

The Standard Bearer

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Taming the Tongue

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

James 3:8

What an unruly evil is the tongue! Men have been able to tame all kinds of animals. They can get cockatoos to sing, tigers to jump, elephants to dance, dolphins to flip, and snakes to be charmed.

But the tongue is different. It cannot be restrained or controlled to do just what we want it to do. Therefore it brings forth sinful words that often wreak havoc in our lives and in the lives of others. The tongue is full of killing poison.

The inspired James uses some very strong words to describe the tongue: "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of

nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (James 1:5-6). Don't let the seriousness of this escape attention! The smallest of flames, started on a tiny little match, is capable of setting an entire forest on fire. So it is with our words: once we speak evil, we cannot take it back. Sometimes we can limit the damage, and the effects will fade; but if conditions are right, the damage can be horrendous and last a lifetime.

How great a matter a little fire kindleth!

Hatred in our words can cost the very life of our neighbor. The men who accused Naboth of blasphemy against God and the king caused Naboth to be stoned to death through their false witness.

But much more common than bearing false witness in the technical sense is the sin of backbiting. How often do our words "bite" our neighbor behind his back, when he cannot defend his good name? "Did you hear what so and so did?" Then, out rolls the tale that drags our neighbor's name through the mud. We may be reporting true facts about our brother or sister in the church; but when they are meant to harm his good name, we have sinned against him. "The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly" (Prov. 18:8).

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While backbiting is done in relative secrecy, some people are so bold as to hurl false and malicious statements in the presence of their neighbor. Such slander is just another way of harming our neighbor's good name.

When we use our tongues to demean others, hatred again rears its ugly head. We might criticize others, even speaking true things to them and about them; but if our language is harsh and imbalanced (e.g., always pointing out the faults and never pointing out that which is done well), it is hateful speech. Parents can sometimes demean their children by the way they speak to them, using harsh language or making as if the children will never get it right. Of course, children can pack some pretty potent poison themselves. Perhaps they imagine that name-calling on the playground is mostly harmless fun; little do they realize the pain and sorrow that just a few words can cause. Sometimes we sin with our tongues by what we don't say or by telling only part of the truth in order to give the wrong impression.

Even apart from deceptive words, the tongue often shows hatred towards our neighbor by speaking crude words. Some words have become so common we hardly notice when they are used. Vulgar words and jokes often demean the sanctity of marriage and turn the gift of intimacy into rottenness.

Moving into the realm of the spiritual, the tongue is every bit as deadly. The tongue that speaks heresy is full of the same deadly poison of hatred toward God and the neighbor. The tongue that constantly complains about others or about the church, and yet refuses to deal with the issues, is not showing love, but is, in fact, spreading hateful poison in the church.

Even worse, the unruly tongue so easily utters God's name in vain (or says nothing when God's name is taken in vain). Although we sometimes use substitutes like "Gosh!" or "Geez!" and other words to express amusement or surprise, those substitutes are still connected to God's Holy name and therefore still constitute using God's name in vain.

On and on we could go about the unruly evil of the tongue. Scripture speaks about the evil tongue in many ways: mischief and vanity are under it (Ps. 10:7); like a sharp razor, it works deceitfully, loving devouring

words (Ps. 52:2, 4); it is sharpened like a sword to inflict maximum damage (Ps. 64:3); it boasts against the heavens (Ps. 73:9); the strange woman uses it to flatter and seduce (Prov. 6:24); it afflicts others and works ruin (Prov. 2:16). No wonder the lying tongue, a false witness speaking lies, and one who sows discord among brethren (with his words) are among the seven things that Jehovah counts as abominations (Prov. 6:16-19).

How many feelings have been hurt by the tongue? How many relationships have been damaged or destroyed by the tongue? How many are led into evil ways by the tongue? How many churches have suffered because of unruly tongues? "How great a matter a little fire kindleth!"

