

The Standard Bearer

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Man's Devices Versus Jehovah's Counsel

There are many devices in a man's heart; nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand.

Proverbs 19:21

As another year dawns upon us, many devices will be found within our hearts. Solomon, of course, is not talking about devices of the medical kind, but of the scheming kind. People devise many schemes. Some of them seem almost certain to materialize, while others will almost certainly not do so. Who can tell what will become of our plans?

Although the plans of men are uncertain, this coming year holds no uncertainty whatsoever from God's perspective. That is because the New Year, Anno Domini 2014, like every year before it and every year to follow, is the year of our Lord Jesus Christ, who bought us with His precious blood. We belong to Him, and A.D. 2014 belongs to Him.

His unchangeable plan, based on His infinite wisdom,

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and brought to pass by His Sovereign rule, shall certainly stand. That is our comfort as we contemplate the future!



Many are the devices in a man's heart! The number of plans and purposes are at least as many and varied as the people who make them. Everyone devises plans.

As the year 2014 stands before us, we might have all kinds of plans in our hearts: plans to marry and have children, plans to move house, plans to expand the business, plans to add to the retirement account, plans to take a vacation, or plans to graduate from high school or college. Like the man in the epistle of James, we might say, "To day or to tomorrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain" (James 4:13).

By contrasting man's devices with God's counsel, Solomon purposes to show that our plans are uncertain. It is not at all sure that our plans will come to pass.

In the first place, our plans are not at all certain because circumstances change. Many plans will not come

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to pass at all because of obstacles that stand in the way. There can never be any certainty about our plans because, ultimately, we do not have control over our circumstances. Any number of emergencies might sidetrack the best-laid plans.

In the second place, even if there were no obstacles standing in the way of our plans, we might still decide to alter or abandon them. That's because, in our limited wisdom, we often fail to give adequate attention to all the facts. A new piece of information may present itself, or we may simply have failed to give proper attention to some of the particulars.

In the third place, our plans often fail to materialize because they are carried out in our human weakness. Even mighty Nebuchadnezzar could not guarantee that he would remain in power over Babylon. In one day God took him down from his mighty position and drove him from society to eat grass like an ox (cf. Dan. 4:33). As strong as we imagine ourselves to be, we are not strong enough to control our future.

We simply do not know what a day will bring, much less a year. All our plans can be demolished in a moment. We could be involved in a car accident today. Our house could burn down tonight. We could be diagnosed with terminal cancer tomorrow. "Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away" (James 4:14). As thoughtful and diligent as we might be in the pursuit of our plans, nothing is guaranteed.



In stark contrast to the many and uncertain plans of men stands the one absolutely certain plan of God: "nevertheless the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand."

God's counsel is His careful deliberation in eternity, according to which He governs the universe and everything in it. Central to God's counsel is His plan to gather a people for Himself in Jesus Christ. From His act of creating all things, to His preservation of the creation, to His bringing history to the final day, everything hangs on God's counsel in Christ.

God's counsel shall stand!

To "stand" in the original literally means to rise up—the idea being that God's counsel will not be frustrated.

It will not be kept down. It will certainly come to fruition. "Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure" (Is. 46:10). God does not say, "I will *try* to do my pleasure"; rather, He says, "I *will do* my pleasure." Nor will God simply do part of His pleasure; He will do *all* of it.

How can we be so sure about the accomplishment of God's counsel? We can be sure that God's counsel shall stand, in the first place, because it is the counsel of the LORD, who never changes. Jehovah, the Great I AM, is completely independent of the creature. He is not a God who reacts to the creature, changing from one minute to the next; rather, He governs the creature. He never changes His will, but He wills changes to occur. Thankfully, Jehovah changes not; otherwise the church of Jesus Christ would have been consumed long ago (cf. Mal. 3:6).

In the second place, God's counsel shall stand because He has formed it in His perfect wisdom. God knows all things, and He knows exactly how to accomplish His plans. Nor is He ever surprised by new developments such that He needs to alter His plans. Notice, in that connection, that Solomon does not speak of *many counsels* (plural) in God's heart. Instead, he refers to the singular "counsel." God doesn't have contingency plans; He doesn't try to accomplish plan A, and if that fails, go to plan B. The fall of Adam into sin did not force God to follow an alternative counsel that brought Jesus Christ into the picture. Rather, God's wisdom saw the end from the beginning and every point in between.

In the third place, God's counsel shall stand because He carries it out by His almighty hand. No man or angel or any force or phenomenon in all creation is able to thwart God's counsel. Nothing is too hard for God (Jer. 32:17). If God by His mighty power created the heavens and the earth, if He commands the winds and the waves to obey Him (cf. Mark 4:39), if He turns the hearts of kings wherever He desires (cf. Prov. 21:1), then Jehovah is certainly able to accomplish His counsel.

God's counsel shall stand! What a contrast to the changeable, weak, and ignorant devices of men.



Solomon speaks of man's devices and God's counsel. By speaking of them, as it were in the same breath, he means to indicate that there is a certain relationship between the two. What is that relationship? Just this: man's devices *serve* God's counsel! Or to put it another way, God's counsel includes and makes use of man's devices.

A good example of that truth is found in the history of Joseph. The child of God rejoices to hear how God used the wickedness of Joseph's brothers, the wickedness of Potiphar's wife, and so many other circumstances to give Joseph the rule over Egypt. When Joseph speaks of that history he freely testifies that, "ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good" (Gen. 50:20).

Even more significant is God's counsel with regard to Jesus Christ. The Jews meant evil against Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus in wicked greed. Jesus was crucified and slain by wicked hands. But behind these wicked actions was "the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). Such horrible wickedness, and yet it was used by God for our salvation.

Although the wicked will continue their schemes against God and His church, and although the Antichrist himself will someday establish his earthly kingdom, nev-

ertheless God rules over all things in order to accomplish His glorious counsel. The devices of the wicked serve the overarching counsel of God. Not a creature can stir without God's will.

As regards our particular circumstances this coming year, we must know that God's counsel shall stand. God will use the most difficult of trials to draw us, to loosen our grip on the things of this world, and to bring us closer to Himself. He will overrule even the smallest of circumstances to accomplish our sanctification. Whether we meet with riches or poverty, health or sickness, peace or turmoil, the counsel of Jehovah shall stand. God will turn all things for the good of His church.

In His singular counsel, God leaves nothing to chance. He determines how much rain and snow will fall; He determines when and where the next war will occur; He determines the economy of nations. Of course, men's devices enter into the picture. But God's counsel reigns supreme.

Knowing the certainty of God's counsel ought to give us great comfort in the circumstances of this coming year. What a comfort to confess, "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Ps. 73:24). What a comfort to know, "the counsel of the LORD, that shall stand." 

EDITORIAL

PROF. BARRETT GRITTERS

"In 2014, Heaven Is Still Our Hope"

Although I would be heckled off the podium at most Christian universities and even Reformed colleges if I began a speech with such a line, I still confess with all the conviction my heart can muster: "Heaven is still my *hope*. Heaven is still my *home*."

As the year of our Lord 2014 begins, my prayer for you, readers of the *Standard Bearer*, is that you still hope for heaven, too.

We look to the future and embrace what our hearts are set on: heaven. As the world becomes increasingly wicked, we await with joyful anticipation our life in the presence of God and His saints—in heaven. As the church becomes more and more apostate, caring little for biblical righteousness and less for truth, we eagerly await heaven. As we become older, our thoughts more and more turn to our future home—

to heaven and dwelling in eternity with God.

This is our hope.

But it's the hope of fewer and fewer in Christendom.

Many readers of the *SB* live in a pretty small corner of the church world, but none should be naïve about what much of the church hopes for in 2014. And it's not heaven. At least not the heaven we have always been taught.

Last week almost 3,000 people in our town gathered to hear N.T. Wright make fun of the traditional view of heaven. N.T. Wright is considered to be “the world’s leading New Testament scholar.” The gathering place was the building of Mars Hill, a mega-church “community” in Grandville, MI, where Rob Bell formerly was pastor. And the connection is not incidental. Sponsoring the lecture was Calvin Theological Seminary. Calvin was promoting a conference that would begin the next day—with Wright as headline speaker—on “A Missional Reading of Scripture.” *Missional* is the new buzzword for those who want heaven on earth (to be as blunt as possible), and that’s Wright’s primary agenda. He wants to convince his readers and hearers that heaven is here and now.

Wright’s books are wildly popular, especially among seminary professors and students, theologians on the cutting edge of modern theology. One of Wright’s most well-known disciples is Rob Bell, whose trendy 2011 book, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven, Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, also redefined heaven and hell along the lines of N.T. Wright.

But Wright has other influential disciples. Cornerstone University and its related Theological Seminary have at least one professor who speaks similar language. Michael Wittmer wrote a 2004 book entitled, *Heaven is a Place on Earth*, tipping his hand in the opening line: “I don’t want to go to heaven.” He would like to go there

for a visit, but he doesn’t think he could take too many rounds of “Shine, Jesus, Shine.” So he sides, Wittmer says without shame, with Huck Finn, who complained that heaven sounded boring and that if Tom Sawyer would not be there he didn’t want to be there either. As if that weren’t provocative enough for a Christian pastor, Wittmer’s next section title is a play on the wording of an old hymn, turning it on its head: “Heaven is Not My Home: I’ll Just be Passin’ Through.”

