

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	The Hope of the Sons of God REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA	98
<i>Editorial</i>	Rare As a White Crow PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS	101
<i>O Come Let Us Worship</i>	Praising the Lord in the Congregation (6) REV. CORY GRIESS	104
<i>Taking Heed to the Doctrine</i>	Redefining Election REV. JAMES LANING	107
<i>A Word Fitly Spoken</i>	Exceeding REV. BILL LANGERAK	109
<i>All Around Us</i>	The Juggernaut of Apostasy REV. NATHAN LANGERAK	110
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	Disciplining Our Covenant Children in Love (2) REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG	114
<i>Go Ye Into All the World</i>	Queen Esther: A Model for Foreign Missions Today? REV. RICHARD SMIT	116
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	119

The Hope of the Sons of God

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

I John 3:2-3

In verse 1, John calls our attention to a most astonishing fact. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

To be called the sons of God means to receive the title or position of sons of God and be recognized as such. And notice who it is that calls us the sons of God. It is God Himself! God has called us His sons from eternity in that He has chosen us to be His sons. Consequently, in time God adopts us to be His sons and even transforms us into His own image through a new birth. And

always does He acknowledge us as His sons, as He will also in the Day of Judgment.

John extols the manner of God's love that gave us that position. "What manner of love...." It is a love that is first and that seeks us out even when we were enemies. It is a love that sent His only begotten Son to the cross to secure our sonship.

In the verses we consider for this meditation John addresses the church as beloved, which means loved ones. They were loved by John. But more importantly they were loved of God. In keeping with this theme of love, John shows the church its future as the sons of God. It does not yet appear what we shall be. But when Jesus shall appear we shall be like Him.

This hope in turn leads the sons of God to purify themselves.

Let's consider this hope of the sons of God, that we may be led to purify ourselves.



A glorious hope!

Hope is a certain expectation and longing for some fu-

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

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Editorial Office

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
dykstra@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave
Hudsonville, MI 49426
benjwig@juno.com

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@
hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Rev. Martyn McGeown
Apartment 10, Block D
Ballycummin Village
Limerick, Ireland

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ture good. There are especially three elements in hope. Hope is living in daily expectation of some future good. It is also a longing and desire for that future good to come. And, contrary to the way we use the term hope today, the biblical concept of hope expresses a certainty that this future good will come and be ours.

As the sons of God we have a certain hope for future good.

Interestingly, the ungodly, who are not the sons of God but of Satan, also have hope for the future. Their hope is limited by their unbelief. Their hope rises no higher than the earthly horizon. They look only for a greater earthly good, for earthly peace and prosperity. But their hope will ultimately fail because it is based on human achievement.

As the sons of God, we have a certain, that is, sure, hope for future good. This is because our hope is based on the perfect work of Jesus Christ. John speaks of one that "hath this hope in him." This "him" is Jesus Christ. John is speaking of a hope that is "in" or literally "upon" Jesus. This is a hope that rests upon Jesus. Such a hope is a certain hope.

John explains what this hope is in verse 2.

Now we are the sons of God.

In Christ we belong to the family of God through adoption and a spiritual rebirth. Because we are members of His heavenly household, God lives with us as our constant companion and friend and provides for all our needs for body and soul, both in time and eternity.

What a gift of love!

And it doth not yet appear what we shall be.

Greater things await us as sons of God.

When Jesus shall appear, we shall be like Him.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God come in the flesh, died on the cross and was subsequently raised from the dead and glorified in heaven with a heavenly body. One day He will appear on the clouds of heaven in great glory to judge the living and the dead. In that day we shall be like Him.

We shall be like Him, first, in that we will be raised as He was raised to receive a heavenly body. In the resurrection the corruptible (perishable) bodies we have now will be raised in incorruption. Our dishonorable and weak bodies that have succumbed to death will be raised in power and glory. Our present natural and

earthly bodies that limit us to the physical realm will be raised as spiritual bodies, adapted for the glories of heaven. In other words, we will be raised from the grave, even as Jesus was raised, so that we will be like Him.

But there is more.

We will also be purified from all sin, so that the image of God as it is in Jesus Christ will be perfected in us. As the sons of God we bear the image of God but imperfectly. There remains much of sin in us. This is because the work of salvation is only begun. But when Christ appears, we will be made like Him in that we will be conformed perfectly to the image of Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God. This will complete the work of salvation in us, enabling us to live in perfect communion and fellowship with God in the new creation.

We know this!

The meaning is that this is a well-known fact among the sons of God. It is well known that when Jesus shall appear, we shall be made like Him. And we know this because of another well-known fact. When Jesus appears, we shall see Him as He is. Jesus made this clear shortly before He was crucified. Jesus, in His high priestly prayer, said, "Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me" (John 17:24). Closely related to this is what Jesus taught in His great Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). The meaning is that we shall see God in all His glory as He is revealed in Jesus Christ. And we shall not see Him simply to gaze on Him, although that would be wonderful indeed. Think of Peter, James, and John, who were thrilled just to see Jesus in His glory on the Mount of Transfiguration shortly before His death. We shall see God, rather, in that we will be able to commune with Him through Jesus Christ in the fullness of fellowship. When we make an appointment to see the doctor, it is not just to stand in the room to look at him but rather to discuss with him our health concerns. So also when we shall see God, we will stand in His glorious presence as He appears to us in Jesus Christ, to commune with Him.

John sets this forth as the proof that we shall be made like Jesus in the day of His appearing. None can see God in the day of days except those who are perfectly

conformed to the image of His Son Christ Jesus. Those who appear in the judgment in sin, bearing yet the image of Satan, shall not see God. They will be rejected and cast into hell.

This then is the hope of the sons of God: to be made like Jesus in the final resurrection and, in Him, to see God in perfect friendship and fellowship.

The psalmist expressed this hope in Psalm 17:15: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."



A sure fruit!

"And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure" (v. 3).

The principle is that one's hope for the future will determine his behavior today. For example, a person whose hope is to retire in luxury will work hard and save up for the future. A young person whose hope is to be a professional athlete will practice hard to keep in shape and to hone his skills.

In like manner, the hope that the sons of God have for the perfection and glory that await them in Jesus Christ will have a dramatic effect on their behavior here below. They will purify themselves.

Of course!

The hope of the sons of God is to gain the final perfection of all things so that they may be made like unto Jesus and, without the hindrance of sin, to enjoy the eternal bliss of God's friendship and fellowship.

This hope of the sons of God will necessarily lead them to purify themselves in anticipation of and in preparation for that day. One does not hope for final perfection, then give himself to the defilement of sin. Those who defile themselves with sin without repentance declare that they are not the sons of God and that their hope is only in earthly things. Those who hope for the complete perfection that awaits the sons of God will purify themselves daily.

This purifying consists of two parts. It consists of removing the guilt of sin so that we are forgiven by God and reconciled to Him. It also consists of turning away from sin in our lives to live an undefiled life of holiness in the service of God. Since perfection is not attainable in this life, this aspect of purifying oneself means a daily turning from sin to serve the Lord and to grow in holiness.

This is possible only in Jesus Christ. We are totally incapable of purifying ourselves. All purifying and cleansing of sin is found in the purifying blood of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ made the perfect sacrifice that alone can cleanse us from our sins. His sacrifice alone removes our guilt before God so that we can be forgiven. His perfect sacrifice is also the power to turn us from sin to a holy life. And so one purifies himself by turning to Jesus in faith, to find forgiveness and the power of a new and holy life.

This is what a son of God does in anticipation of and in preparation for the hope that he has for the perfection of heaven.



A necessary calling!


Our calling is to purify ourselves as the sons of God.

Notice that the passage of this meditation simply informs us what the sons of God do. In this hope of final perfection they purify themselves.

But this implies the calling to purify ourselves daily in the cleansing blood of the cross.

This calling follows the pattern of Scripture. It tells us what the fruit of God's saving grace is and then admonishes us to live that way. These admonitions are the power of God to produce these fruits of grace in us.

So also here.

Let us live as true sons of God who, in the hope of final perfection, daily purify themselves in the blood of Christ, remembering always the admonition of Hebrews 12:14, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord." 

*...the hope that the
sons of God have
for the perfection and glory
that await them
in Jesus Christ
will have a dramatic effect
on their behavior here below.*

“Rare As a White Crow”

“**R**are as a white crow” is Abraham Kuyper’s description of how scarce discipline was in the church of his day. It was as rare as a white crow. I have seen a lot of crows in my life. We used to hunt crows once in a while in the orange groves outside of town. Waves of crows—“murders” of them, as they say—flew out of the foothills in the evenings to scavenge in the landfills at night. Never saw a white crow. And that was Kuyper’s point.

In the Netherlands of his day (1837-1920), Kuyper claimed, discipline was that rare. In the days we would consider to be some of the glory days of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, this fundamental third mark of the true church hardly showed itself. Is that how infrequently we observe discipline in the church of our day? In the Protestant Reformed Churches? In your congregation?