Where does the tongue get its deadly poisonous fire from? From hell itself. Satan started the fire, as it were, with his own proud boasting. In his rebellion the devil sought to take Adam and Eve and the whole human race with him. Now, because of Adam's fall into sin, every last person (Christ excepted) is subject to the corruption that is passed down naturally. By nature, our hearts are full of envy, strife, and hatred.

No wonder, then, that the Holy Spirit tells us, "The tongue can no man tame." No (mere) man, that is to say, no person who participates in the human race, is able to tame the tongue.



However, an unruly tongue ought not to be manifested by the child of God. "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (James 3:10).

Instead, God would have us tame our tongues.

Taming the tongue involves turning away from all evil spoken with our tongues. Stop lying. Turn away from false, backbiting, and reproachful words. Turn away from words that stir up anger. Turn away from self-serving or seducing flattery. Stop pouring forth foolish and vain words. Do not allow your tongue to continue uncontrolled.

Not only does taming the tongue involve putting off the old man, it also involves putting on the new man. Taming the tongue involves both the putting away of lying as well as the speaking of truth with our neighbor. In other words, God would not only have

us avoid using the tongue for evil, He would also have us use the tongue for good, out of love for God and our neighbor.

Just as Scripture is not short on passages that condemn the wrong use of the tongue, so too it sheds much light on the proper use of the tongue. Often it contrasts the evil and the good in the same verse: "There is that speaketh like the piercings of a sword: but the tongue of the wise is health" (Prov. 12:18). "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life: but perverseness therein is a breach in the spirit" (Prov. 15:4).

While the unruly tongue is horrible, the tame tongue is music to the ears of the godly. "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones" (Prov. 16:24). "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver. As an earring of gold, and an ornament of fine gold, so is a wise reprover upon an obedient ear" (Prov. 25:11-12).

What does the tongue look like when it is controlled? It speaks the truth uprightly and confesses it. In addition, it defends and promotes the honor and estimation of the neighbor. The tame tongue bears witness to the truth, even though it may bring persecution. How many prophets stood for the truth against wicked kings and paid for it with their lives? John the Baptist is just one of many examples; he condemned Herodias' remarriage to Herod and lost his head for it. How many churches will experience persecution when they continue to condemn the vile sins of today's culture?

Instead of cutting our neighbor down with our words, the tongue that is controlled will speak that which is good to the use of edifying, seeking to minister grace to the hearers, no matter what their age or their relationship to us (cf. Eph. 4:29). Instead of speaking gossip and slander, the controlled tongue will wisely reprove those who are walking in sin, knowing that such wounds are faithful when administered in love (cf. Prov. 25:12; 27:6).

The controlled tongue not only speaks the truth with the right goal, it speaks those words as gently and lov-

ingly as possible. "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

The tame tongue will use the truth of God's Word for communicating instruction to those who are ignorant, for convicting of sin, for leading to amendment of life, and for teaching what is right and good in God's eyes (cf. II Tim. 3:16).



But is such taming of the tongue even possible? Does not this text declare "the tongue can no man tame"?


Indeed, it is so; no person participating in the human race by nature can control the tongue so as to use it in love for God and the neighbor. Romans tells us "There is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness" (Rom. 3:12b-13).

The tongue can no *man* tame.

But "the things which are impossible with men are possible with God" (Luke 18:27). What is impossible in us by nature, God brings about by His grace, which is ours in Christ Jesus. It is God, then, who graciously works in us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

Where can we obtain the practical knowledge and strength to grow in the right use of our tongues? "If any of you lack wisdom let him ask of God" (James 1:5). "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17).

Do we desire to have a tongue that is tamed? That in itself is already a sign of God's work in our hearts.

May God continue to work in us, giving to us that which we ask for in faith, that we may ever use our tongues for the good of our neighbor and the praise of His Name. 

*Taming the tongue
involves both
the putting away of lying
as well as the speaking
of truth with our neighbor.*

Whose Is the Work of Missions?