“Heaven is a place on earth” becomes the new but sad refrain of many Christians. Their hope, therefore, is not heaven as the dwelling place of God where Jesus ascended after His resurrection, but this earth as it has been gradually transformed. *Heaven is a place on earth*. The Kuyperian neo-Calvinists are on Wright’s same band-wagon because of their “transformationalist” worldview. This is why Calvin Theological Seminary would so enthusiastically embrace Wright, as well as make clear their common cause with Mars Hill. This is what it means to be “missional.”

After Wright’s speech, the headline of the denominational (on-line) news report was, “Writer Speaks of Heaven Being Here and Now.” The report’s conclusion noted the speech’s focus on the “hope of the unity God brings to this world... and *not necessarily on the world to come*” (emphasis added).

SB readers ought to know what N.T. Wright’s books teach. As his works are increasingly embraced and his views repeated in seminar-

ies, so are his redefinitions of all the traditional theological terms. Justification, the judgment, redemption, faith, atonement, hope, heaven, and hell are all given new definitions, based in part on Wright’s “new perspective on Paul.” Paul did not teach what we have always thought.

Let me give a few more examples of what you will read and what students in these seminaries and many Christian colleges will be taught about heaven and our hope.

In *Christianity Today* Wright said, “The bodily resurrection [of Christ]...is our social and political mandate.” What’s important to him is going “straight from worshiping in the sanctuary to debating in the [city] council chamber; to discussing matters of town planning...green spaces, and road traffic schemes; and to environmental work, creative and healthy farming methods, and proper use of resources.” If heaven is *here*, this makes sense. Wright wants Christians to make “a radical difference in the material lives of people down the street.” To “eliminate hunger and famine” is the calling of Christians. So that no one misunderstands, he emphasizes that that is “not an extra to the mission of the church. It is central.”

One of Wright’s books, *Surprised By Hope*, says that Scripture does not say that we will “go to heaven when we die,” but that heaven will come to earth and that the earth upon which we live will be transformed. “Heaven, in the Bible, is not a future destiny, but the other, hidden dimension of our ordinary life—God’s dimension, if you like.” Thus, the twenty-four elders casting

their crowns before the throne “is not a picture of the last day, with all the redeemed in heaven at last.”

One of the most amazing statements Wright makes is a blatant misquotation of the Lord’s prayer: “Thy kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.” Read that again. Wright does not reveal that he is misquoting the Lord, twisting His words to fit his own agenda. He only says, “That remains one of the most powerful and revolutionary sentences we ever say.” Indeed. It makes me wonder whether it is one of the best “Freudian slips” since Freud, or a deliberate (and therefore evil) misquotation of the Word of God. The Lord taught us to pray, “Thy *will be done* on earth as it is in heaven.” What will biblical scholars do next to convince our children of their kingdom on *this earth*?

This New Year’s editorial is not the place to argue the case for the traditional view of heaven, to defend the historic Christian hope. Instead, I write to alert you to the heresy and its prevalence, and especially call us to renew, and not forget, our hope according to the Word of God.



Of course, those who teach that heaven is on earth point to weaknesses in the understanding of many about heaven. Also, as with all false teaching, those who teach that heaven is on earth include elements of truth in their proposals, and it’s worth pointing these out to highlight what our hopes ought to be.

First, heaven as our loved ones now experience it—glorious reality!—is not the *ultimate* and *final* hope of the people of God. These saints now live temporarily in what the church has usually called the “intermediate state,” the state of a man’s soul between his death and the second coming of Jesus Christ. The *ultimate* hope of the people of God is after Jesus comes again and makes all things new. We must not forget this.

Yet the intermediate state of man’s soul—in the presence of God in heaven!!—is nothing to be laughed off as a tedious singing of unending rounds of “Shine, Jesus, Shine.” What utter blasphemy! (To caricature truth, however, is typical of those who propose error.) But truth is that people of God have been delighting in heaven for 6,000 years! They are delighting in heaven *now*. They are delighting in the presence of God without boredom! They live in the presence of their blessed Savior. This is a grand part of the hope of the people of God. Our Catechism confesses our hope that “...my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its head.” And it confesses, “Our death is...a passage into eternal life.” No, that is not my *only* hope; but it is a *vital aspect* of my hope.

Second, our earthly bodies are important! The critics of our traditional hope accuse Christians of forgetting the importance of the body. Indeed, if we forget that God loves us in the body, that Jesus redeemed also our bodies, and that when Christ comes again He will resurrect *these* bodies, we make a serious

mistake. There are two mistakes we can make with regard to our bodies: one is to idolize them; the other is to ignore and abuse them. Do we Reformed Christians, avoiding the error of making *too much* of our bodies, forget that they are temples of the Holy Spirit that must be cared for now? Do we, knowing that our bodies are going to be buried soon and that without them we will enjoy the glory of heaven, not think enough of the importance of our bodies?

It’s not an unimportant aside to say that, if the trend not to attend funerals is a bad trend, not going to the graveside for an honorable Christian burial is also regrettable. There, Christians gather to remember the confession we make every Sunday, “I believe the resurrection of *the body*.”

Third, the earth *is* important. If the critics of the traditional hope expose in us a neglect of this earthly creation, they have exposed in us a serious error. Reformed Christians ought to be the most earnest environmentalists (although for radically different reasons than the secular, green, tree-huggers). But our hope is not the transformation of this earth by earthly or even spiritual means. It is the transformation of heaven and earth into one at the second coming of Jesus Christ...*after* this present earth’s destruction.

Fourth, we *do* have some of heaven, already now. Although Wittmer is wrong to deny that the twenty-four elders surround the throne of God in heaven, there is truth in saying that these elders, representing the church, already now engage

in this heavenly worship of God on earth. In Christ, old things have passed away, and all things have become new. Because of what Jesus has done in His first coming, it is even possible to say that we now “sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6; see also 1:3). So when the old saints lament when a younger “old saint” passes away that God did not take *them* yet, let them keep in mind the reality of heavenly life that is theirs *presently!* What great riches we have even now. And we will have them throughout all of A.D. 2014 if the Lord does not take us home this year.

All these reminders are impor-

tant to keep our hopes focused as well as full.

But the deep error of those whose hopes have gone offtrack is to ignore the truth that Jesus is coming again—physically and bodily, as He ascended (Acts 1:11). Coming again for judgment. Coming again to redeem His earthly creation. Coming to resurrect those who fell asleep in Him and to change their bodies into heavenly bodies just as He changed their souls into heavenly souls when they died (I Cor. 15!). Coming *soon*.

This earth will be destroyed. It is not salvageable by man. The political machines of the world will

not be Christianized. The court systems of this world will not mete out justice, but more and more promote wickedness and condemn the godly. And when the cup of iniquity has been filled and the people of God are persecuted for standing for truth, then believers will cry out more than they do now, “Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly! Rend the heavens, and come down! Deliver us from our adversaries! And justify Thyself before all those who have rejected Thee.”

The hymn was right: *This world is not my home, I’m just a passin’ through.*

In 2014, our hope is still heaven.



TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (5)

What the Bible Says about the Bible: Scripture As “The Oracles of God”

“Though the Stake Were Staring Us in the Face”

A papal legate arrived in the city [of Prague], in the spring of 1412. He brought the sacred pallium—a vestment sent by the pope as a token of authority—to Archbishop Albik, the successor of Zbynek. He was also, to publish the bull of the pope against Ladislas. He suspected that Hus might oppose the measure. Yet it was highly important for the success of the sale of indulgences, the practical plan to raise funds for the crusade, that the great preacher should not do so. Hus was, therefore, brought before the legate.

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Previous article in this series: November 15, 2013, p. 80.

“Will you obey the apostolic mandates?” asked the legate.

Hus did not hesitate. “I am ready with all my heart to obey the apostolical mandates.”

“Do you see?” said the gratified legate to those standing by. “The master is quite ready to obey the apostolical mandates.”

“My lord,” replied Hus, “understand me well. I said I am ready with all my heart to obey the apostolical mandates. But I call apostolical mandates the doctrines of the apostles of Christ [as set forth in Holy Scripture]; and so far as the papal mandates agree with these, so far will I obey them most willingly. But if I see anything in them at variance with these, I shall not obey, even though the stake were staring me in the face.”

It was plain that Hus was not disposed to pass the

matter over in silence. He would take his full share in a discussion that was to agitate the kingdom. In consequence, we must consider him as occupying a new position, one that was more difficult than any he had occupied before. He was to come into direct conflict with the pope. He was to question papal authority, refute papal logic, expose papal baseness and iniquity. In his past efforts he had not had occasion to oppose the pope personally. He had recognized him as the head of the Church, appealed to him, addressed him in respectful language and shown him due reverence. Such a position was no longer possible. He had entered more deeply into the whole subject of the authority of the pope. As a reformer by nature and by the call of the Holy Spirit, as a public and influential man, he felt impelled to resist the evil tendencies of the priestly rule system wherever they appeared. His soul revolted at the sale of indulgences. His duty to Christ and the Church required that he should express his abhorrence.