I thank God that, from my somewhat limited vantage point, this is not what I observe in the churches. In my own congregation the key is exercised. When I read reports of classis meetings, it is not infrequent to see that consistories sought classis’ advice to proceed to the erasure of a baptized member, or to the second public announcement of Christian discipline, in which the name of an impenitent

sinner will be mentioned. There are even times, though they are rare, when the Form for Excommunication is read. By the mercies of God toward the PRC, we are able to say that the elders are not ignoring their God-given calling to manifest this third mark of the true church. Faithful elders are seeking the salvation of the sinner, the purity of the church, and the glory of God—the three commonly mentioned goals of discipline.

But could discipline *become* so rare among us? And what would explain that it could have been lost in the land and church of our spiritual forefathers in the Netherlands?

A common complaint

Perhaps surprisingly, lack of Christian discipline in Europe was the complaint more often during what is sometimes considered to be “the most flourishing periods of Reformed theology.” Abraham Kuyper ministered at the end of the nineteenth century; but even at the end of the seventeenth century discipline was scarce in the Netherlands.

This was the complaint of Wilhemus à Brakel (1635-1711), a well-known Reformed pastor who was born only 20 years after the Great Synod of Dordt—flourishing days indeed. In his systematic the-

ology, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service*, first published in 1700, à Brakel laments:

...in general it seems as if the Lord Jesus did not give this key [of discipline] to His church. Not only are the small foxes which spoil the vine not caught, but great wolves have dominion there. How the wall has been broken down so that the vineyard is vulnerable to being trampled upon! The wild boar is rummaging in her, and the leaven is leavening the entire lump.... All this takes place because the ungodly have a place among His people.

Whether à Brakel was inclined to pessimism is a question, but he even judged that “there is no hope for improvement,” and he listed reasons for his bleak assessment: Everyone appeared to be sleeping the sleep of carelessness. The people no longer knew what behavior was considered to be offensive. Pastors were blind, he said, and many elders seemed as blind as the shepherds. The elders who did have discernment turned their heads so as not to see the blatant sins. Even if some elders did care, “there are so many situations where censure must be applied that they do not even know where to begin.” And if they would begin, they would “encounter so much opposition that (they) will become

discouraged and leave the task undone.”

Surprising for such days. But the situation in Kuyper’s day, and 200 years earlier in à Brakel’s day, should not be surprising. Scripture teaches that the church has always been tempted to abandon discipline.

In I Corinthians 5, Paul admonished the church of Corinth for a scandalous cover-up of sexual sin. The new congregation was accepting of a man who had committed the debauchery of incest. Rather than mourn about what ought to have been the church’s great embarrassment, they were puffed up. Instead of excommunicating him, they embraced him. Over against (we imagine) a few voices of criticism, they probably defended his membership. The chapter is a brief but thorough summons to the Corinthians: “Exercise discipline!”

A similar story is told in the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor in the opening chapters of Revelation. Two of the churches—Pergamos (22:12-17) and Thyatira (2:18-29)—were chastened for their slackness in discipline. Pergamos “held” the membership of false teachers, the Nicolaitans (14, 15). Thyatira suffered some so-called “Jezebel...to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (20). In the young fellowship of Christian churches—representative of New Testament Christianity—two must already be rebuked for negligence in discipline.

Slippery slope?

How could this happen in a

faithful Reformed denomination today? What might lead to such in a congregation or Reformed denomination that seeks to be faithful?

These are important questions in every age, even when it does not appear that there is present neglect in my or your denomination. If the church loses this mark, she ceases to be church. She does not remain a true church, claiming to be “merely a without-the-third-mark true church.” She becomes a false church. A church without discipline has become the world. She so conforms herself to the world that she becomes “the world.”¹

Our Reformed Confession of Faith is straightforward. From the Word of God we discern which is the *true* church (since all sects assume to themselves the name church) by the *marks* of the true church. The third mark is: “if church discipline is exercised in punishing of sin” (Belgic Confession, Art. 29). To the extent that a church lacks this third mark, to that extent she becomes false church. The slide soon becomes precipitous.

Probably no single cause leads to the abandonment of proper Christian discipline. It is probably also true that none of the *many* causes began as a clear determination to leave off this scriptural duty. Instead, gradually and almost imperceptibly, a church begins to lose sight of the importance of the work, until one day one of her members finds, by studying history, that his

church has turned into something that would be unrecognizable to her founding fathers.

What might some of these causes be?

Recently we celebrated God’s blessing of 450 years of Heidelberg Catechism preaching. If we abandon the practice of systematic preaching of the Catechism, Lord’s Day 31’s instruction to use the key power of discipline will likely not be heard regularly. Soon, the new generation will forget about the importance of the duty.

If we elect elders who have no strong commitment to discipline, these weak men will not lead us in the duty, and soon everyone’s natural aversion to this disagreeable practice will result in abandoning it.

If the angry response of the member being disciplined backs us off, or the fear of repercussions turns us off, or the love for peace at any cost drives us, discipline will be lost. If we officebearers would rather turn the other way because the sinning member has important connections in the church, maybe in the consistory, or if we are hesitant because we imagine that discipline is not loving, the mark will disappear.

A covenantal perspective

There are *many* reasons why discipline may be lost.

But there is *one* reason that may stand above them all. It is a failure to recognize that one of the deepest purposes for discipline is to defend God’s covenant.

One purpose of discipline is to save sinners, as Matthew 18:15 and

¹ Gordon Keddie put it this way in “Moral Failure and the Church,” *Reformed Presbyterian Witness*, May 2013, 16.

I Corinthians 5:5 teach. Another purpose is to keep the church pure, as I Corinthians 5:6, 7 teaches. The figure Paul uses here (leaven) shows that discipline prevents sin from spreading. The Church Order of the PRC mentions these two purposes in Article 71: “to reconcile the sinner with the church and his neighbor and to remove the offense out of the church of Christ.” Often a third purpose or goal of discipline is given as the glory of God, although this is not explicit in the article. Calvin’s way of expressing this was negative: “that the name of God be not blasphemed before the world.”

God’s precious covenant

But the deepest purpose of discipline, which in my estimation may well *combine* all these purposes, is that the covenant of God be honored. God’s beloved fellowship with His people must be protected. Not the *doctrine* of the covenant. But the covenant *life itself* of fellowship with God.

Discipline serves God’s covenant.

The covenant, as God’s *holy fellowship with His beloved*, may not be defiled. Discipline is God’s instrument—painful and difficult as it always is—to preserve from pollution the covenant. God’s precious covenant!

Let me explain: One of the most beautiful ways in which God *lives with* (has *covenant* fellowship with) His people is our assembly for public worship on the Lord’s Day. Then and there God meets for intimate fellowship with His

beloved family. That sacred covenant meeting must be kept *pure*. It may not be defiled, for example, by a man speaking the lie about God. Preachers who do not speak truth in these public meetings are the grossest defilement of the covenant. Words fail me to describe this horror with sufficient sense of abhorrence. These heretics are the greatest offense to God. Discipline is the means to remove this horrible offense. Discipline puts the heretic out of the pulpit and, if he is not repentant, out of the church. We hardly need an illustration to make this truth *clear*, but maybe an illustration will be helpful to

*Christian discipline
serves God’s covenant.*

emphasize it. Imagine a large and happy anniversary or birthday dinner where one of your prominent guests—whose duty is to respect you—begins to tell lies about you. Your shock and dismay could hardly be greater, and you would do what you could as soon as you could to rid yourself of this intruder. Public worship of the congregation is such a meeting of God and His people, a covenant meeting.

Likewise, *members* who resist the preaching of truth, believing and confessing false doctrine, dishonor God. Also they spoil the meeting of God with His people and thus may not be allowed to continue as members.

The Lord’s Supper celebrated in

public worship is another intimate expression of covenant fellowship. In this sacred covenant meal, God’s believing children sit with Him to partake by faith of His own Son’s life. As our Form for administering the Lord’s Supper indicates, this is a meal reserved for guests who confess the truth and live godly lives. Those whom God invites to this supper are humbled by their sins, believe the promises of God, and “purpose... to walk uprightly before him....” That is, God’s hallowed supper is reserved for guests who walk daily in repentance and faith. Those who do not are warned to keep themselves from the table. And if necessary, they must be kept away from the table by the elders through Christian discipline. The very first step of discipline is silent censure, which by definition is a barring of the impenitent from the Supper.

God’s covenant is holy.

The church may not allow the *covenant* to be broken and profaned by impenitent intruders on it.

The elders and church that do not take this seriously should reread the warnings of Leviticus 26: “If ye despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague.... I will set my face against you.... I will walk contrary unto you, and will punish you seven times [covenant number!] for your sins.”

Christian discipline serves God’s covenant.

Let us not make it a rarity. 

Praising the Lord in the Congregation (6)

The Element of Singing

Praise ye the LORD. I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.