If there are questions about denominational unity in *worship* (see the last two editorials), there are as many questions and difficulties regarding the denomination's unity in *missions*.

Two divergent views of missions and their relationship to the *denomination* exist in the Protestant Reformed Churches, views that reflect two minds that existed even before the formation of the PRC. One of these views is right, the other wrong.

The question is: Whose is the work of missions? Is it the local congregation's, or is it the denomination's? To focus the question: may a local congregation ever do mission work without the oversight of the denomination, or must all mission work be regulated by one of synod's committees—the Domestic Mission Committee (DMC) or Foreign Mission Committee (FMC)?

The one view holds that, even if the local congregation is the “calling church,” which officially sends the missionary, all mission work is denominational. Those who hold this view sharply criticize any church that engages in missions “solo,” as they might label it. Worse, they

may accuse such a church of “independentism,” a label no Reformed church ought to embrace.

The other view holds that a local congregation may do mission work by herself, and that any attempt to force her to give it to the “churches in common” is an incorrect view of Reformed denominational life. Those who hold this view are jealous of the right of the local church alone to preach the gospel. They would criticize their critics by complaining that their autonomy is being challenged.

I have heard from both sides of this debate, and believe that it would be helpful to hold before us what is the Protestant Reformed's *official* and *unambiguous* stand on this question, as well as how we came to have this view. For the peace of the churches, especially for the cause of unity in missions, we ought not be casting aspersions on one another.



Before I answer the question, let me remind us how important it is for us to support missions and our missionaries.

Some of us remember, during the time of the Vietnam war, how damaging it was to the morale of the young soldiers in Vietnam that, back home, everyone was arguing about whether the US should even

be involved in the war. On their furloughs the boys came home to protests and jeers. Soldiers need united support behind their efforts. So PRC missionaries—at home and abroad—must know that the churches are pulling together for the cause of the gospel. Then, too, consistories and mission committees should not be distracted by a sense that there is a segment of the church in some way opposed to their work.

There are many ways to remind us of the importance of missions among us, thus getting us to “pull together.” We could hold before us the question that every consistory faces annually at church visitation: “Is the congregation busy in the extension of God's kingdom, especially in the promotion of missions, to the best of its ability?” We could point out that, throughout the history of our churches, in some years almost *half* of our denominational budget was designated for mission causes. We could remind ourselves that the constitution of the Domestic Mission Committee begins with this striking statement: “The Protestant Reformed Churches believe that, in obedience to the command of Christ, the King of the church, to preach the blessed gospel to all creatures, baptizing, and teaching them to observe all things

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2013, p. 4.

which Christ has commanded, it is *the explicit duty and sacred privilege* of said churches to carry out this calling according to the measure of our God-given ability.” We are churches who, although we confess with sorrow that we have not carried out this sacred duty as faithfully as we ought to have, nevertheless are committed to “declare and publish” the promise and command of the gospel “to all nations and to all persons promiscuously and without distinction, to whom God out of His good pleasure sends the gospel” (Canons of Dordt, II:5).

Even if we might not have been aware of the weight of PRC financial resources used for missions, we are aware of those familiar statements from our confessions. What we might not know is that the cause of missions was dear to our Reformed fathers from the very beginning of the Reformed faith in this country. And as you know by now, I am always interested in promoting among us a healthy sense of our history.

In 1851, when our *Afscheiding* (secessionist) ancestors first joined the RCA in West Michigan and met as classis in Holland, they had a “fraternal discussion” about the “bounden duty of the church of God in every way to preach to the world the precious word of salvation.” They were concerned that their present prosperity would fade if their “active participation in the extension of God’s kingdom (were) neglected.” This neglect, they believed, would incur “double guilt” because of their double blessing: they not only had

the truth, but in the land of the free they had the liberty to *proclaim* the truth. So, repeatedly in their first decades in this country, the classical and synodical assemblies pressed upon the churches to have monthly prayer meetings and regular collections for missions. Newsletters were to be written. A monthly magazine was commissioned to “stimulate the interest of the churches.” Even when they discussed the Christian schools at synods, one of the reasons given for supporting these schools was that persons must be “trained to carry the light of the truth to the blind heathen.” At the same time, to remind us that there is nothing new under the sun also with regard to missions, more than a few times at various synods dissatisfaction was expressed regarding how little mission work was being done. All this took place from 1851 through the early part of last century.

