writing is very readable. For the most part, the book is Reformed and theologically strong. For instance, there are a couple of references to man's having lost God's image when Adam fell, a notion that is thoroughly biblical but not widely accepted today. However, there are also several parts with which Protestant Reformed readers will disagree. For example, in the chapter entitled "To Bring Judgment," Beeke quotes an excerpt of Calvin that says Christ "offers salvation to all without reserve, and stretches out his arms to embrace all, that all may be encouraged to repent." (I was unable to locate this quotation in the e-version of Calvin's commentaries that I use.)

While the book does not have to be used as a devotional book for the month of December, I employed its 31 meditations to that end. At a time of the year when those who mention our Lord tend to leave Him in the manger, and even we can lose sight of Him amid our hectic holiday schedules, *Why Christ Came* proved an advent devotional that overall is God-centered and Christ-exalting. ☺

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Denomination Activities

The work of our denomination's radio ministry continues to grow. We recently came across a report

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

that the Reformed Witness Hour was ready to begin broadcasting in New York City, New York for the first time in our churches' history. Thanks to a friend of our radio program in Long Island, NY, the RWH was heard on Hope Radio (six FM frequencies on Sunday, reaching

nearly three million people), beginning Sunday, February 2, at 8:30 in the morning. Here is a description the station published:

"The Reformed Witness Hour" airing Sunday at 8:30 A.M. on 6 frequencies; 101.5 FM, 94.9 FM,

104.5 FM, 96.5 FM, 96.9 FM, and 107.1 FM. If you have family or friends in that area, please let them know about this exciting new area of outreach and remember to pray for this special gospel ministry, that God would use it to gather and build His church by the work of His sovereign Spirit.

Once again our PR Seminary in Grandville, MI invited those who were interested and had the free time to attend select classes this coming semester. Prof. Dykstra invited auditors to his Church History class, a class in which he planned to teach Ancient Church History; to his class on Reformed Confessions, concentrating on the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Belgic Confession; and to his History of Dogma class. Prof. Cammenga invited auditors to his Reformed Dogmatics class, which began with Eschatology, the study of the last things, and to New Testament History, a class in which he planned to treat New Testament history from the Passion of Christ through the missionary journeys of the apostle Paul.

We at the “News” extend our thanks to Mr. Chuck Terpstra for providing us with the following news item through his 3’R’s Blog:

On January 16, the Seminary faculty (minus Prof. Gritters, who was in India), registrar, and students traveled to Chicago, IL and the Lutheran School of Theology to view the rare books they have in their Gruber collection. The Seminary had asked in advance to see especially the books from the German Reformation collection. Dr. R. Klein from the LST

proved to be an informative and entertaining host, and the Seminary thoroughly enjoyed their time viewing the incredible rare books, including a copy of Luther’s 95 theses, published in 1517, and a Greek New Testament written on vellum from A.D. 850. From that visit the group walked the three blocks or so to the Oriental Institute Museum. This museum is a world-renowned showcase for the history, art, and archeology of the ancient Near East, and has many displays encompassing those nations and lands that played such an important role in Old Testament history. Since this museum left them so close to the Rockefeller Memorial Chapel on the University of Chicago campus (directly behind the museum), a tour of this remarkable structure was also enjoyed by faculty and students alike. We should also add that there was one more stop on their itinerary before heading home to west Michigan: a stop at the original Aurelio’s Pizza Restaurant in Homewood, IL, where the men enjoyed a delicious supper of Chicago-style pizza.

Every so often we find ourselves wishing we could be in two places at the same time. Such was the case on January 22, when we “wished” we could have been at the meeting of the Reformed Doctrines Class, meeting at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, under the leadership of Prof. Engelsma. As part of the subject of “church power,” Prof. Engelsma began that class by answering a question from the class, whether a member of the church who objects to a consistorial decision is exercising lawful “church power” or should

simply be dismissed as a “trouble maker.” The class was to continue with further instruction concerning the congregation’s governing herself particularly in discipline, and concerning the unique, Reformed doctrine and practice of Reformed church government as held and carried out by the PRC.

We are embarrassed to admit that we do not know much about this group, but, regardless, the PR Student Orchestra was pleased to announce its 2nd annual recital. It was held on January 23 at the Grandville, MI PRC. The group of musicians played a short ensemble program, as well as a few solos and smaller group numbers. Anyone interested in playing a stringed instrument or hearing the young people play fine orchestral music was invited to join them for a fun night of music. Perhaps if these young people have their 3rd annual recital next year we can find out more about them.

Young People’s Activities

From a recent bulletin from the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, we learned that they will be starting a Young People’s Group. The first meeting was scheduled for Friday, February 7, at the home of Rev. and Mrs. R. Kleyn. This group was meant for the young people of Covenant of Grace who were thirteen and older. Plans called for Bible study to center in the life of David, followed by a time of fellowship and food. The young people were also hoping to include some discussion about fund raising for the upcoming Young People’s Convention.

Sister-Church Activities

The deacons of our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church, organized a collection of clothing for the PR Churches in the Philippines, especially those affected by the recent typhoon, or for other poor in the churches who may have a need.

School Activities

The PTA of Genesis Christian School in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited all their supporters aged 16 and up to a Bowling Night on January 24, for two games of 5-pin bowling. If we have this correct, 5-pin bowling is played only in Canada. A perfect score of 12 strikes in one game is 450 points. Genesis PTA

awarded a Boston Pizza gift card to whoever scored the highest. All others had to pay for their pizza afterwards.

Minister Activities

Rev. Haak declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the vacant Faith congregation in Jenison, MI. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanksgiving to God, we remembered on December 28, 2013, the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents and grandparents,

JIM and BARB JANSMA.

We thank our heavenly Father for keeping them as husband and wife, and laying upon their hearts as covenant parents to bring up their children in the fear of the Lord. Our prayer is that God will continue to guide them in the future as He has in the past. Great is His faithfulness!

“All the faithful to His covenant
Shall behold His righteousness,
He will be their strength and refuge,
And their children’s children bless.”

Psalter 281:4

- * Peggy Jansma
- * Tim and Penny Kamps
Jaimie, Faith, Olivia, Hannah
- * James and Kelly Jansma
Derrick, Dylan, Thomas, Kori
Hudsonville, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The congregation of Southeast PRC expresses deepest sympathy to Ivan and Faye Korhorn and family, and to Joyce Rietema and her family in the death of their brother,
MR. TIM HEEMSTRA.

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

Rev. William Langerak, Pres.
Mark Ophoff, Assist. Clerk

Teacher Needed

■ The Protestant Reformed Christian School of Dyer, Indiana is accepting applications for two open positions. First, we are accepting applications for a full-time Discovery Center (Resource Room) teacher for the 2014-2015 school year. Also, the goal of our school board and association is to start a special education program in our school. To that end, we are also accepting applications for a Special Education teacher. Interested applicants are urged to contact our administrator, Ryan Van Overloop, at (219)558-2660 or ryan.vanoverloop@dyerprcs.org, or our Education Committee chairman, Matt Bennett, at (219)558-0861 or Matt_bennett_74@yahoo.com.

Reformed Witness Hour March 2014

Date	Topic	Text
March 2	“Job’s Absolute Trust in God”	Job 13:15
March 9	“Job’s Resurrection Hope”	Job 19:23-27
March 16	“Affliction Is for My Profit”	Job 23:8-10
March 23	“How Can I Be Right with God?”	Job 9:1-4
March 30	“Job Maintains That He Is Innocent”	Job 27:6