Psalm 111:1

Introduction

Last time we began to examine one of the main elements of Reformed worship that contains our response to God in the service, the element of singing. We discovered that the regulative principle requires the singing of praise in public corporate worship. We noticed the unique form of communication that singing is, fitted for our worship of God from our whole hearts. Finally, we saw how singing is a unique part of our dialogue with God in the covenantal assembly. It is a giving of all that we are to Him in response to His giving all that He is to us in His Word.

Singing as Dialogue of the Congregation with God

It is not only singing itself that is a unique part of the dialogue of worship. *Congregational* singing is a unique part of the dialogue of worship. The singing we do in the public, corporate worship service is and should be *congregational* singing. We are a *body* that has been called together to meet with Jehovah face to face. And our response to Jehovah, who speaks to us as a body, must be given also as a body.

The psalmist in Psalm 111:1 recognizes the importance of that. "I will praise the LORD with my whole

heart, *in the assembly of the upright, and in the congregation.*" The psalmist understands that the church is a body, and he does not want to sing to God only by himself. He wants to be bound with the body, to place his voice amongst the other voices and be as one coming to praise Jehovah. He is committed to joining with those who are the upright, those who also have this greatest desire to exalt the name of Jehovah God. He wants to be a part of that group that has one purpose, to lift high the name of God.

There is something wonderful about congregational singing. We should look forward to singing together as a body of Jesus Christ, to be amongst the assembly of the upright declaring the name of the Lord. At the prospect of this we should cry out with the psalmist in Psalm 122:1, "I was *glad* when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD."¹

The Reformation of the sixteenth century restored congregational singing to the church. In the Middle Ages singing had degenerated into the work of individual monks or choirs of monks. But as the Reformation restored biblical doctrine, it also restored congregational singing. When the Reformation restored the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, a natural implication was a restoration of congregational singing. Every believer in the pew holds the offices of prophet, priest, and king. All must have the privilege of exercising those offices, bringing praise to God without going through an earthly mediator.

Choirs, then, and solo performances, can do an injustice to the truth that the congregation has gathered together as a body before Jehovah, and that each one comes in that office of believer whether child or older member. Besides that, we must remember that the public corpo-

Rev. Griess is pastor of the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2013, p. 464.

¹ Psalm 122:1.

rate worship service is not a concert. We are not here to be entertained. We are not the audience of the praise and worship taking place. God is the audience of our songs and worship. We are here to give God praise together. He is the audience, and all must speak to Him.

As the body of Christ does that in the worship service, there is a wonderful combination of the individual and the communal. There is no individualism as the body joins together in the chorus of praise. But there is no depersonalization either. We are a *body* gathered here singing, but there are still *individuals* who sing. It is still I who sings and I remain me, personally singing from a heart that individually wants to honor and worship God. But as I come in the body I am joined to something that is more than me. I am united with the upright who also from the heart individually and personally want to seek and worship this great God.

What to Sing

It is an attribute of the Psalms that they were inspired by God to maintain perfectly this combination of the individual and the communal in the body of Christ. The Psalms are written in such a way that at times they represent the individual, but always as a part of the body of Christ. There are many beautiful and theologically-sound non-inspired songs out there that may be sung as a part of the Christian life generally. But many of those non-inspired songs are songs that are only about the individual's personal salvation before the Lord. The Psalms, however, even if they are about the individual, are always about the individual as he lives his life in the covenant community, as a part of the church. So that there is always a combination of the individual and the communal, no matter what Psalm you read or sing.

Some Psalms are explicitly church Psalms. They are about the church as a whole. And in those Psalms that express the praise and desire of the church as a whole, there is also the desire of the church as a whole as it is experienced by the individual. Alternatively, in the Psalms that are written with the first personal pronouns "me" and "I" there is the experience of the individual, but always as he is a part of the whole body of Jesus Christ. This is one of the things that make the Psalms so appropriate for the singing of praise in public, corporate worship.

The Psalms are most appropriate for singing in cor-

porate worship because they are given to the church by God for this purpose. Though written in the Old Testament, they are still fitting for God's people today. They are God's inspired songs, and when we sing them, we are singing God's Word back to Him. You remember earlier in this series I said that at every point in the service the Word of God must be taken up, for the Word is the power in the worship of God's name. Here too, in singing, God has given us His Word. He has given us a specific collection of songs, inspired for the singing of praises to Himself. Some will make the argument, if singing is like prayer, and we don't pray the same prayers, why do we sing the same Psalms? The answer is precisely this, that God in His Word did not give us a separate book of prayers, but He did give us a separate book of songs for the church to sing.

And we can be thankful that He did. These Psalms contain every emotion of the child of God as he lives life in the covenant. Calvin once said that these Psalms are an anatomy of the soul. Every aspect of the life of the human soul is represented in the Psalms. They contain joy, lament, even holy frustration. They contain pleading, helplessness, and sorrow, and they contain great delight. It can be the case sometimes that when churches use non-inspired songs in worship, they are always happy songs. Of course, the Christian must be happy, and the Christian does have a deep sustaining joy in his life, but every time we come to worship we are not on cloud nine, and do not need to be. To pretend to be can be unreal, even fake.

Sometimes the child of God comes to the worship of Jehovah's name and he needs to lament before his God. Sometimes he needs to express disappointment, still with respect, as the Psalms do. Sometimes he needs to plead. Sometimes he needs to express helplessness. Sometimes he needs to speak of a sorrow that is deep and real. And all of this is contained in the Psalms. All that we are as children of God is there, and the Psalms can lead us to express all that, while through it all still expressing praise to God! Through the Psalms' laments, there is still praise. Through the disappointment, there is still praise.

Human nature never changes. God never changes. Though progressive, the covenant is ever essentially the same covenant. And though we now sing the Psalms with New Testament understanding, the Psalms are for us now

just as much as they were for the people of God in the Old Testament. We see Christ now, and the fulfillment of all the Old Testament types and shadows, but these Psalms still represent our life in the covenant of grace and the praise of our hearts.

Jesus sang Psalms as part of His regular worship when He was upon the earth. Jesus worshiped in the synagogue, and the synagogue was a Psalm-singing synagogue. Besides that, Jesus carried on the tradition of Psalm singing in conjunction with the ceremonies of God's people. After the institution of the Lord's Supper in Matthew 26:30, the Scriptures say of Jesus and His disciples, "And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives." That "hymn" was really a collection of psalms called the great Hallel, or the great praise. It consisted of Psalms 113-118. That set of Psalms was normally recited or sung at the end of the celebration of the Passover, and the Lord Christ and His disciples sang them after the first Lord's Supper.

When Colossians 3:16 speaks of singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, it is possible that all three of those words refer to the Old Testament book of Psalms.

The historical record of the church adds some weight to the argument for Psalm singing in worship. It is well documented that the early church, following the worship of the Jewish synagogue, sang Psalms in worship. And while in the Middle Ages the church turned away from Psalm singing, the Reformation was a return to the singing of Psalms. So much so is this true that at one point the term Psalm-singer was almost synonymous with the term Protestant.²

During the Reformation, it was especially John Calvin who led the charge in the return to the singing of Psalms. Writing in the preface to his Genevan Psalter, he puts the case best:

And, indeed, we know from experience that singing has great strength and power to move and to set on fire the hearts of men in order that they may call upon God and praise him with a more vehement and more ardent zeal. It is to be remembered always that this singing should not be light or frivolous, but that it ought to have weight and majesty. Now what Augustine says is true, namely that no one can sing anything worthy of God that he has

² Joel Beeke quoting Michal LeFebvre in *The Outlook*, July-August 2010, Vol. 60, No. 4, pp. 19-24.

not received from him. Therefore, even after we have carefully searched everywhere, we shall not find better or more appropriate songs to this end than the Psalms of David inspired by the Holy Spirit. And for this reason when we sing them, we are sure that God puts the words in our mouth as if he himself were singing through us to his own glory.³

The Blessings We Receive from the Use of This Element

Although first of all and primarily for the lauding and exaltation of the name of Jehovah God, singing in the public worship also grants blessings upon the singers. The first of those blessings is that the congregation is edified by her own singing. Colossians 3:16 speaks of this when it says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; *teaching and admonishing one another* in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." When the congregation sings to God the words of the Word of God, she also teaches and admonishes herself. Each one hears others singing and each one hears himself singing the words of Jehovah God. In this way, individuals teach each other and themselves the Word being sung.