He knew the risk. He knew that he was staking his life on the venture.... In these circumstances, so different from any in which he had previously been placed, his courage was to be put more severely to the test. Should he speak or keep silence? In this emergency that thus arose, Hus did not falter. He did not tremble to speak his conviction. With him obedience to Christ stood first in importance. The limit of obedience to all authority was to be determined by this rule. The bull required what was directly opposed to the law [or, Word] of Christ. He could not obey the bull. He could not break his rule—to obey God rather than man.¹

“...even though the stake were staring me in the face.” So strongly was John Hus convinced of the authority, the ultimate and sole authority of Scripture—a hundred years before the Reformation took place. In many respects he led the way; he was a reformer before his time. He pointed the way, a way that the others, Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, and Knox, would follow. Long before the Reformation took place, Hus called attention to the outstanding difference between the churches of the Reformation and the Roman Catholic Church. The difference, the great difference, was the difference concerning the authority in and over the church. That authority was not the authority of the pope. Rather it was the

¹ William Nathaniel Schwarze, *John Hus, The Martyr of Bohemia* (New York: Fleming, 1915), 64-66.

authority of Holy Scripture. Scripture was over all, and all—including the pope—were called boldly to confess and humbly to submit to Scripture’s supreme authority. Pre-Reformers and Reformers alike regarded Scripture as the supreme authority in the church, so that they insisted on obeying Scripture “though the stake were staring them in the face.” They were willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, the sacrifice of their lives—think about it—because they knew Scripture to be the Word of God, the divinely inspired, infallible, and inerrant Word of God. Submitting to the authority of Scripture, they were submitting to the authority of God, since Scripture is the very Word of God. That was their conviction. That conviction brought about the Reformation.

The Bible and the Bible alone is the only infallible authority in the church. Sometimes this is referred to as the formal principle of the Reformation and is distinguished from the material principle of the Reformation, the truth of justification by faith alone. *Sola Scriptura*, Scripture alone, and *Sola Fide*, faith alone, stood in the closest possible relationship to each other. Justification (salvation) by faith alone, because this was the teaching of Scripture—and Scripture is the only and ultimate authority in the church. Because the church had departed from the authority of Scripture, false doctrines and wrong practices had crept into the church. Genuine church reformation required that the church should be re-formed according to the infallible rule of sacred Scripture. Once again the church was brought to honor the supreme authority of the Word of God in the life of the church.

In our last article, you will recall, we began to consider what the Bible says about the Bible, the self-authenticating nature of Scripture. It is the Bible’s teaching about itself that it is the infallibly inspired and inerrant Word of God. The Bible teaches about itself that it is God’s Word in the words of men. As the Word of God, the Bible is the supreme authority in the life of every believer and of the church. Nothing need be believed that is not supported by Holy Scripture, and nothing that is taught in Holy Scripture may be ignored or rejected. Scripture is the authority over faith (what we believe) and morals (how we live). Scripture’s authority is the authority of God Himself—divine authority. Augustine said long ago: “What Scripture says, God says.”

This is the Bible’s testimony about itself. This is what

the Bible says about the Bible. Scripture teaches about itself that it is the infallibly inspired and inerrant Word of God. It is significant that Scripture makes this claim concerning itself. It might have disavowed divine authorship, as do some of the apocryphal books. Or the Bible might have said nothing concerning its inspiration, neither claiming nor disavowing divine authorship. But instead, Scripture insists that it is the very Word of God. This is what the Reformers had in mind when they referred to the self-authenticating nature of Scripture.

In our last article, we took special note of Jesus' word in John 10:35 that "the Scripture cannot be broken." This is what the Bible says about itself, that it cannot be broken. It is not possible to break Scripture because Scripture is the Word of God. Not only *may* it not be broken; not only are men forbidden to break the Scriptures, but in actual fact, they *cannot* break the Scriptures. They cannot break the Scriptures because the Scriptures are the Word of God. As the Word of God, Scripture's authority is binding on all men. That authority cannot be broken or set aside. Because Scripture is the holy and perfect Word of God that cannot be broken, all men everywhere are called to submit to the authority of the Scriptures.

In this article and the next, I want to consider with you the teaching of the apostle Paul in Romans 3:2. In this verse, the apostle refers to the Old Testament Scriptures as "the oracles of God." That is what the Bible is and what the Bible says about itself. That Scripture is "the oracles of God" is a very significant and instructive expression. That the Bible is "the oracles of God" aptly expresses the fundamental truth regarding Scripture, that it is the very Word of God. This is what the Bible says about the Bible, that it is "the oracles of God."²

The Oracles of God

By "the oracles of God," the apostle is referring in Romans 3:2 to the sacred Scriptures, the written Word of God.³ Paul makes this plain in two ways in what follows.

² The Greek is τὰ λόγια τοῦ Θεοῦ. The word translated "oracles" is closely related to the Greek word λόγος, which means "word." Thus "the oracles of God" refer literally to the words of God.

³ There are three other places in the New Testament where the expression "oracles of God" occurs. The other passages are: Acts 7:38, Hebrews 5:12, and I Peter 4:11. In every instance the expression "oracles of God" refers to the sacred Scriptures, the written Word of God.

First, he says in verse 4, "God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is *written*...." He appeals to that which is "written," that is, that which is written in the Holy Scriptures. What is written in the Holy Scriptures is "the oracles of God." That by "the oracles of God," the apostle is referring to Scripture is evident, secondly, from the fact that, throughout what follows, Paul quotes again and again from the Old Testament Scriptures. He quotes from the Old Testament Scriptures to support his teaching concerning the natural depravity of every member of the human race. Just as Jesus did not appeal to His divine Sonship but to Holy Scripture in order to establish the truth of what He taught, so Paul does not appeal to his apostolic office to support what he has been teaching but rather to the clear teaching of Holy Scripture.

By "the oracles of God," the apostle is referring to the Old Testament Scriptures, first of all. He has in mind the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament Bible. These thirty-nine books were recognized as the Old Testament canon. By the time that the apostle wrote the Epistle to the Romans, the Old Testament was complete. The canon of the Old Testament was fixed. Significantly neither Jesus nor the apostle Paul was forced to defend the canonicity of any of the books of the Old Testament. There was complete agreement regarding what books belonged to and what books did not belong to the Old Testament canon. These books and these books alone were recognized by the Old Testament people of God, as well as by Jesus and His apostles. Concerning the Old Testament Scriptures, the apostle says that they are the oracles of God.

By implication, what the apostle says about the Old Testament Scriptures applies also to the New Testament Scriptures. No less than the books of the Old Testament, the twenty-seven books of the New Testament are included in the canon of Scripture. They are the books—like the Book of Romans—that were written by the apostles or by their close associates. They are the books that bear the marks of sacred Scripture. And they are the books that the Holy Spirit led the church from the time of the apostles onward to recognize as belonging to the New Testament. The Scriptures as a whole, therefore, including both the Old and the New Testaments, are the oracles of God.

What does the apostle mean when he says that the

Scriptures are the oracles of God? The word “oracle” refers to a divine utterance, a word or message directly from the mouth of God. That was the meaning of the word in the Greek world in which the apostle Paul lived. Among the ancient Greeks, an oracle was considered to be the direct mouthpiece of the gods. The oracle was the spokesman of the gods. Men consulted the oracles so that they might know directly what the will of the gods was. Among the ancient Greeks the most famous oracles were the oracle of the Greek god Apollo at Delphi, and the oracle of the god Zeus at Dodona.

The apostle, now, takes that word “oracle” and applies it to Holy Scripture. Scripture is the oracle of God. This is what the Bible is: “the oracles of God.” What this means and what the apostle intends to teach by this description of Scripture is that Scripture is the Word of God, the very Word of God. If Scripture is the oracles of God, Scripture is the Word of God. This is the tremendous truth that he teaches! The words of Scripture are not simply words *about* God, words *concerning* God. The words of Scripture are not merely words that witness to

God. But the words of Scripture are the very words of God, the oracles of God.

This is true of the Scriptures as a whole and of the Scriptures in all its parts. Scripture is *entirely* the oracles of God. Clearly this is the apostle’s teaching. This belongs to the significance of the plural: “*oracles* of God.” All of Scripture, the Scriptures all together, are the oracles of God. Scripture is *only* the oracles of God.

To teach that Scripture is partly the Word of God and partly the word of man, to teach that Scripture is the Word of God inasmuch as God’s Word can be found in Scripture—much like the proverbial needle in the haystack—is to deny that Scripture is the oracles of God. This is what men are teaching today. This is the view of Scripture that is accepted by many professing Christians today. But this view flatly contradicts the apostle’s teaching in Romans 3:2.

Next time, the Lord willing, we will consider the significance and the implications of the truth that the Bible is “the oracles of God.” ☞

ALL AROUND US

REV. MARTYN MCGEOWN

“Crept in Unawares” (Jude 4)

When the devil is unable to intimidate the church into accepting homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, and transgenderism (LGBT), he uses deception. In this deception we hear the ancient hiss of the serpent, “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1).

“Yea, hath God said?” has been Satan’s tactic from the beginning. “Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?” “Hath God said that He is the Creator of all things?” “Hath God said that there was a worldwide flood?” “Hath God said that women shall not be office-bearers in the church?” “Hath God said that marriage is between one man and one woman?”

Satan is hissing again. “Yea, hath God said that homosexuality is sin? Surely, that’s only the *traditional interpretation* of the Bible. Cannot we move on from

that outdated view?” He uses scholars to undermine the Scriptures, but what he really needs is an intelligent young man with an emotionally appealing story.