As early as 1886 our fathers even proposed that a third (!) professor be called to the seminary whose focus would be on training missionaries. The proposal was not adopted, and I wonder how many negative votes can be attributed to the plan that a portion of the professor’s salary be taken out of synod’s *mission fund*!

Our early history also includes a moving story about the sacrificial commitment to missions. At a certain discouraging time in the late 1800s when a missionary could not be procured for a field, and after no one volunteered for the work even though repeated calls were made, it was finally reported that “the secretary of the mission committee

volunteers himself. He has earnestly considered the matter, would greatly desire that somebody else go, but since nobody offers himself, he will seriously consider the call if extended to him. The proposal was unanimously accepted... and he was called for a period of at least 5 years at a salary of...”

We have a rich history in missions prior to our separate existence as Protestant Reformed churches. One part of it—may we remember this for a long time, perhaps even revisit it as churches—is the 1910 Synod that promoted missions by declaring seven mandates for the churches:

1. That mission sermons be preached repeatedly to the congregation;
2. That the subject of missions be taught in the catechism classes as much as possible;
3. That a lesson on missions be taught quarterly in the Sunday school;
4. That existing societies make a systematic study of missions;
5. That mission fests be held annually as much as possible;
6. That each local church strive to support a missionary;
7. That systematic weekly offerings be taken for missions.

The PRC’s *current* decisions, as well as our history, ought to encourage us not only to mission zeal, but also to *unity* of mind and heart.



So back to our question. Whose is the work of missions? The official position of the PRC is that

one of the views is wrong and the other right. The right view is that missions is the work of the local congregation, and that *some* missions may *become* the concern of the churches in common. Those who are critical of a consistory doing missions without denominational supervision fail to take into account our denomination's official view of responsibility for the work of missions. On the other hand, those who maintain the prerogative of the local consistory to do missions on her own rightly protect the autonomy of the local congregation and should (carefully) dismiss the accusation of independentism.

I hasten to add that a local congregation may not be *wise* doing missions alone. They may not be *wise* to go on without the collective experience and support of the denomination. At times a church may be guilty of an *attitude* of independentism. I hope to raise the matter of wise judgments in the next editorial. But it is wrong immediately to criticize a local congregation for doing missions without the denomination's direct oversight.

I also hasten to add that the question is not as simple as it may first appear to be. The question involves the definition of *missions*. It involves distinctions, between foreign missions and home missions; between local evangelism and church extension work; between witnessing and preaching; between a church having and supporting *contacts* and a church actually calling a *missionary* to a field. Many

factors are involved in the question.

But the question itself has been answered by the PRC. The synodically-approved constitution of the mission committee says: "Although mission work is the calling of the *local church*... *some* mission work may also *become* the work of the churches in common" (emphasis added). *How* this statement came to have a place in the constitution is a story for the next editorial. Whether the statement is biblical, confessional, and faithful to Reformed ecclesiology and church polity may be examined in the proper manner by any in the churches. But there is no question that the constitution states two things:

1. Mission work is the calling of the local congregation.
2. Some mission work may become the work of the "churches in common," that is, of the denomination. Then the local church receives help—advice, supervision, and financial support—from all her sister congregations banded together in the synod.