When we sing Psalm 8, we teach each other the doctrine of creation and the effect that that doctrine should have upon our piety. When we sing Psalm 51, we teach each other about the depths of our sin. When we sing Psalm 119, we teach each other about sanctification and

³ It is for these reasons and others that the PRC is a Psalm-singing denomination. We sing almost exclusively Psalms in our worship service. I say almost because the Protestant Reformed Churches have, nevertheless, never been exclusive Psalmists. They have never applied the regulative principle as demanding exclusive Psalmody, but rather to the demand to sing God's Word. This is evident from the fact that the Church Order in Article 69 says the 150 Psalms of David shall be sung, and then besides them some of the inspired songs of Scripture such as the song of Mary, the song of Zacharias, and a few other hymns. In addition, every Protestant Reformed Church sings a biblical hymn every worship service. The opening doxology is a trinitarian hymn. "Praise God from whom all blessings flow" is scriptural, no doubt, and is a song sung in many churches historically, but it is not a Psalm. It is the last part of a hymn that was written by an Anglican bishop named Thomas Ken in 1674. However, the Protestant Reformed Churches are committed to near exclusive Psalm singing in worship for the reasons above and others.

its connection to the Word. When we sing Psalm 23, we teach and admonish each other about assurance of salvation. And many more examples could be given.


The final blessing of singing is the absolute delight that we experience in worshipping Jehovah God in song. We said at the beginning that God commands us to sing in worship. This is our duty. He calls and commands us to do this. Yet, by the Spirit of Jesus Christ this duty becomes a great delight for the child of God. Part of the reason why God commands singing in the worship is that we might enjoy His presence, for in song Jehovah comes close to us. When we exalt His name, He comes near to us, and in the glorifying of Him He bows down, as it were, and presses Himself close.

And this is our chief end, to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. The human soul finds full meaning and full joy as He comes close to us in the worship of His name. Who has not experienced this? Sometimes we come to the worship of God with an unprepared heart, sometimes a heart that is even bitter or hard. Don't you experience that it is not until songs of praise fill the lips that God softens the heart and the soul is lifted to our great King and we delight to be in His presence?

Our sinful nature prevents us from experiencing that sometimes. There are times when we just mouth the words, and the singing to Him is pure duty with little delight. Nonetheless, we still sing. We are still called to sing, and it is good that we do, for we dig trenches—patterns,

habit—by our obedience. The trenches we dig sometimes are filled with the waters of great delight so that duty does become delight. Nevertheless, we dig those trenches, and we do so knowing that one day the sinful nature will be completely removed.

In that day the flood waters of delight will fill those trenches fully and perfectly for all eternity. The church of God will worship and will delight in that worship always and forever. Imagine what it will be like in that day, singing together in that great assembly in heaven with no sinful nature to hold us back. It will be pure delight, giving of ourselves fully to Jehovah God with everything that we are in song. An assembly of the upright will be gathered that no man can number, and we will join together in glorious, Spirit-filled praise.

Revelation 7:9-12: After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, Saying, Amen: Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen. 

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

REV. JAMES LANING

Redefining Election

A previous article (April 15, 2013, p. 320) spoke of how today many are redefining the term redemption. The redemption of which they speak is very different from the redemption spoken of in Scripture:

Rev. Laning is pastor of Hull Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Previous article in this series: August 2013, p. 444.

- They speak of a “redemption” for this world, rather than for the church.
- This redemption would involve not a deliverance from sin, but rather some external changes in society designed to improve merely the bodily life of human beings.
- Individuals of different religious faiths could join hands as “redeemers,” working together to bring this about.

This is a very serious, radical redefinition of a fundamental doctrine of Holy Scripture.

Those who go down this road will likely end up redefining other doctrines as well. Consider, for example, the connection between election and redemption. Election refers to God's eternal decree to redeem some people. That being the case, redefining redemption will likely lead to redefining election as well.

In this article we consider an example of this. We take a look at an attempt made by some today to change the doctrine of election, so that it will fit with this new doctrine of redemption.

Rejecting double predestination

Of our three Reformed confessions, the Canons of Dordt explain the doctrine of election in the greatest detail. According to Article 6 of the First Head of the Canons, we confess to believe:

the profound, the merciful, and at the same time the righteous discrimination between men equally involved in ruin; or that decree of election and reprobation, revealed in the Word of God.

This article of the Canons speaks of God's decree concerning salvation as being one decree with two aspects (election and reprobation). Those who hold to the Reformed creeds, therefore, confess that God has eternally chosen to save some people, and has reprobated the others. This doctrine concerning both election and reprobation has been commonly referred to as *double predestination*.

There are many today, however, who refer to themselves as Reformed, but who nevertheless reject this biblical teaching. Some even reject it explicitly:

It is our view that double predestination, despite being taught by some of the most significant theologians in the Christian tradition, is a mistaken interpretation of scripture's depiction of election.¹

This doctrine—taught in our Reformed confessions,

¹ Richard J. Plantinga, Thomas R. Thompson, and Matthew D. Lundberg, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (2010; repr., New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 355.

and not just by some “significant theologians”—the three Calvin College professors, who wrote the book quoted above, come right out and reject.

They do, however, claim to hold to the doctrine of election. But they redefine what is meant by the term, and thus teach a new doctrine of election, one that goes well with the new doctrine of redemption.

Salvation for more than the elect

The elect are the ones whom God has unconditionally chosen to save from their sins. The elect and the saved, therefore, are one and the same.

But that doctrine does not fit well with the teaching that God desires to redeem this world. If God has elected to save only some people, then there is no redemption for those who are outside of the elect.

Thus a new doctrine of election has been sought. And one that appeals to many sounds like this:

To be chosen, to be elect, therefore does not mean that the elect are the saved and the rest are the lost. To be elect in Christ Jesus, and there is no other election, means to be incorporated into his mission to the world, to be the bearer of God's saving purpose for his whole world....²

According to this new doctrine, the elect are not the only ones saved. There is a salvation for those who are outside the elect.

And there is more. According to this new doctrine, the elect are chosen for the sake of the non-elect. Together the elect are chosen to be “the bearer of God's saving purpose” to those who are not elect.

In other words, the elect are chosen by God to serve the non-elect. But is that the correct relationship between election and service? Consider the following passage from Romans 9:

(For the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according

² Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 86–7. Rev. Newbigin (1909–1998) was an ordained minister in the Church of Scotland who became the Associate General Secretary of the World Council of Churches. He is quoted by the three Calvin College professors in a section of their book that promotes a “rethinking of the doctrine of election” (p. 357).

to election might stand, not of works, but of him that calleth;) It was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated (Rom. 9:11-13).

God says the reprobate serve the elect. The church is not chosen for the sake of this world. Rather, God makes

use of this world for the good of His church. This new doctrine turns this completely around.

This serves to illustrate that the changes being promoted today are not minor. God speaks of redeeming the church, but many are speaking of redeeming this world. God says that Esau shall serve Jacob, but many today are saying that Jacob must serve Esau.

... to be continued. 

A WORD FITLY SPOKEN

REV. BILL LANGERAK

Exceeding

Among the many wonderful virtues of the true, eternal, and living God is that He is exceeding. We might be inclined to think of the word “exceeding” merely as some ordinary adverb or adjective. But in Scripture, ‘exceeding’ is a perfection of God. God exceeds in everything (except sin and unrighteousness, of course). And although Scripture applies “exceeding” to many different things and activities, it also makes clear that ultimately only God is exceeding. Whatever or whoever else Scripture may call exceeding is always exceeded by God Himself. Whereas nothing can or does exceed Him.

The word “exceeding” is akin to our superlative suffix –est. It describes something of outstanding quality, beyond measure or limits, to the extreme, maximum, or that which surpasses all others. So the waters of the flood prevailed exceedingly upon the earth (Gen. 17:9). The fornicating men of Sodom were exceedingly sinful before the Lord (Gen. 13:3). At Sinai, the trumpet calling the people to meet God was exceedingly loud (Ex. 19:16). And Solomon was exceedingly wise (I Chron. 2:22). But when describing God, “exceeding” refers to His absolute superiority, greatness, and even infinitude. Although the term “infinite” appears only three times in Scripture (and only once with the meaning we usually associate with it), God is indeed infinite (B.C., Art. 1). And His infinitude is clearly and repeatedly taught by this word “exceeding.”

Although God is exceeding in everything He is and everything He does, Scripture directs our attention to two particulars. First, God exceeds in grace. Scripture says the grace of God is exceedingly abundant with faith and love in Christ Jesus. And we are directed to pray for this exceeding grace of God in us (II Cor. 9:14). Secondly, God exceeds in might. The apostle Paul prayed that the church might know the exceeding greatness of God’s power and know what makes this power so exceeding. And what especially makes it so exceeding is not simply that it is inexhaustible, but that God uses His power for our benefit (Eph. 1:19), it is the only power by which we believe, and God uses it to show us His exceedingly great love and the riches of His kindness toward us through Jesus (Eph. 2:17; 3:19).


The apostle Paul also teaches that God’s power exceeds even all that we can ask or think (Eph. 3:20). Think of any power—muscular, creaturely, nuclear, electrical, gravitational. God’s power exceeds it. Think of how God has used His power in the past—to create all things in six days by His Word (Rom. 1:20); to move holy men of old to speak (and write) His Word (II Pet. 1:21); to send His only begotten Son in our flesh to die for our sin and be raised up again (Luke 1:5; Rom. 1:4). God’s power exceeds all that. Think of how God uses His power now to uphold and govern the universe, to maintain the stars in their courses, to send forth continual heat from the sun, and to establish or overthrow nations. God’s power exceeds that. And now think of all we could possibly ask God to do with His power—to save and sanctify us from

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

sin; to help us in any distress and adversity; to overthrow any sin and even Satan in this world; to perfect all things in the everlasting kingdom of Christ. God's power exceeds all that too.