Enter Matthew Vines.

Matthew Vines is a twenty-three-year-old professing Christian who identifies himself as gay, although he claims also to be celibate. In 2010, he suspended his studies at Harvard University in order to study full time for two years the Bible’s teachings on homosexuality. Having failed to convince the conservative Presbyterian church in which he grew up that their “traditional understanding” of the Bible was incorrect, he resigned his membership. Shortly thereafter, in March 2012, he gave a speech in a more liberal church, a speech that went viral and made Matthew Vines a sensation. The speech, the transcript of which has been translated into multiple languages, has almost 650,000 hits on YouTube and has been shared on blogs and social networking sites countless times. The *New York Times* even highlighted his story in an article entitled, “Turned Away, He Turned to the Bible” (Sept. 14, 2012).

Rev. McGeown is missionary-pastor of the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland stationed in Limerick, Republic of Ireland.

The speech itself is an attempt to explain (away) the six texts usually quoted as condemnation of homosexuality. Vines argues passionately that this “traditional interpretation” has borne bitter fruit in the church, namely that gay people are forced to be alone, and may never enjoy a romantic bond with another person, enjoy marriage, or have a family. Of course, he fails to mention that a gay person in a “same-sex relationship” *cannot* have a family, for it is biologically impossible, according to the Creator’s design, for two men or two women to produce a child.

The arguments that Vines advances have all been answered by conservative Christians before.¹ Robert Gagnon, associate professor of New Testament at the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, said, “Every one of these rehashed arguments I have refuted in previous work, of which Vines shows not the slightest awareness.”² They are (1) It is not good for a man to be alone. To deny marriage to homosexuals is to force them to be alone. Besides, teaching must be judged by its fruit. The “traditional interpretation” has the bad fruit of victimising and marginalising homosexuals. (2) The sin of Sodom was not homosexuality, but lack of hospitality, or even (attempted) gang rape. Whatever it was, it has nothing to do with “committed, monogamous same-sex relationships.” (3) The passages of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 are not applicable today, because the Old Testament ceremonial law is not applicable today; and, besides, the behaviour condemned was ritual prostitution, not homosexuality as such. (4) Romans 1:26-27 refers to men and women who are “naturally” heterosexual, but who deliberately commit homosexual acts contrary to their own nature. For a homosexual man to have a relationship with a woman would be unnatural *for him*. Or, the meaning is a condemnation of sexual exploitation or (again) ritual temple prostitution. (5) The words “effeminate” and “abusers of themselves with mankind” (I Cor. 6:9-10 and I Tim. 1:10) do not refer to homosexuality but to some kind of sexual exploitation, and cannot be used to condemn “commit-

¹ Two of the best books on the subject are Robert A. J. Gagnon, *The Bible and Homosexual Practice: Texts and Hermeneutics* (Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN: 2002) and James R. White and Jeffrey D. Niell, *The Same Sex Controversy* (Bethany House Publishers, Minneapolis, MN: 2002). The latter is more accessible to the common reader than the former.

² Cited in “Matthew Vines’ ‘Homosexuality is Not a Sin’ Message Finds Support in Kansas,” Examiner.com, September 20, 2013.

ted, monogamous same-sex relationships.” One passage Vines does not discuss, leaving the impression that the Bible has only six passages about (against) homosexuality, is Matthew 19, where Jesus teaches that God instituted monogamous, heterosexual, lifelong marriage, and where Jesus affirms the clear distinction between the male and female (vv. 1-12). Homosexuals desire to leave the impression that Jesus never addressed homosexuality.

I urge the readers of the *Standard Bearer*, and especially parents and Christian school teachers, to be ready to answer these arguments, for they will come up again and again. I do not have time to answer them here, but to dismiss them as not worthy of a response is not the way to equip our members.³

Besides all this, we live in an emotional society. Arguments, logic, and exegesis mean little to a culture who react rather than reflect. If you have a story and can tell it in an emotional manner, you will win hearts and minds of people more than if you have good, theologically sound arguments. Politicians and the news media know this. Advertisers know this. Increasingly, the church panders to this.

Matthew Vines’ video is only the beginning. His next step has been to set up the Reformation Project, a “Bible-based, Christian, non-profit organization that seeks to reform church teaching on sexual orientation and gender identity.” How Bible-based is it? The statement of faith on the website is deliberately broad: “We are ecumenical in nature and mission, inclusive of Protestant, Catholic and Orthodox Christians alike.” What is the “reformation” that Vines’ project seeks? The Reformation Project intends to equip activists (he calls them Reformers) to spread the revisionist view of Scripture to their community and especially to their churches.

From September 18-21, Vines held a conference in Asbury United Methodist Church, Kansas City, KS. In attendance were fifty hand-picked Christians chosen from the one hundred who applied. Before they even attended the conference, these people were required to read 1,100 pages of material on the subject in preparation. Vines writes on the Reformation Project website:

³ James R. White, of Alpha and Omega Ministries, has responded in a 5-hour podcast to Vines’ presentation. It can be downloaded for free from <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php/2012/05/23/gay-christianity-refuted/>. White responds to every one of Vines’ arguments at length. I highly recommend this to all our readers.

We will equip them [the volunteers] with the tools and training they need to go back to their communities and make lasting changes to beliefs and interpretations that marginalize lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people. Once they go back, we will continue to offer them personal, financial, and infrastructural support for months and years to come. We will ensure that even those with the biggest and most daunting of goals will have the means to accomplish them. Crucially, the aspiring reformers that we train will not be seeking to change their churches by asking them to ignore or look past the Bible. The Bible is not anti-gay. It never addresses the issues of same-sex orientation or loving same-sex relationships, and the few verses that some cite to oppose those relationships have nothing to do with LGBT people. Careful, persistent arguments about those passages have the power to change every Christian church worldwide, no matter how conservative its theology. The mission of The Reformation Project is to train a new generation of Christians to streamline that process and accelerate the acceptance of LGBT people in the church.

We have been warned. Coming to a church near you is one of Matthew Vines' "Reformers." I am no prophet, but I would not be surprised to hear of a Reformation Project event or conference in a Christian college in the not so distant future. Vines has money and influence to spread his message. Scripture, however, warns us of men like Mr. Vines, who are guilty of "turning the grace of God into lasciviousness." Such men creep into the church unawares, or, like Mr. Vines, they grow up in the church. Instead of repenting, they demand that the church change the holiness of God to accommodate them.

The Bible teaches forgiveness for homosexuals, as well as for sinners of all other categories. For, "such were some of you, but ye are washed..." (I Cor. 6:11).

In the way of repentance and faith.

Only in the way of repentance and faith. 

FEATURE ARTICLE

REV. BRIAN HUIZINGA

Encouraging the Next Generation to Read (3)

What Can We Do? The Ten "P's"

Now what can we do to encourage and promote the reading of sound, spiritually-edifying literature, particularly among the next generation?

I. Support the Preaching

Deliberately we begin here. Were I not a preacher but a cobbler, I would still begin with preaching, as every Reformed man should.

Pray for the seminary, support the seminary, pray for the minister, see to it that the young people attend the preaching, see to it that young people have a regard for preaching in their own congregations and elsewhere.

Rev. Huizinga is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

This is the text of the speech Rev. Huizinga gave at the annual meeting of the RFPA on September 19, 2013. Previous article in this series: December 15, 2013, p. 129.

What does preaching have to do with reading? Romans 1:16 authoritatively states that the preaching of the gospel is "the power of God unto salvation." The power of God unto salvation! The salvation of which Paul speaks is to be understood in the broadest sense. It includes the work of the Holy Spirit, who takes that word of Christ and plunges it deep into the hearts of young people to transform them, renew their minds, and give them a hunger and thirst for the living God and therefore for growth in doctrine. God-glorifying, cross-magnifying, soul-edifying, life-giving, biblically-faithful, Spirit-energized preaching is not *a* power, but *the* power of God unto salvation. It kindles in hearts love for God that wants to know more of Him, and that through reading. The best thing you can do to support and encourage reading among the new generation is to support and encourage preaching, because it is God's power unto salvation.

When that preaching sets forth the wonder of God's

covenant and His faithfulness to it in Christ, God is pleased to use that word to make an eighteen-year-old man go home and pull from his shelf *The Battle for Sovereign Grace in the Covenant* to behold what God has done through controversy. When the preaching sets forth the wonder of grace in Jesus Christ crucified, as that comes to expression in so many ways in so many different kinds of texts, God uses that preaching to strike a chord in the heart of a sixteen-year-old girl, so that she goes home and she wants to read that book of meditations by her bedside, which she has left untouched for two months. When one in the preaching cries unto the cities of Judah, “Behold your God,” God uses that to work in the heart of a young person to say, “Show me more of my God! Show me Christ!” He goes home, picks up a book, and reads, and reads. Poor or no preaching is reading’s enemy. Support God’s power unto salvation: Preaching.

2. Plant Seeds

Planting seeds refers to the activity of all those parents, family members, unmarried persons, teachers, and officebearers who have an impact upon the life of young people. Let the whole environment in which we live include attitudes, behaviors, and words that are as so many seeds. The heart of the young person is the field. The plant that sprouts up is the reading of a book. The seeds that go into the heart and produce reading are our attitudes, behaviors, and words.