Next time I hope to show the history of this expression in the constitution, the sharp criticisms that were made of it, and the determination of synod to maintain it. Also, God willing, we can begin a discussion of some related questions, such as: At what point should a consistory decide that her mission work ought to have the supervision of the denomination? Is there ever a case when a congregation may engage in missions without ever seeking to do it with

the rest of the body? And are the answers to these questions dependent on the *kind* of mission work being performed?

In the meantime, let us all go forward in this "explicit duty and sacred privilege" with the prayer that God will gather His church and that He will use us—the little Protestant Reformed Churches—as instruments in that gathering. Let us pray that our maintenance of truth may be to this end: that the beautiful gospel God gave us to proclaim to the ends of the earth may be the sword of Christ to make captives for Christ, gathering them into the great army of Christ that battles for the glory of Christ, until this same Christ comes again, asking at that day, "Have you been busy in the mandate I gave to you in my parting words to you?"

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."

God bless our missionaries! God bless our congregations, busy in the work of missions! God bless our denomination with faithfulness—and unity!—in this great cause, which is not our cause, but His. 

Calvin on the Free Offer

I have read your articles on “Calvin, Hoeksema, and the Free Offer” in the *Standard Bearer*, and I would like to comment on them. First, let me introduce myself. I taught Bible and Reformed Doctrine at Unity Christian High School in Hudsonville for eight years (1956-1964) and I have been a friend of the PRC since that period in my life. I was acquainted with Rev. Gerrit Vos, and my wife and I were good friends of his daughter Marilyn and her husband, Dr. Ben Zandstra. So I am well acquainted with the PRC and a regular reader of the literature of the Reformed Free Publishing Association.

Having introduced myself, I would like to comment on your articles re the “free offer” in the *SB*. Since you cite Calvin as an authority, along with Hoeksema, Bavinck, and others, I would call your attention to Calvin’s superb sermon on I Timothy 2:3-5, which states that God “desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.” My book, *Grace and Its Fruits* (Evangelical Press, 2000), a selection of John Calvin’s sermons on

the pastoral epistles (faithfully translated into modern English), includes Calvin’s sermon on that puzzling text, which is often wrongly cited as support for the free offer of the gospel. Calvin states that Paul has in view *all nations*, not Jews only, and *not* “all men” individually. God, according to Calvin, desires all His elect people in all nations and “men of all ranks and social positions” to be saved and come to know the truth as it is in Jesus. This is vastly different from the Arminians’ and the Federal Vision’s conditional offer of the gospel.

I offer my comment with a word of appreciation for your articles on the subject and a prayer for God’s blessing on your ministry and the Protestant Reformed Churches.

In Christ,
Joseph Hill
Associate Professor emeritus of
Biblical Studies and Greek
Geneva College

The Reformed Worldview: Truth and Its Consequences (5)

The History of the Concept *Worldview*

In considering the transition from the Old to the New Testament, we have seen the glory that the light of Christ shines upon our way of living as God’s people.

Having been redeemed by Christ, we have been made children of our heavenly Father, taken into the very fellowship of God Himself, His own covenant life. With joy

we confess with the apostle in I John 3:1, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!”

To live in that covenant relationship with the Holy One, to live as the bride of Christ, is to live in the liberty with which Christ has made us free. With the perfect law of liberty written in our hearts, we are free to serve God in thankfulness for our relationship to Him and for the treasures that are ours in Christ Jesus.

The New Testament, therefore, with its clearer light of revelation, points us to Christ as the fulfillment of

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the Old Testament ordinances and inveighs against the children of God being brought into bondage again to the law or to the commandments and doctrines of men.

Legalism would rob us of the treasures of Christ by making our religion one of externals and placing the focus on what we do rather than on who we are—children of the kingdom of our Father.

If we are to lay hold of the Reformed worldview, it is important that we understand this error.

From a certain point of view, legalism is appealing to us. If there were not an attractiveness to legalism, this would not be a threat to us, and the Holy Spirit would not have had to give us warning through the inspired apostle. To our sinful flesh there is a certain appeal in legalism, even a strong attraction—especially when we don't want to come to grips with our personal spiritual deficiencies and sins.