Scripture also reminds us that God is exceedingly generous. Our Lord's beneficence is exceeding because essentially what God gives is Himself. So He said to Abraham, "I am...thy exceeding great reward" (Gen. 15:1). His covenant promise, therefore, was not simply to bless this father of all the faithful, but to do so exceedingly, both personally and in his generations. Explicitly God said, "I will multiply thee exceedingly; I will make thee exceedingly fruitful; and I will multiply thy seed exceedingly" (Gen. 16:10; 17:2, 6). And being exceedingly faithful to keep His promises, God made the children of Israel exceeding in might (Ex. 1:7), gave them an exceedingly good land (Num. 14:7), and ruled them by exceedingly honorable and glorious kings (I Chron. 19:25; II Chron. 17:12). Jesus, however, exceeds them all and in every way.

In Jesus God gives. He gives with exceeding power, grace, and generosity. He gives far above all that we can ask or think. By the exceedingly gracious working of His exceedingly great power, God through Jesus Christ adopts us as His children and heirs with Abraham. He

gives to us exceedingly great and precious promises that by these we might be partakers of the divine nature (II Pet. 1:4). The result is that although at times we might fear exceedingly (Matt. 17:24), He gives us a faith that grows exceedingly (II Thess. 1:3). Although we might tremble exceedingly before His presence (Heb. 12:21), He also makes us exceeding glad with His countenance (Ps. 21:6). Times of exceeding sorrow (Matt. 26:22), He turns to exceeding joy (Ps. 43:4). If reviled, persecuted, and spoken against falsely, we rejoice exceedingly, for great is our reward in heaven (Matt. 5:12), and our momentary afflictions work for us a far more exceeding weight of glory (II Cor. 4:17). Although we often faint, we can pray exceedingly (I Thess. 3:10). And although by the commandment sin becomes exceedingly sinful to us (Rom. 7:13), so also by His justifying grace and sanctifying power each believer can say, "My soul has kept thy testimonies and I love them exceedingly" (Ps. 119:167). Therefore, unto Him that is exceedingly able to keep you from falling and present you faultless before His exceedingly glorious presence with exceeding joy; to the exceedingly wise God our Savior, be exceeding glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen (Jude 1:24-25). 

ALL AROUND US

REV. NATHAN LANGERAK

The Juggernaut of Apostasy

This year is the tenth anniversary of the formation in the Netherlands of the Reformed denomination *De Gereformeerde Kerken Hersteld* (the Reformed Churches restored [RCr]). In 2003 these churches liberated themselves from the *Gereformeerde Kerken Vrijgemaakt* (the Reformed Churches liberated [RCN-lib]), the churches of Klaas Schilder and mother of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches (CanRC). The RCr now consist of twelve churches divided into two classes.

Since their separation the RCr have maintained their

Schilderian convictions about the covenant, a charge that will not disappoint them. For instance, they note in the introduction to their letter to the 2013 CanRC Synod that

after the Liberation in 1944, individual members of the liberated churches decided over time to migrate to North America, mostly for economic reasons. When the first wave of immigrants came to North America in the late 1940s, they first sought the possibility of joining with the Protestant Reformed Churches in America (PRC), but these efforts were unsuccessful. The PRC maintained that God made his covenant with the elect only, which was not an acceptable doctrine for the liberated members.¹

Rev. Langerak is pastor of the Protestant Reformed Church in Crete, Illinois.

¹ J. Houweling, "The Letter of the CRCA...of the RCN...to the Synod Carman 2013 of the Canadian and American Reformed Churches," *Reformed Continua* 11 (April 2013).

In that same letter the RCr criticize the CanRC for even admitting the internal and external distinction in the covenant, a red cape to the liberated covenantal bull.

We will give another example. Your intensive search for unity with the URCNA, which recently reinforced the wrong doctrine regarding internal and external covenant...has led to the following tolerant statement of two of your professors: "It is theoretically possible that some ministers preach an internal/external distinction within the covenant, and that this would be tolerated within the Canadian Reformed federation."²

The RCr warn against the CanRC's relationship with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, that the Westminster standards with their teaching of

the concept of "more or less pure" (W.C. Art. 25.4) in combination with the "invisible catholic church" (W.C. Art. 25.1), and an ambiguous doctrine on the covenant with the emphasis of the election (LC, Q/A 31) may give rise to pluriformity, false ecumenism and tolerance of heresies.³

The Liberated did and still do err in their fear of election and their view of the covenant cut free from election; as far as I can tell, so do the RCr. The ecumenical efforts of the CanRC with other Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the United States and Canada, which the RCr sharply criticized, are due to those other denominations' succumbing to the influences of Schilderian covenant theology through the heretical teachings of the Federal Vision.

For years the RCr have published the *Reformed Continua*, an English language paper to inform the English-speaking Reformed church world about the denomination. In recent editions of the magazine, the RCr remembered their liberation. In April 2013 they published a special edition containing their feisty letter to the CanRC Synod 2013, recalling the causes of the liberation of the RCr. The October 2013 edition contains an article for the youth that reviews the causes of the formation of the RCr, including destruction of Sunday observance, rampant criticism of Scripture, corruptions of the song-book by theologically wrong hymns, and open violations of the seventh commandment in the RCNlib.⁴

² J. Houweling, *ibid.*

³ J. Houweling, *ibid.*

⁴ Berdien Heres, "What was it about again? The Liberation of

In the special edition of May 2013, S. de Marie, minister in the RCr, reviewed the important book *The Ongoing Revolution: The Development of the Reformed Churches in Perspective*, written by G. Dekker, professor emeritus in sociology of religion at the Free University of Amsterdam and member of the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (GKN). The book is based on his research into the development of the RCNlib from 1970 to 2010.⁵

De Marie entitled his review article "From Reformed to Secularized Churches?" Both the book and the review are a catalog of the appalling apostasy that has overtaken the churches of Schilder as the result of revolution against the Reformed creeds and the Word of God, a revolution that has led to a thoroughly secularized church.

[Dekker also wrote] a book in 1992 called, *The Quiet Revolution*, in which he traced developments in the (synodical) Reformed Churches from 1950 to 1990. In it he showed how over a period of forty years these churches increasingly conformed to the world. This process of secularization led to a decline in membership, a course that has continued much stronger after 1990. How did it happen? It occurred, says Prof. Dekker, because of a desire in these churches to be open and to adapt to the world....

Prof. Dekker's conclusion in 1992 was that by their openness towards society, the synodical churches had gradually but steadily engaged in a "quiet revolution" of adapting to the world. This occurred at the expense of their orthodox doctrine of Scripture and resulted in a loss of their reformed identity.

The "(synodical) Reformed churches" are the GKN that expelled Schilder in 1944 and precipitated the formation of the RCNlib. *The Quiet Revolution* shows that the GKN—the churches of Abraham Kuyper, J. Ridderbos, B. Wielenga, and H. Bavinck—left their first love, succumbed to the siren song of the world, and were wrecked on the rocks of doctrinal modernism and world conformity.

After he published this book on the revolution in the GKN, Professor Dekker was invited to speak to the RCNlib at their fiftieth anniversary celebration in 1994. In a provocatively entitled speech "Are the churches on

2003," *Reformed Continua* 13 (October 2013).

⁵ S. de Marie, "From Reformed to Secularized Churches?" *Reformed Continua* 12 (May 2013). Subsequent quotations from Dekker's book are from this article.

a slippery slope?" he spoke of a "new openness" evident in the RCNlib who were "increasingly adapting to the world, even though their doctrine was still orthodox." At the time, he made this dire prediction: "The liberated will in the future give evidence of having undergone drastic changes. They will increasingly adjust to society around them," a development that he prophesied would mirror the earlier developments of his own GKN.

His prophecy came true, as he amply demonstrated. De Marie corroborates the revolution against God's Word and the creeds that has overtaken Schilder's churches. They are afflicted with all the false doctrines and wickedness of life that characterize the GKN. There is rampant criticism of Scripture, especially unbelief of Genesis 1–11, the miracles of Scripture, and the historicity of Scripture's persons, facts, and figures. There are denials of the doctrines of grace, including universal reconciliation. They have abandoned the Reformed confessions as merely historical documents, theologically relative, and as having no active place in the life of the church.

These doctrinal errors in the RCNlib have been accompanied by gross wickedness of life: rampant divorce, adjustment of the church's position on divorce and remarriage to the needs of the situation, acceptance of living together before marriage as normal, approval of homosexuality, and violation of the fourth commandment.