If we who have an influence in the lives of the young people do not read, do not read good books, do not even get the *Standard Bearer* or other RFPA publications as a bare minimum, or if we dismiss them; if we do not love the truth and have an appreciation for the heritage God has given to us as churches and convey that in attitude and behavior and words; if we do not go to Bible study, or if we do go to Bible study but talk about how bad it is; if we spend more time fidgeting with our gadgets and socializing online than we do openly communicating with our young people in any serious way; if we never talk to our children about spiritual things and are not open to their concerns; if we do not have time for family devotions that include reading, discussion, singing, and prayer, then we are walking around the young people with a big tank of toxic, plant-killing spray hosing down the fields of their hearts, and it would take something just short of a miracle to get them to read solid literature for their spiritual growth.

However, when we who have an influence upon young

people plant seeds through attitudes, behaviors, and words that are God-glorifying and covenantally-directed, God will bring plants. We do! He does! When we love and openly speak of our love for God, the church, and our precious heritage as churches; when we read, and the children get used to seeing us reading, or at least having open books and magazines on the table; when we bring books into the home, and reflect on books; when we read to our children, even as they get older; when we are in the van on a long trip and start talking about what we read in a biography of some godly mid-west farm girl in the world-war years, or when the teacher takes a few minutes before class and talks about an article he was reading on a father of the *Afscheiding* and all of the sacrifices made for the truth at that time, we are planting seeds. Plant seeds! May God bring plants—young people reading.

3. Encourage Preparation for Future Service

I have never heard a man in the church say, “I regret my behavior of youth, for I wasted too much of my time reading solid Reformed works, when I could have been doing other things.” But so often you hear men in the church (particularly elders) say, what I myself say, “I regret not reading more in my youth, it would have helped me so much in being a more serviceable workman in God’s kingdom.” Let us lay this upon the hearts of young women who have a role in God’s church, but especially young men who will have leadership roles and hold office. “Young man, the day is coming when you might be a minister, an elder, a deacon, a school-board member, a member of this committee or that committee, and you need preparation for that. Read. Why don’t you read? You might not understand this now, son, but listen to me, you would do yourself such a favor if you would only read.”

We will never have the knowledge we wish we had, but let us not unnecessarily hurt ourselves and our future by failing to read, and hurt the young people by failing to encourage them to prepare for future service. When tomorrow comes, today is forever lost. What will you do today? Prepare.

4. Encourage Partnering

Many do not have the self-discipline to run for exercise three times a week. They need a partner to hold them accountable, to encourage them, to spur them on, and to whom they can speak. Finding a running partner, many run, run, run. How do we get people (young people) to read, read, read? Encourage partnering. The partner could

be a parent or a sibling, a spouse for the married, a friend, a group of friends, a group of couples, a coworker with whom you share a 45-minute lunch break that includes little meaningful conversation. Find a good book, read it or a chapter on your own time, and discuss it together. The dynamics can be set and changed. The young people golf together, and shop together. Could they not read and then discuss together a timely book for the nourishment of their souls?

5. Encourage Peer-Paraphrasing:

The young person has made it through a book or an article. Do not stop there. Now encourage them to take what they have read and paraphrase it, put it in their own words. Paraphrase the chapter, the article, the book. Paraphrase to peers. This is different than partnering. In partnering you read the same book. With peer-paraphrasing, you paraphrase what you read to a peer—a spouse, a friend, a coworker. That might spark an interest in them and get them to read. But it also helps you think more deeply about what you read. This will force us and our young people to read carefully when we do read. And this will be a way to continue benefiting from the book after it has been read.

How about this? Your peers are your family members. All the children are required to read. Now take one night a week, Wednesday night right after supper, Saturday night, Sunday afternoon, with the whole family together. Each person gets a couple minutes to paraphrase to their peers what they have read. There will be mutual rewards, enriching the experience of all.

6. Encourage Portioning

Look at that big book sitting there. It was written by a professor of theology, by John Calvin or Abraham Kuyper. It has 300 pages. I cannot read it. It is too daunting. Encourage *portioning*. You do not have to read the whole book at once, or even a whole chapter at once, but read from heading to heading. You do not have to read the whole *Standard Bearer* at once, but read one article at a time. The man sitting in seat one at the table does not eat the whole piece of meat in one bite, but he breaks it up into manageable, bite-size pieces and over the course of time devours the whole meal. There it is, sitting on the shelf. It was given to me at my confession of faith: *For Thy Truth's Sake*. It is huge! Portions, portions. Encourage the young people to take a book and divide it into manageable, bite-size portions.

7. Encourage Perseverance

A young man or woman is reading a good book or magazine, but over the course of a few weeks wearsies and discontinues. How much it would help if one person, just one person, said, “Hey, I see you are reading that book. Good job. That is a great book. Keep going.” Sometimes with half a mile to go in a 5k, all the weary runner needs is one person to shout out some encouraging words, “Keep pushing. You are looking great. You are so close!” Why not with reading also? How easy. How simple. How many times have we missed an opportunity to encourage a young person to *persevere*? Only a few words could make a significant difference.

8. Promote Literature and the Reading of it

Lately, the RFPA, and, for example, the staff of the *Beacon Lights* have been doing a terrific job promoting literature: new designs and little cards getting information out to the people, and other techniques. That is not enough. We need to promote it as well. We need to do everything *we* can. Parents, catechism teachers, elders on family visitation, school teachers, leaders of young people's societies, the chaperones at the Young People's Convention—400 young people right there for one week. Promote literature in your cabin. Talk about reading. Promote, promote, promote.

9. Encourage Pen and Pencil

Writing in the book or on something else helps one digest and remember what he read. In many places the tablet is replacing the book, and I do not know if you can highlight things in a tablet. But if you have a book, as long as it is your own, get a pen and pencil and write in it. Underline, put exclamation marks, see page 47, stars, asterisks, notes. Interact with your book, your magazine, young man, young woman. If it is yours—pen and pencil.

10. Emphasize the Parental Mandate

The parental mandate is not: “You ought to read.” Or: “I strongly encourage you to do some reading.” The parental mandate is: “You shall read. I am your father. I have been given authority by God. This is my house. You, son, you, daughter, shall read.”

Why would we not do this? The two-year-old is not

so excited about sitting through another hour-and-a-half long worship service on Sunday. But “you shall come to church.” And over the course of time children begin to see the wisdom of their parents and they enjoy going to church. And to the young people, we have said, “You shall be home at (whatever time—11 P.M.),” and though they may object, they grow up and they say, “That was the wisdom of my parents—that curfew.” The young woman wants to go out and even go to church in that little skirt, and father says, “You may not go to church wearing that.” It is an argument now. But, over time, she realizes she was foolish. She sees the wisdom of her father.

“You shall read.”

Now, do not come to the young person with both hands full, a book in one hand, and a whip in the other, like that of one of Pharaoh’s servants: YOU SHALL READ! Not that kind of “shall.” You come with a book for your son in one hand, and a book for yourself in the other. You read, son, and I also shall read. Then discuss the books. The parental mandate must be given in the right attitude and spirit, surrounded by the right conduct and life, and then God will transform the “I must read” in them, into “I want to read,” and even into “I am privileged to read.”

“But dad, you don’t know how busy I am. I can’t even read all of the books I have to read for college. I don’t have time to read.” Well, we know that is not true because we were all there one day. Nor is it true when the patient

responds to the dentist’s, “It doesn’t appear that you have been flossing every day,” with, “I don’t have time to floss every day.” The dentist does not even take the time to say, “You don’t have time to run a piece of string through your teeth for sixty seconds a day? You can do that while staring at your television.” You *have* time to read. It is a matter of the *will*. “I am your father, and I love you, and now let’s start prioritizing. For starters, you’ve got to turn that thing off, put it away, unplug it, put it way over there. Now, we’re going to read.” Sunday afternoon, what are you going to do this afternoon? Here is this literature. You shall read.

We parents, in love, need to exercise and enforce the parental mandate, “You shall read.”

By the grace of God in Jesus Christ wherein is the “will” and the “to do” of His good pleasure, and for the glory of Jehovah and His covenant, let us press on now lest a generation arise among us not knowing the Lord nor the works that He has done for Israel. Let us lay this upon the hearts of the young people. Read!

Where do you sit at the table? Where do the young people sit at the table? Where will the next generation sit at the table? This is not a parable. Jesus will not chide you for pressing toward the highest seat at the wedding table as He did the Pharisees. Take your seat in position number one. Devour good books. And let it be the joy and rejoicing of your heart. May God bring the children to sit with you. 

The Qualifications of the Office of Elder (3)

Adult Males: The Scriptural Defense

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

Previous article in this series: September 15, 2013, p. 487.

The position that we defend in this article is that men only, and not women, may be elders in Christ’s church. To be more clear, we do not hold that *any* man may be an elder. The qualifications set forth in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 restrict the office to certain gifted and spiritually qualified men. But they also prohibit women from holding the office.

Having given three reasons in our last article why we must vigilantly defend this position, let us now see that this position is not one we dreamed up, but is the teaching of Scripture itself.

I Timothy 3 and Titus 1

I Timothy 3 and Titus 1, which set forth the qualifications for officebearers, indicate that women may not serve in the special offices in the church.