These errors accompanied ecumenical efforts toward apostatizing Reformed churches, eventually with Lutherans, Roman Catholics, Arminians, and now with the thoroughly apostate national church called the PKN, a denomination into which virtually all Protestant churches in the Netherlands have merged.⁶

Just as important as Dekker's warning of this dreadful apostasy is his warning about *how* it happened in the churches of Schilder. At the root Dekker points to "openness [*openheid*]" : "Prof. Dekker considers openness towards society and church as the origin and the core from which most other changes have emerged. De Marie makes clear that what Dekker means by "church" is the apostatizing church. De Marie agrees: "We are of the opinion that Dekker accurately determines the real origin

⁶ These things are documented in the letter of the RCr to the RCNlib found at <http://www.reformedcontinua.nl/article/34>. These are also mentioned throughout Rev. de Marie's review.

of the revolution that is occurring within the RCNlib." Openness means the exact opposite of the antithesis. The apostasy began with the efforts, both deceptive and bold, to overcome the antithesis in church and life that God places between His people and the world and the apostatizing church.

De Marie argues that the "openness" in the life of the people in their organizations and relationships were "catalytic" in their openness in ecclesiastical relationships, that is, that their desire to be accepted and to cooperate with others outside the church in their personal lives led to the church's being open to other apostatizing denominations.

There is nothing strange in this, inasmuch as the organic and institutional life of the church are inseparably related. It is, however, immaterial for the main point where these efforts began. De Marie concedes this point when he says, "Either way, the mutual interaction between the attitude of church members and the church government is undeniable." The history of the RCNlib makes clear that *any* efforts to overcome the antithesis are destructive to the church, regardless of where those destructive efforts originate.

This destructive "openness" appeared in official church labors toward a false ecumenism. Dekker speaks of a "search" for unity and "a change in attitude" that led the RCNlib to abandon being alone. The RCr itself spoke about the "unstoppable desire for church unity with other churches, despite evidence of toleration of biblical criticism and heresies in those churches."⁷

True unity in the church is based on the truth, and only on the truth. True unity is an organic unity, that is, the fruit of mutual faith, as a tree is a single unity out of one root. A false unity is based on everything except the truth and is more akin to an iron ring that keeps the slats of a barrel together.

The false ecumenism of the RCNlib, which was also the undoing of that denomination, was driven by a desire to be a witness and to be accepted by the larger and more influential and more glamorous ecumenical organizations. It was a unity that was not on the basis of the truth, but on the basis of a certain program, purpose, or issue. It was a unity, as de Marie describes, that

⁷ *Reformed Continua*, 11 (April 2013).

originated in an “openness towards others” that “included unscriptural tolerance.”

Those in the RCNlib who were pushing for this false ecumenism stigmatized the true calls for unity on the basis of the creeds, Scripture, and the antithetical calling of the church as “isolationism,” a loaded word that smacks of the loathsome charge of “Anabaptism.”

This false ecumenism indicated “a radical change in thinking and striving.” The RCNlib were no longer willing to be separate for God’s sake. The antithesis in ecclesiastical life was being abandoned, and unity was being sought at the expense of the truth: “a relativizing of the doctrine with a view to the life of the community of faith or the unity of the church.”

Dekker points out that the church papers led the way in the push for this kind of unity. The *Nederlands Dagblad*, the leading paper of the RCNlib, was typical: “In an article, ‘*Samen aan het ene front*’ [Together on the one front] issued in 1983, the former editor-in-chief, J. P. de Vries, argued ‘that we should stand together with other Christians at one and the same front. Therefore, we should appeal rather than confront...’”

This desire for “openness” and the stigmatization of the antithesis as “isolationism” affected education, too.

Dekker writes about the schools: the bond of family-school-church, the triangle, which was considered unbreakable, was given up in the course of the 1990’s. He quotes from the yearbook of 2002, that...it was observed that “also within our churches, reformed education is no longer a matter of course.” They wanted openness instead of isolation.

The articles regarding the apostasy in the RCNlib are fascinating reading and serve as a warning, because they clearly expose the process of apostasy and lay the blame on ignoring the truth of the antithesis, a cause and process nearly identical to the apostasy in the GKN, the denomination of Kuyper and Bavinck, and in the Christian Reformed Church, mother of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The letter of the RCr to the CanRC referred to the history of the rapid departure of its mother, the RCNlib, as a “mirror,” and indeed it is.⁸ It is a mirror that all Reformed churches can profitably look into.

Looking deeply into this mirror, I do not believe that either de Marie or Dekker, astute though their observa-

tions may be, went far enough in their evaluations of the causes of apostasy in the RCNlib. Throughout his article, and especially at the end, de Marie sharply criticized Dekker for failing to delve into the doctrinal issues at the root of the apostasy. De Marie was critical, and rightly so, of Dekker’s justification of the apostasy of his own GKN and of the RCNlib as necessary for them to serve in changing the world. De Marie also criticized Dekker’s appalling call to Reformed churches not merely to be followers in this regard, but to be in the van of change. To his credit, de Marie explains that the antithesis was being ignored.

This analysis, though, does not delve deeply enough into the doctrinal roots of the apostasy of the RCNlib. The antithesis does not stand on its own, but is a thoroughly covenantal concept. So much is this the case that the very first promise of the covenant of grace is preached by God Himself in the language of the antithesis—“enmity between thy seed and her seed!”

The RCNlib were opposed and still are opposed to the truth of God’s Word and of the Reformed creeds that God makes His covenant only with His elect. Like Abraham Kuyper’s common grace that affected the GKN and others and is still affecting them as the vicious root out of which all kinds of apostasy developed, the covenant view of the RCNlib teaches a kind of common grace in the covenant, a universal love of God (in the covenant). That principle must also, by God’s judgment, work through to the destruction of the antithesis and striving for “openness.” That theology and thinking is and has been the juggernaut of apostasy in Reformed churches.

To those twelve doughty churches in the Netherlands as they review their history, this is the word of history from deep in the mirror of Reformed history: if they will complete their liberation and the reformation of the churches in the Netherlands, they must go past 1944 and return to 1834, to the covenant doctrine of the fathers of the Secession, and, even farther, to the covenant doctrine of Dordt and the baptism form—a covenant doctrine of an unconditional covenant promise given to the elect only and a covenant made with the elect alone, and thus of an antithesis between church and world and between the holy church of God and the corrupt synagogues of Satan.



⁸ Ibid.

Disciplining Our Covenant Children in Love (2)

Our children need the discipline of their godly parents from the time they are given into our arms at birth until they are brought to maturity. The goal of this discipline is to raise them to become responsible adults as citizens of the kingdom of our Lord and as members of His church. Discipline is not only about chastening our children when they sin, it is also about teaching them to restrain their sinful nature, and establishing godly order in their young and still immature lives. They need to be taught to live by the spiritual principles of the law of God in their whole life.

Every age of the development of our children has its own challenges. I know from experience, as the father of seven children, that the most difficult stage through which we must guide our children is the one from teenage years to the time of their independence, when, hopefully, they have been well equipped to establish their own Christian homes and discipline their own lives according to God's Word.

We as parents must be willing to invest a great deal of time and energy in the disciplining of our children. This will require that we be ready to make significant personal sacrifices. As parents it is possible to neglect our children because of our own selfish and worldly pursuits in life. Our covenant children need to grow up in a home where a humble, self-sacrificing mother is present. The father must not allow himself to become so consumed with his daily occupation, with the building of the company or business he is the head of, with managing the farm, or with making money and achieving success in the world,

that he neglects his calling as father. Research reveals that fathers in America commonly spend less than six minutes a day in meaningful interaction with their children.

Our role as fathers is not only earning enough money to buy all kinds of modern things for our children, every new electronic gadget, expensive sports equipment, perhaps an ATV, and maybe an expensive sports car later in life. In fact, the greatest spiritual danger for our children as they grow up is not poverty and want or that they have to go through life with much less perhaps than the neighbors' children. The greatest danger is that our children grow up without having been disciplined to keep them from the evil of covetousness. The discipline of our young people must teach them the wisdom required to handle wealth and earthly possessions, seeking above all the kingdom of God and its righteousness. This is very difficult and serious, living as we do in prosperous America.

When our children are still young, it is often sufficient to speak a word of admonition to them with the expectation that they will listen. They must obey simply because father and mother say so. They do not always need an explanation. They are too young to understand many things in their life and must simply obey their parents without always questioning their right to demand certain behavior. But this is different when our children come to teenage years, then they need much more from us as parents.

Young people need biblical guidance for the great concerns they will face in their lives and the important decisions they must make. This kind of parental guidance will be greatly beneficial for their future. They need to be given biblical reason for the distinctive, God-centered lifestyle to which God calls us as His covenant people.

Rev. denHartog is pastor of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2013, p. 490.

This explanation must be given in the daily instruction and example of our lives as parents as we have our children living with us in our covenant homes.

We as parents need to appreciate the psychological development of young people. During this time of life in their development, many changes take place, some quite mysterious and even hard to understand fully. As our children are growing up to adulthood, they have strong inner desires for independence in their lives. These desires were created in them by God. However, at this time in life, they still need the firm, loving guidance of their parents. Sinful permissiveness will result in unrestrained sin. This will lead to anger against their parents when they are admonished. It is very common that inclinations to rebel are strongest in the days of youth. Parents need wisdom and loving patience especially in this time of their children's lives. Our young people have to be taught to accept the fact that they still have much need for guidance and that they must be willing to submit to it and follow it.

Changes in attitude during teenage years can be very dramatic and sudden and even come as a shock to parents. These changes can create great anxiety for parents. Without guidance of godly discipline, young people will sometimes go very wrong, and this can have very serious consequences for their future. As parents we need to pray for wise discipline and perseverance, so that if at all possible we can keep our young people from going wrong in this stage of life.

A measure of conflict during the teenage years of our children is common. We must expect disappointments along the way, and we must be longsuffering and ready to forgive and restore in the godly way of repentance and forgiveness. Our children are no less sinful than we are. There is continual need for loving correction and repeated encouragement of our children to do that which is right and pleasing to the Lord. This takes much grace from God for us as parents. We must pray for this grace also in the hearts of our children.

An excessive demand for secrecy in their life and rejection of parental oversight are often accompanied by an inclination of young people to go in the ways of worldliness and sin. Our young people need to be given the right of privacy in their lives, but this must be given at the right time and in the right measure. Our young

people must be taught to live worthy of the trust and confidence of their parents. We must teach our young people to be open and sincere and truthful in their lives. When children have been taught this and also show this in their lives, parents reward them by honoring and trusting them with increasing freedom and independence. Mutual trust is so important during teenage years. Grievous violation of this trust will often cause deep hurt and can be repaired only with a great amount of Christian love both of parents and young people themselves.

Powerful influences are coming into the lives of our young people today through the worldwide Internet and such modern devices as ipods and the increasingly powerful cell phones with astounding capabilities for accessing all sorts of worldly philosophy and lifestyles. We as parents need to keep up with these things in a measure sufficient to exercise oversight of the lives of our teenagers. This is not easy because of the rapid pace of the development of these modern inventions of our times. The pace of this easily leaves parents behind in bewilderment.


We as parents must exercise oversight in the lives of our young people in the important area of friends they choose. Teenagers need friendship outside of the home and the immediate covenant family. This is a healthy development in their lives and should be encouraged by parents. Truly godly friendships will have a considerable influence in the lives of our young people.

In disciplining our teenage children, we surely ought not ignore the reality that at this time in their lives notable changes take place in their sexual development and that very strong feelings are involved in this. There is a serious need for parental concern in this area. Parental neglect in it can have very serious consequences for young people. This is not a subject that is easy to talk about with our children. It is, however, increasingly urgent in our modern day to talk openly with our young people about this subject. Strong warnings must be given about the gross immorality of our times. Godly advice and wisdom must be given by parents in a personal way to their young people. Practices of dating and of behavior when young people are alone with a person of the opposite sex must be talked about. Warnings must be given regarding the power of the sex drive and its potential for bringing much shame and damage to the lives of our young people. We will by the grace of God do our young people a lot

of good in their lives when these matters are properly dealt with in the disciplining of our children. Our young people must not be left with the foolish imagination that they can decide on their own how they will behave and that parents have no right whatsoever to ask anything regarding this area of their lives. This latter opinion is the foolish and wicked notion of the world that often leads to fornication and ungodly living.

During the teenage years of our children we have opportunity to give them direction in the tremendously important area of the choice they make for marriage partners. They must be instructed that there are few areas of their present life that will have a more signifi-

cant influence on their later life than their choice of a life partner. Children need to be deeply impressed with the importance of this and learn to appreciate the value of godly advice and discipline in this area. They should be urged to date within the sphere of the church and to do so only with those who show themselves to be truly godly in their lives as well as sound in their knowledge of the truth.

We have such an important calling as covenant parents when our children have grown up to be young people. May God give us grace not to neglect this calling but to be diligent and zealous for the great good of our covenant young people! 

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. RICHARD SMIT

Queen Esther: A Model for Foreign Missions Today?

Perhaps you have never thought of the question in the title before. In the July 2012 issue of the missions magazine *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, Professor Lee Beach, a professor of Christian missions at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, raises this question about Queen Esther of the Old Testament as an example for foreign missions.



Is Queen Esther a model for foreign missions today? “Yes,” teaches Prof. Beach.

Prof. Beach promotes this answer in light of the difficulty in reaching limited-access nations and cultures. Limited-access nations and cultures are those who might allow people who may be Christians to enter very temporarily as tourists, school teachers, or businessmen, but who will not give entrance to missionaries, called and sent by Christ through His church. These are usually nations

dominated by atheists, Buddhists, Muslims, or some other world religion that is vehemently and publicly opposed to any form of Christianity, especially the Reformed faith. In the face of that problem, Prof. Beach encourages the church to view Queen Esther as a good model for successful missions in limited-access nations and cultures.

Prof. Beach teaches this idea based first of all on the assumption that Esther was a child of God and that God was at work in her life by His blessing, even though God’s name is never mentioned in the book of Esther, not even by Esther herself. It is argued that the church needs to learn that, although God appeared to be inconspicuous in the life of Esther, He was busy in her life for her salvation and for the good of the Jews. From that faulty basis, Prof. Beach boldly states that, following Esther’s example, we “sometimes advance the mission of Christ best by not talking about him much, if at all.”¹

Secondly, Prof. Beach points out that the “heroine” Queen Esther immersed herself in the Persian culture by

Rev. Smit is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.

¹ Prof. Lee Beach, “Esther as a Model for Doing Mission Work,” *Evangelical Missions Quarterly*, vol. 48, no. 3, pp. 248-249.

means of the hiding of her Jewish heritage. An example is given of what this might mean. The article relates a story of a missionary pastor who approved of the use of some obscene language in an artistic presentation in order to reach a community that few people could normally reach. Similarly, the church ought to be willing, if necessary, to conceal her religious identity, even temporarily behind a cloak of wickedness, for success among the normally unreachable.

Thirdly, Prof. Beach proposes that the church, like Esther, should be willing to compromise at critical moments in her mission work. Prof. Beach criticizes Queen Vashti's courage to disobey the king's wicked command because it resulted in her banishment from the palace and resulted in an abrupt end to any continued and positive influence on Ahasuerus. He commends Queen Esther's compromise because that achieved positive influence upon Ahasuerus and positive results for the Jews. Rather than being too holy, strict, and abrupt in the short-term and so lose influence, missionaries should permit some critical and temporary compromises for long-term influence and results.

Finally, Prof. Beach teaches that the church should follow Queen Esther's example because of her heroine status. The church must follow her heroes, and so the church must learn from Esther that missions can sometimes be done without confessing Christ. Even when God's name is absent and deliberately hidden, missions can still take place. When the church is faced with the challenges of limited-access nations and cultures, the way of Queen Esther is a legitimate solution.



Is Queen Esther a model for Reformed missions today? We say, "No."

To follow Queen Esther's example would be disobedience to Christ. Even though many Christians today regard Queen Esther highly as a believing heroine, the fact is that she was an unbeliever.

She with her uncle Mordecai did not return to the land of promise and join the ranks of the saints who returned to Jerusalem, rebuilt the temple, rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem, and served Jehovah faithfully at His temple in the hope of the covenant promise.

She is not mentioned in Hebrews 11, either directly or even indirectly, where we have God's inspired and

infallible list of the heroes and heroines of faith at very significant moments in the history of God's church in the Old Testament.

She lived in the sin of lying when she concealed her identity as a Jew.

She lived in the sin of fornication and adultery when she participated in the king's beauty pageant, when she lay with him overnight in the king's palace bedroom to pass his "test," and when she married the divorced king.

She did not confess the name of the God of Israel when in distress, especially during the time of her fasting at the critical moment in the story. She did not call her maidens and others to pray unto Jehovah for His unfailing covenant mercies to preserve His remnant from the enemies of God. She may certainly have followed the Old Testament Jewish food and fasting laws, but so did the wicked Pharisees impeccably in the days of Christ. It is clear that even if she had followed Jewish customs in secrecy, she did not believe and serve God with a believing heart.

She was an accomplice to the insubordination of uncle Mordecai towards the king's official representative for a time, wicked Haman.

Certainly God was active in the life of Esther, but not as the God of salvation. It seems that many confuse the teaching of the presence of God in the life of Esther by His providence and the presence of God in the hearts and lives of His saints by His grace and Spirit. Indeed God was at work in the palace of King Ahasuerus for the preservation of the elect remnant and the line of Christ in Palestine, but that does not mean that God was gracious to Esther when her life and the lives of the Jews at that time were amazingly spared. God was certainly at work in the life of Esther as the God of providence, but not as the God of her salvation, since we do not see the fruits of faith in her life.

Queen Esther cannot be a model for foreign missions. If she is an example of any kind, she is an example of what the church may never do in missions.