The list of qualifications begins in I Timothy 3:2 and Titus 1:6 by saying that a bishop must be “blameless, the husband of one wife...” I Timothy 3:4 requires the elder to be “one that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity.” In addition, I Timothy 3:1 and 5 refers to the elder as being a “man.”

In two ways these verses make clear that elders must be male, and may not be female.

First, they specify that the elder is to be the husband of a wife, rather than the wife of a husband. We grant that by these words, “the husband of one wife,” God requires the elder to be a one-woman man—not a polygamist or an adulterer, but an example of faithful devotion to his wife. Our point now is that the Spirit of inspiration did not express this idea generally, “faithful to one’s spouse,” but specifically, “the husband of one wife.” The English words “husband” and “wife,” and the Greek words that they translate, are gender specific. An elder may not be the wife of one husband; he must be the husband of one wife.

Second, I Timothy 3:4 specifies that the elder must “rule” his own house well. Again, the Spirit of inspiration does not merely require an elder to be faithful in carrying out his (her) domestic duties. Rather, He directed Paul to use the word “rule”—referring particularly to the duty that God assigns to the husband and father.

I Timothy 3:5 indicates *why* an elder must be a male: “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” The church of God needs *rulers*; it needs rulers who can objectively discern with their intellect, not their emotions, what is right and best for the church. It needs rulers who have proved themselves, by their example in their family, to be good rulers. For all the gifts that women have—indeed, some have exceptional gifts of organization and ability to direct (distinct from ruling) a household well—God did

not create women with the necessary gifts to *rule* the home, and therefore to rule the church.

I Corinthians 14:34-35 and I Timothy 2:11-14

Our second reason for saying that women may not hold the office of elder (or any other church office) is that some Scripture passages expressly prohibit women to hold positions of authority in the church.

I Corinthians 14:34-35 reads in part, “Let your women keep silence in the churches . . . for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.” In the New Testament, the word “church” never refers to a building; it refers either to the body of believers, or to the official worship of the church. The latter is the case here. In worship, women may not speak.

I Timothy 2:11-14 also forbids women to teach in the church. Verse 12 says, “But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.” Verses 13 and 14 ground this requirement in two historical, unchangeable facts: first, Adam was created as the head of Eve; second, Eve’s fall into sin was due to her being deceived by the devil.

Whereas I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 specifically taught that only males may hold office in the church, these verses speak to the place of women in the church more generally. However, that they are more general does not make them less clear: if I Timothy 3 and Titus 1 did not explicitly, in as many words, forbid women to hold office, these verses do: “I suffer *not* a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over a man.” Express prohibitions are clear.

God’s Consistent Will

Our third reason for restricting the office of elder to men is that this has been the consistent will of God for His church and covenant people throughout history.

Never in the Old Testament were women appointed as judges of the cities, tribes, and nation, charged to administer God’s law. (I consider this an indisputable fact—Ex. 18:21, Deut. 1:13 and 15, and II Chron. 19:8 cannot be read any other way). Never did a queen rule in Jerusalem over the covenant people of God, on God’s behalf. Except Athaliah, of course—but she was not appointed by God; she usurped the throne by

murdering its rightful heirs, and was bent on destroying the true worship of Jehovah.

We need not now explain why the Old Testament mentions the occasional prophetess—Miriam, Deborah, Huldah—because the office of elder in the church of Christ is not the New Testament equivalent of the office of prophet in Israel, but of the office of king. Still, by referring to such women we are reminded that the Israelites did recognize the exceptional gifts of some women at various times throughout their history. However, Israel did not use these gifts as a reason to make the women rulers of the nation.

Because God at no time made expressly clear that His will changed with regard to women in positions of authority, but rather made expressly clear that His will did not change in this regard (I Cor. 14 and I Tim. 2), the church of Christ must understand it to be the consistent will of God for His church throughout all history that only men—and then, qualified men—fill the offices of authority in the church of Jesus Christ.

This is not male chauvinism. This is not to ignore the weaknesses and sinful natures of men in the church. This is simply to recognize the will of God.

Objections

Three possible objections to all that we have said may be stated and briefly refuted.

First, someone familiar with the Greek language might point out that the word translated “man” in I Timothy 3:1 and 5 is not gender specific; what the King James Version translates as a noun referring to a male is actually a pronoun meaning “someone,” and could refer to either male or female.

We agree that the Greek word as such can refer to a male or female.

This does not mean, however, that God permits women to be elders. As with any pronoun that could refer to either male or female, or to singular or plural (such as our use of the word “you”), one must ask: what (who) is the antecedent? To whom, in this sentence, does the pronoun refer? And the answer in I Timothy 3:1-13 is that the pronoun refers to males, husbands, rulers of homes.

The second objection is that Paul prescribed that males be elders because in his day men were the rulers of

homes and of society. Because things are different in our culture today, elders may be either male or female.

This objection is an insult to the Holy Spirit’s ability clearly and accurately to instruct the church of all ages regarding the Lord’s revealed will. The Lord’s revealed will for the church does not depend on the church’s culture or the time in history in which she lives; rather, it depends on foundational principles that never change. Moses warned Israel against this very kind of thinking in Deuteronomy 30:11-14: God’s law was not written in a different language (“in heaven”), nor was it intended for people of a different culture (“beyond the sea”); it was given plainly to the Israelites. So with all of God’s Word, as applied to male eldership: God’s will regarding male eldership transcends culture. Scripture even indicates this regarding the point at hand: the qualifications for elder are written to two different churches—Ephesus (I Tim. 3) and Crete (Tit. 1). They existed at the same time in history, and as part of the same Roman empire, but were distinct churches, with different backgrounds and particular customs and cultures. But God’s will regarding male eldership transcended geographic and cultural differences.

The third objection is that Scripture is not clear on the matter of whether or not women are permitted to or excluded from the holding of church office.

Although we referred briefly to this objection in our last article, we note it again, because this is the basic argument of those Reformed church bodies that now permit women to hold office: the Scripture does not *clearly* say we may not. This, we are told, is why good and sincere Christians are found on both sides of the issue. If Scripture were clear, all Christians would see it the same way.

Our response is threefold. First, this is an attack on all of Scripture. If Scripture is not clear, it is not reliable and trustworthy, and cannot be profitable, as Paul told Timothy it was (II Tim. 3:16). Second, this is an attack on the Holy Spirit, as we just pointed out in responding to the second objection. I go farther: it is a lie against the Holy Spirit. It charges the Spirit of Christ with the inability to speak clearly, when in fact, as God, He speaks most plainly. Third, it ignores this fact, illustrated from creation: at high noon on a cloudless day, the sun in the heavens shines forth with all its glory and splendor—but not all see it. Some do not see it at all. Others do not see

it clearly. They are blind—either completely, or partially. This is the issue with regard to the Scriptures—they are clear, but the minds of men are blinded.

Forget not, dear reader, that such blindness manifests the depravity that is common to all, even to us. Wherefore, as we stand firm on the matter of excluding women

from the offices, let our prayer always be that of blind Bartimaeus, “Lord, that I may receive my sight” (Luke 18:41), and our supplication that of the psalmist, “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law” (Ps. 119:18). 

Rendering to Caesar

Recent headlines have carried news of allegations that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) targeted certain conservative groups and held up or denied their applications for tax-exempt status. What are the implications if the tax-collecting agency of our nation would target our churches or schools? How do recent changes in the law make it more likely that our churches and schools will face increased scrutiny in the future? In order to understand these questions, it is important to understand how the current tax laws work in relation to non-profit entities.

The general assumption is that any entity is subject to taxation. Even if a corporation is organized under the non-profit corporation statutes of a state, it must still make application to the IRS for recognition of tax-exempt status in order to be exempt from taxes in the eyes of the IRS. The one exception to the rule is for churches, which are presumed exempt without applying. Many churches still apply for recognition of tax-exempt status in order to ensure that there is not a question as to whether it does in fact qualify as a “church.”

Many people assume that donations to any tax-exempt nonprofit organization are charitable contributions that qualify as tax deductions. However, the issue of whether donations to the organization qualify for a tax deduction is a separate issue. Some organizations are tax exempt, but contributions to them do not qualify for tax exemption, such as donations to a political action committee.

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

Donations to churches do qualify as deductible charitable contributions without formal recognition from the IRS.

In order to receive recognition from the IRS as either tax exempt or as a qualifying charitable organization, an entity must file IRS Form 1023, aptly titled “Application for Recognition of Exemption.” The form requires an organization to submit much information, including copies of Articles of Incorporation, Bylaws, copies of its web pages, advertising brochures, fundraising materials, and a host of other documentation. The form also includes many questions about board members, employees, and constituencies. The form also inquires extensively about amounts and sources of contributions, as well as projected annual budgets.

Once submitted, Form 1023 is assigned to an IRS agent to be reviewed. After reviewing the form, the agent will often send a letter requesting additional documentation or asking questions about the organization’s operations. Sometimes changes to organizational documents such as Articles of Incorporation or Bylaws are required in order for the application to be approved. If an organization’s articles of incorporation do not include language prohibiting discrimination based on race, ethnicity, or national origin, the IRS will insist that they be amended to include such language.