The church may not hide Christ or hide any doctrines of the Reformed faith in her mission work of preaching the gospel.

The church may not, by "critical compromise," integrate into culture unnoticed. Rather, she must visibly and boldly call sinners out of their idolatry, world religions,

unbelief, and wickedness unto repentance from their sin, unto faith in the living Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, and unto a holy life of thankfulness and godliness according to God's commandments.

The church may not do what might be more of a temptation for Reformed missionaries today. When filling out the immigration visa forms or answering the questions from the immigration or government officials, missionaries may not lie about their true identity and say that they are only school teachers or something else, for example, in order to enter a nation that is closed to missionaries. It is a real temptation for a missionary to fall into the sin of lying to the government officials at the airports or land-border crossings of a limited-access nation with the justification that a "little" lie will allow more unbelieving people to hear the Reformed faith and possibly be converted. The church may not fall into the sinful reasoning that the goal of missions justifies a little lie or two in some cases.

Lying is sin, and God punishes lying and liars. The use of a few lies, the use of even the lying and deception of drama, and the hiding of the Reformed faith under a bushel basket of a willful cover are not biblically-approved methods of missions. We may not compromise the Reformed faith or our Reformed antithetical walk of life with the excuse that a temporary compromise will in the end be blessed by Christ for the gathering of His church. Instead, that mission method of compromise and lying will only bring God's judgment upon it.



Are there proper biblical examples for Reformed missions, even with the challenges of limited-access nations? We say, "Yes!"

There is the example of Daniel. He refused the king's meat and lived an antithetical life in the palace of Nebuchadnezzar and then of Darius. He did not conceal his identity at critical moments in his life. He and his three friends did not compromise their faith in Jehovah. Daniel did not hide his faith when threatened with death in the den of lions if he continued to pray to Jehovah three times a day. In the way of faithfulness, these exiled saints were blessed, and the kingdom of Christ was advanced.

There are other good examples from the Old Testament for the church to follow in her missions. Some of


these lived in the same era as Queen Esther: Zerrubabel, Nehemiah, Ezra, and the faithful families who returned to Jerusalem, built the temple, and together built the walls of Jerusalem. Let the church follow the examples of these Old Testament forefathers.



Now, there may yet be a question that needs an answer. Some might ask, "What about all of those people on the other side of the border of those limited-access nations and cultures? Do we just stand over here, do nothing, and let them all go lost? Should not we use every means possible, even a few Esther-like means, to have the true gospel of sovereign, particular grace preached in that nation or culture?"

Our answer is rooted in the truth that Christ at God's right hand knows His other elect sheep (John 10:16). He knows where they live in the world, even in those nations whose doors are shut to full-time missionaries. We believe that Christ will gather His sheep and lambs through His divinely-controlled Word. As the book of Esther itself truly shows, the Lord will rule sovereignly in the hearts of wicked rulers so that the borders will be opened, just wide enough and long enough for His Word to be preached and His Spirit to do His work. We believe that those who are ordained unto eternal life must be gathered into the fold of our Good Shepherd, and not even the gates of hell can prevent Christ from doing that. We believe that if a door is not opened to full-time missionaries at a time that we might like, that also is the Lord's will that missionaries' families not be sent behind that closed door at that time.

Therefore, the church should never think that she must use lying or ways of compromise to be successful in difficult missions. Rather, the church must trust Christ in His mission work, and trust and pray that He will open doors in His good time so that His elect sheep may be gathered by His Word and Spirit from all nations according to His sovereign good pleasure and for the glory of His grace.

With a quiet trust in the Lord, let the church do diligent and honest mission work according to the good examples of Scripture. 

Congregation Activities

For this issue of the "News" there are no anniversaries of the organization of any of our congregations to celebrate. In fact, we have only one more to write about, and that will come in our next issue. Do you know which one of our churches has not been included yet? Sadly, there is no cash award if you know, only bragging rights.

We celebrate with the Randolph, WI PRC upon the joyful occasion of God's bringing to them, and to us as a denomination, a new pastor. Pastor-elect Guichelaar was ordained and installed as the 12th pastor of Randolph by his father-in-law, Prof. R. Cammenga, on Sunday morning, October 13. Prof. Cammenga chose to speak from God's Word found in Numbers 16, under the theme, "The Rebellion of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram." The following Lord's Day, Rev. Guichelaar began his ministry, preaching from God's Word found in Romans 1:16, 17, under the theme, "Not Ashamed of the Gospel." With thanks to God, we add our prayer to that of Randolph, when we ask our heavenly Father to bless and prosper Rev. Guichelaar's ministry in our churches.

The ladies of the Edgerton, MN PRC invited the ladies from neighboring churches in Iowa and South Dakota to join them for

the fall Combined Ladies meeting on October 29. The speech topic was entitled, "Temptations of the Heart," with Mrs. Lael Griess and Mrs. Carol Brands as speakers. Dessert was served following the speeches.

The Grandville, MI PRC went ahead with renovations to their sanctuary in late October. The work started at 5 A.M. on October 21 with the removal of pews. Plans included replacing the carpet in the sanctuary, installing new pew pads and fabric, replacing window shades, installing central vacuum in the sanctuary, updating and moving sound equipment, installing a hearing loop, upgrading of electrical, minor repairs for dry wall and paint, concluding with a major cleaning of the sanctuary. During the time of renovation, Grandville scheduled many of their meetings, including Sunday worship, at nearby Covenant Christian High School.

On Sunday, October 20, the Byron Center, MI PRC celebrated her 30th anniversary as a congregation. The "News" extends congratulations to this sister in the Lord. For our readers' information, Byron Center was organized for the second time (they had a previous existence from 1925-1944) in 1983 with 24 families. Today they number 115 families. In addition to their current pastor, Rev. A. Spriensma, they have had three other pastors, Rev. B. Gritters, Rev. Doug Kuiper, and Rev. R. Van Overloop.

A Men's Bible Study continues to meet on Saturday mornings at

First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. Their last meeting was October 26, preceded by breakfast at 7:30 A.M. Discussion continued on the theme, "Developing Godly Characteristics for Leadership in the Church."

Denomination Activities

This fall the Theological School of our churches sponsored a special conference commemorating the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. Written in Germany in 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism is the most widely used and translated of all the Reformed creeds. It has a warm, personal style and with its beautiful theme of comfort, the Catechism has always had a special place in the hearts of God's people. This conference took place October 17-19 at the Hudsonville, MI PRC. If you arrived early you were able to hear performances by the Hope Heralds on Thursday evening and Bryan Westra on Friday evening. The PR Theological School's three professors, Cammenga, Dykstra, and Gritters, as well as Rev. C. Haak, Rev. A. Stewart, and Dr. J. Klautke, were the speakers. Most of these lectures have already appeared in print, in this magazine's November 1 issue. At the Friday night session, the winners of the Writing Contest were also announced. There were five different categories, with three winners in each. In all, there were almost 80 who entered, so we express our appreciation to all of them as well. Some of these entries have appeared in print in the *Beacon Lights* magazine, so

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

we encourage you to look for them there. Hudsonville estimates that there were about 600 or more at the conference both Thursday and Friday nights, with a few less on Saturday morning. There were also approximately 200 who listened to the conference live, via the Internet, each day.

Mission Activities

In recent news from the Philippines, we learned that an earthquake hit on Tuesday morning, October 15, measuring 7.2 on the Richter scale. It caused a lot of damage and led to many deaths (over 150) near its epicenter on the islands of Bohol and Cebu in the central Philippines. Our missionaries do have contacts on and make monthly visits to the next island to the west of Cebu, the

island of Negros. We are thankful to hear that while they felt the tremors, no damage or injuries were sustained. Through these events we hear the footsteps of Christ and are reminded in a concrete way of His coming.

Rev. W. Bruinsma, missionary pastor to the PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA, was able to give two Reformation Day lectures this fall. On the evening of October 30 he spoke on "Why the Reformation Was Necessary," in Cranberry Township at the Four Points Hotel by Sheratan, and then again two days later, on the same subject, for members and friends of the Fellowship in Pittsburgh.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of the

Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI, gave a Reformation Day lecture on November 1 at Covenant, entitled "War and Peace in the Heidelberg Catechism." This lecture developed the themes of spiritual war and holy peace in the history and text of this beloved catechism.

Minister Activities

The vacant Faith PRC in Jenison, MI has extended a call to Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, to become their next pastor.

On Sunday, October 27, the Doon, IA congregation extended a call to Rev. W. Langerak, presently serving the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, to become their next pastor. ☞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 8, 2014, at the Southeast Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, MI. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 9, 2013.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour December 2013

Date	Topic	Text
December 1	"A God-fearing Man's Labor"	Psalm 128:1, 2
December 8	"The Blessedness of Family"	Psalm 128:3, 4
December 15	"Church and Family"	Psalm 128:5, 6
December 22	"While They Were There..."	Luke 2:6
December 29	"Great Is Thy Faithfulness"	Lamentations 3:22, 23