This stage of the process, the review of the Form 1023, is where the abusive practices reported in the news are alleged to have occurred. Some conservative groups claim that the IRS agents reviewing their applications required them to answer many more questions than other groups, that their applications were held up for additional lengths

of time, and that more documentation was required of them than of other groups. The agents reviewing applications for recognition of exempt status have a great deal of discretion and power in deciding what documentation is required, so one can see where such abuses could occur.

The issue with the alleged abuses in processing the applications for recognition of tax-exempt status illustrates the difficulties that could face our churches and schools as our doctrines cause us to come under increased scrutiny. However, while the alleged abuses grabbed the headlines, changes in the legal landscape could have even farther reaching implications for our churches and schools. As the world rapidly changes around us, our doctrines and beliefs could become the basis for legally denying tax exemption for our schools and possibly even our churches.

The world around us is rapidly becoming more and more accepting of sinful lifestyles such as homosexuality. Even churches are changing positions to accept homosexual members and, in some cases, homosexual clergy. As our churches hold fast to the doctrines of Scripture, they become more and more out of step with mainstream thought.

As homosexuality becomes widely accepted, the laws are also changing. Whereas homosexuality was still illegal just a few years ago, it has now become a protected status, and laws are changed to prevent discrimination against homosexuals. The United States Senate has been working on a bill that would add protection against discrimination in employment based on sexual orientation.¹ The bill is moving forward with bipartisan support.

Discrimination is one of the bases for denying or revoking the tax-exempt status of an organization. In 1983, the United States Supreme Court heard the case of *Bob Jones University v. United States*.² Bob Jones University (BJU) had a policy of prohibiting interracial marriage or dating. In 1976, the IRS revoked BJU's tax-exempt status retroactively to 1970. BJU challenged the action, stating that its position was based on its sincerely held religious beliefs. The case was ultimately heard

by the Supreme Court, which upheld the action of the IRS. The Court found that the government's interest in eliminating racial discrimination outweighed the concern about the tax burden to the school in the exercise of its religious beliefs.

While we would never condone discrimination based on race, churches such as ours with a firm stand against homosexuality are often compared to those who discriminated based on race in the past. As noted above, Bob Jones University argued that their racial policies were based on sincerely held religious beliefs. Critics are quick to point out that churches in the past used Scripture to justify racial discrimination, just as we point to Scripture to support our position in regard to homosexuality. The situation becomes even more difficult as other churches abandon scriptural teachings to preach tolerance and acceptance for homosexuality.

Many are already clamoring for revocation of tax-exempt status for groups that do not condone homosexuality. In California, a bill to revoke the state tax-exempt status of the Boy Scouts and other groups that exclude homosexuals was recently narrowly defeated. Although the Boy Scouts recently changed their policies to allow homosexual members, openly gay leaders are still excluded, prompting activists to demand that the Scouts' tax-exempt status be revoked.

We can expect that in the near future the IRS will require new organizations to adopt policies that prohibit them from excluding homosexuals as members before an Application for Recognition of Exemption is approved. We can expect that at some point existing schools and other organizations will be required to adopt similar language or lose their designation as charitable entities whose donors are eligible for tax deductions.

Churches may very well be treated differently. We can assume the legal analysis would track closely with the Supreme Court's ruling in the *Bob Jones University* case. The Court in that case made a distinction between religious schools and "churches or other purely religious institutions."³

So how does the development of the law in this area affect our churches and schools? The result may well be that it effectively makes our schools, in particular, more expensive to operate. If the IRS denies charitable status

¹ Jeremy W. Peters, *Bill Advances to Outlaw Discrimination Against Gays*, N.Y. TIMES, November 4, 2013.

² *Bob Jones University v. United States*, 461 U.S. 574 (1983).

³ *Id.* at Footnote 29.

for a new school or revokes the status for an existing school, contributions directly to the school will not be tax deductible. The Court in the *Bob Jones University* case implied that this is removal of a benefit rather than imposition of a burden, but the effect is the same. Our constituents will in many cases have less to give to support the schools because their final tax burden will be higher than donors who support schools that adopt the IRS's policies.

This issue is an example of yet another way in which

the world's policies of increasingly demanding toleration for sin makes it more difficult to operate our churches and schools. We are called to obey the government that God has set over us, and to render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's. We must expect that if we stand unyielding in our doctrine, this may mean that we will experience a greater economic burden in the future. We must be ready to accept these greater costs, both in an actual economic sense and in terms of a loss of freedom, for the sake of the Truth. ∞

The Church of Jesus Christ

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 21

Question 54. What believest thou concerning the "holy catholic church" of Christ?

Answer. That the Son of God, from the beginning to the end of the world, gathers, defends, and preserves to Himself by His Spirit and Word, out of the whole human race, a church chosen to everlasting life, agreeing in true faith; and that I am and for ever shall remain, a living member thereof.

Question 55. What do you understand by "the communion of saints"?

Answer. First, that all and every one who believes, being members of Christ, are, in common, partakers of Him and of all His riches and gifts; secondly, that every one must know it to be his duty, readily and cheerfully to employ his gifts, for the advantage and salvation of other members.

Question 56. What believest thou concerning "the forgiveness of sins"?

Answer. That God, for the sake of Christ's satisfaction, will no more remember my sins, neither my corrupt nature, against which I have to struggle all my life long; but will graciously impute to me the righteousness of Christ, that I may never be condemned before the tribunal of God.

This Lord's Day asks three questions: What is the church? What is the communion of saints? and, What is the forgiveness of sins?

All three of the answers given in the Catechism begin with Jesus Christ. It's important to note this, because our tendency in answering any one of these questions is to look away from Christ to what we see and experience, with the result that we become discouraged. When asked, What is the church? we tend to look at our church, its smallness, its sinful members, its lack of unity, all its

weaknesses, and we are discouraged. When asked, What is the communion of saints? we tend to look at our relationships with other church members and say, "There's not much in it for me; nobody pays much attention to me; I don't know what communion is." When asked about the forgiveness of sins, we will look at our own sins, and doubt that they could ever be forgiven because they are so many and so great.

Answering these questions, we need to look to Christ. That's what faith does, and we answer these questions by faith; "I *believe* an holy catholic church, I *believe* the communion of saints, I *believe* the forgiveness of sins." By faith we see each of these in their relation to Jesus Christ.

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

Seeing the Church through Faith

What is the church?

Even though the Bible does use the word “church” to refer to the local organized congregation (Rev. 2:1), we should have a much broader view of the church than this. The Catechism speaks of the church not as an organization or denomination, but as it is in God’s eyes, a great company of people who have been chosen by God and redeemed by Christ; who are being gathered by the Word and Spirit; and who are forever united to Christ by faith. The church is “catholic,” or universal, which means that it can be found in all parts of the world and in all ages. The church is not limited to a time, a place, a denomination, a congregation, or an ethnic group, but is made up of all the elect from the beginning to the end of the world, and is called in Scripture the body of Christ.

Because of this, there are things we can say about the church, by faith, that we might hesitate to say from our experience. Even though the church appears to us to be fragmented, we believe that the church is the one body of Christ. Even though the church is made up of sinners, we believe that the church is the holy bride of Christ. Even though our work of evangelism seems to bear little fruit, we believe that Christ is gathering His church.

This perspective helps me in two practical ways.

First, it helps me to see the importance and possibility of membership in a local church. God doesn’t save random individuals, but the saved who are baptized into Christ are added to the church (Acts 2). Instead of proudly looking for a flawless church, I look for a church that is faithful in the main areas of preaching the true gospel, administering the sacraments faithfully, and exercising Christian discipline. Instead of selfishly holding myself back from membership because a church doesn’t meet my felt needs, I join in order to contribute to the life of the body.

Second, it helps me to be a contributing member in the body of Christ. The Catechism refers to “living” members. Sadly, some church members are more like dead branches than living members. They are enrolled as members of the church, but that is as far as it goes. They contribute little, they participate at a minimum, they do not know the other members, they rarely if ever witness for Christ, and they bear little of the fruits of the Spirit. But those who are united to Christ are “living” members

who, drawing from Christ, are fruitful in godliness with a view to the gathering of the church, and in love with a view to serving other members of the body. Our perspective, and our motivation, is that this is Christ’s church, that He loves her, that He has given Himself for her, and that His goal for her is the glory of the entire body. With this perspective, I will willingly love and serve His body.

The Communion of Saints

What is the communion of saints?

The Roman Catholic says that this refers to the communion we can have with “the saints,” and so they pray to patron saints.

But how would you answer it as a Reformed believer? Most of us, I think, would say this refers to the fellowship that believers have with one another. And whenever that subject comes up, people will begin to complain about the lack of communion and love in their church, and they mean that they just do not feel loved. Whenever we try to explain the communion of saints by looking first or only at our horizontal relationships, we will not get it right.

Looking at the Catechism, the communion of the saints is *first* the communion of all believers with Christ, and *second* the communion of believers with each other. The first is the basis for the second. Our communion with each other flows out of our communion with Christ.

My communion with Christ means that I am partaker of Christ and all His riches and benefits. That means I have all I need and more, that I know the love and fullness of Christ, and that in my need I turn to Him for fulfillment, comfort, and peace.

The communion of other believers with Christ means that I love them because they are one with Christ. I do not look at them and their worthiness to be loved before I make a choice to love them, but I see them in relation to Christ. I see them as His, purchased with His blood, and, knowing His love for me, I love *Him* by loving His body.

Sometimes there is not much communion among saints in a church. It should not be that way, but sometimes it just is. What then? Most important is that I do not withdraw, and say, “I am being left out.” That is a selfish perspective, which views others as being there to serve me, rather than seeing self as one who must serve others.

The remedy is to get busy using my gifts to serve others. After all, this is what Christ has done (Matt. 28:20). My concern should never be myself, but rather the advantage and salvation of others.

Perhaps we think this is not all that important; that doctrinal purity and righteous living are more important than serving others in the body. Jesus tells us, in Matthew 25, how important this is. Jesus says to one who feeds a hungry mouth, or gives a glass of cold water to the thirsty, or takes in a stranger, or clothes the poor, or visits the sick, or makes the effort to see one who is imprisoned, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). And the one who does not do it, does not do it to Christ, and shows by this that he is none of His.

A Body Forgiven

"...forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32).

We might be inclined to think that forgiveness has nothing to do with the church, that it is a very personal thing between the individual and God, and so this subject does not really fit with the church. There are, however, at least four ways that forgiveness is connected to the church.

1. The church proclaims the gospel, which has forgiveness at its heart, and which is absolutely essential for my salvation.

2. Through its exercise of Christian discipline, the church retains and remits sin. A part of the experience of forgiveness is repentance.

3. The church as a whole is the company of those who have been forgiven. Christ has washed his bride of sin by the blood of the cross.

4. Knowing the grace of forgiveness, I am called to have a merciful heart, and to forgive those in the church who sin against me. The church is made up of forgiven sinners who forgive one another.

The experience of forgiveness, then, is closely tied to my place in the church of Jesus Christ.

How wonderful it is to know that I am forgiven. It means that God does not hold my sin against me, and it means that the perfect righteousness of Christ is freely given to me, and thus I can be confident that I will never

be condemned by God. The Catechism breathes with assurance here.

But what about doubt? Sinner, look away to Christ. Repent of your sins, yes. Grieve over them as an offense to God, yes. But in faith look away to Christ and His perfect righteousness and sufficient suffering. Jesus says, "He that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is it important to answer the questions of this Lord's Day from the perspective of faith?
2. To what does the "catholicity" of the church refer? Who belongs to the "catholic" church? Do you think that you have a broad enough understanding of the universal church of Christ?
3. How does believing that Christ is gathering and building the church encourage me in witnessing and in the support of missions?
4. Why is membership in a local church important, and what should I look for in a church?
5. What is individualism, and why is it wrong?
6. When it comes to the communion of the saints, why is it important to see that our fellowship is first with Christ? (Rom. 12:5)
7. If you would begin to feel that there is not much love and communion between other members of the body and yourself, how should you go about rectifying this?
8. Find some Bible passages from the gospels and epistles that show the importance of the communion of the saints in a local church setting.
9. In what ways should members of the body of Christ enrich and serve one another? Does this attitude of serving characterize you? Does it characterize the church of which you are a member?
10. How is the forgiveness of sins connected to the doctrine of the church?
11. Describe the peace and joy that comes through knowing that your sins are forgiven.

Minister Activities

We at the "News" extend our congratulations to Rev. Nathan and Jessica Decker, pastor of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, who were blessed with the birth of their daughter, Emma Kay, born on November 13.

At a special congregational meeting held on December 8, Doon, IA PRC voted to extend a call to Rev. Bruinsma to serve as their next pastor.

Mission Activities

For your prayers: While the Philippine churches in Manila and further north were unaffected by the recent typhoon, the Protestant Reformed Fellowship in Albuern, Leyte has suffered loss. Their worship building has been destroyed, and eleven families that are members of the mission there have lost their homes and possessions. Currently, the families are surviving in evacuation shelters. They are now without their own homes and a house for their Lord's Day worship together. The consistory of the First Reformed Church of Bulacan will be providing benevolent assistance. Their pastor, Rev. Flores, along with Deacon Lito Tries, were scheduled to visit the area the last week of November. The Lord has abundantly provided FRCB with the means to provide the mercies of Christ, for which we are very thankful. May God in His

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

good pleasure keep His people safe, and also reveal to all that He is the God of the storm.

Our missionary pastor to the PR Fellowship in Pittsburgh, PA, Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma, along with his wife, Mary, traveled to Loveland, CO after Thanksgiving to visit with family. While in Loveland, he was scheduled to preach on Sunday, December 1, and give a presentation on the work being done in Pittsburgh.

Sister-Church Activities

Rev. Andrew Lanning, minister-on-loan to the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore, was the featured speaker at a Mission Seminar entitled, "Bearing Witness to the Truth—Speaking the Timeless Truth in a Postmodern Age," on Saturday, November 16. The seminar began at 3:30 P.M., followed with breakout and discussion and questions and answers from 4:45-6:30, and concluded with dinner and fellowship from 6:30-7:30.

School Activities

Professor Russell Dykstra, of our PR Theological School, was the featured speaker at the Edmonton, AB School Society Lectures held on November 30 at the First PRC in Edmonton, AB. Prof. Dykstra spoke in the morning on "The Reformation's Zeal for Christian Schools," followed in the afternoon with, "The Foundation of the Christian School: God's Everlasting Covenant of Grace."

The Student Council of Heritage Christian High School in Dyer, IN sponsored a blood drive with Heartland Blood Centers in their school

gym on November 14 from 7:30 to 11:30 A.M. The students of Heritage encouraged all eligible supporters and students to participate.

The freshman and sophomore classes of Trinity Christian High School in Hull, IA organized volleyball, ping-pong, foosball, and Rook tournaments, along with a freewill donation pasta supper on Saturday, November 23, beginning at 4:00 P.M. All the friends and family of Trinity were invited to enjoy the meal, watch competitive tournaments, and enjoy good fellowship.

The annual Fearfully and Wonderfully Made presentation at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI was given Friday, November 22. Fearfully and Wonderfully Made is a program designed to teach children about various handicaps and how children with those disabilities cope with them. It also helps children understand that they each have a purpose in the body of Christ. They do not have to be the best at everything to be crucial to the body. Each child has his unique gifts. The areas covered this year included, blindness, hearing loss, motor and orthopedic disabilities, learning disabilities, and autism, to name a few. One disability is presented each year to students at age-comprehension level. This year's Fearfully and Wonderfully Made chapel speech was given by Rev. Ron VanOverloop and was based on I Corinthians 12:12-25: "For as the body is one and hath many members...."

Congregation Activities

The members of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a

“Girlz Get Real” Conference on Saturday, November 16, under the theme, “Man looketh at the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh at the heart.” Around 120 young ladies from the 8th grade through post high school, took part in the daylong event. Three ladies, Heidi Boven, Rebecca Koops, and Helen VanderWall, were the speakers, and they exhorted the young ladies to consider questions like: Are you preoccupied with your looks, your clothes, your social life, your popularity, and your attention from the opposite sex? Are you willing to give up these temporary pleasures and shallow, trivial pursuits? Are you ready to serve God’s sacred call in your life? His intent for you is to abandon the world’s temporary

pleasures and shallow pursuits and to seek an ardent fellowship with Him, your King. Are you ready to embark on an adventure with your King?

Young People’s Activities

The Young People’s Society of our Wingham, ON PRC organized a volleyball tournament as a fundraiser to help offset the cost of plane tickets for this summer’s Young People’s Convention in Southern California. The tournament was held on Saturday, November 30, at F.E. Madill High School in Wingham.

On Friday evening, November 22, the Young People’s Society of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC sponsored a gym/game night for all the members of their congregation. The young people had reserved Lighthouse

Community Church for this activity. Each family was asked to bring a snack to share, along with any board games they wanted to play. Donations were accepted to help pay for the building, and we assume help pay for convention expenses as well.

Members of the Edgerton, MN PRC enjoyed a bowl of soup together on November 21. They could choose between pea, cheesy vegetable, tomato, and chili, as well as BBQ. Proceeds went toward the travel expenses of this summer’s convention.

The annual Young People’s Mass Meeting to celebrate Thanksgiving was held on November 24 at the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI. Rev. James Slopsema spoke on “Avoiding Materialism to Be Truly Thankful.”



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Bill and Julie Reinholt in the death of Bill’s sister,

JUDY ANN PAPPAS.

May their comfort be found in God’s Word, “Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort” (II Corinthians 1:3).

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Dan Kiel, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Men’s Society of Hudsonville PRC expresses Christian sympathy to member Mr. Henry Boer in the loss of his sister,

MYRTLE BOONSTRA.

May the family find their comfort in Romans 8:28: “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.”

Erv Kortering, Secretary

Classis West

■ Classis West is scheduled to convene on Wednesday, March 5, 2014, at the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD. All material to be included in the agenda must be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than Monday, February 3. Delegates who will need lodging or transportation from the Sioux Falls airport can inform Rev. Brummel, a.brummel@prca.org, of their need.

Rev. D. Kuiper, Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour January 2014

Date	Topic	Text
January 5	“Alpha and Omega”	Revelation 1:8
January 12	“By Faith Looking for a City”	Hebrews 11:9, 10
January 19	“Not Just Hearers, but Doers”	James 1:22-25
January 26	“God’s Everlasting Glory”	Romans 11:33-36