To keep the focus on that which cannot be seen, to look to Christ, not only in what we believe but in our life's practice, is not easy for us who are so earthly-minded. To put off the old man, to guard our tongues, to live in love one for another, to walk in holiness—those are difficult for us, indeed impossible, when we are not holding to the preeminence of Christ.

Much easier it is to make religion a mere outward expression of what we think it ought to be. Much easier to set the standards as low as following this rule and that rule, than it is to strive after God's standard of love.

And so legalism produces a surface religion, with its adherents emphasizing things that have no basis in the Bible or that are not important, while at the same time ignoring the deep things of God, even the proper place of the law in the life of the Christian.

Legalism would limit us to a shallow self-righteousness, ignoring such deadly sins as gossiping and coveting, bitterness and hatred, slandering and refusing to forgive. And, as is evident from Colossians 2:16, legalism breeds a certain judgmental attitude that is not grounded in biblical principle, but is rather a wretched, soul-destroying expression of pride. Those who don't abide by those self-determined ordinances of the legalist are judged to be lesser Christians, if they are Christians at all.

No greater threat is there to joyful Christianity, to peace in the church, to joyful living in covenant fellowship with the God who made us free. No greater threat is

there to the Reformed worldview than that of legalism.

To be brought back into bondage, to be held to ordinances after the commandments and doctrines of men, is to be led into a form of Christianity—and it is only a form—that is without joy, that is oppressive, that will certainly drive the youth of the church away. God forbid we succumb to such foolishness, as attractive as the devil might make it to our flesh!

The reason for guarding the treasures of the Christian faith and soundly rejecting every form of legalism is that we and our children must live in the consciousness of the glory of our Redeemer. That must guide our life. The glory of our Redeemer and our life in Him must be the foundation of the Reformed worldview.

With "the mind of Christ" (I Cor. 2:16) we view all things, including our calling in the midst of this world. In the light of His Word we bring to expression the mind of Christ, seeking to do the will of our heavenly Father.

So we also understand the warning of the apostle against legalism in Colossians 2:20: "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances?"

The apostle is not denying the place of God's ordinances in our lives. He is rejecting and telling the members of the church in Colosse to reject those ordinances that would bind us "after the commandments and doctrines of men" (v. 22).

We love the ordinances that Christ has established. We yet sing with the psalmist, "O, how love I Thy law." That Word of God is the rule for us as we long to express our thankfulness to God for these great treasures that are ours in Christ Jesus. To walk in the light of the Word, in obedience to the God of our salvation, is our delight as those who love Him with all our heart and soul and mind. Indeed, that law is written upon our hearts (Heb. 8:10).

But Paul sounds a clear warning against those who would make our Christian life one of externals, who would bind us to practices and ordinances that rob us of the joy of living in fellowship with our Redeemer, who would take our minds off the preeminent Christ and His glory.

Christ alone is the One to whom the entire church owes her spiritual growth.

In Christ alone the entire body is supported and held together.

In Christ alone we have our life, and by His Holy Spirit our sanctification.

To live, therefore, with the exalted Christ before our minds is foundational to the Reformed worldview.

Apart from Christ, apart from living in the consciousness of the treasures that are ours in Him, our spiritual life will deteriorate, our perspective will be clouded, and our purpose will be corrupted.

A church so affected can only disintegrate.

In Christ we have been made full. In Christ we have been given the calling to live to His glory, seeking the things above, and putting all earthly things to the service of that end. In the fellowship of Christ alone is the fullness of joy (I John 1:4).

We can easily fall into legalism and its accompanying self-righteousness, fault-finding, and joylessness.

We can easily succumb to a proud, elitist spirit that contributes nothing to the welfare of the congregation or Christ's church.

We can easily fall before those errors because the sinfulness of our nature is inclined to such proud rebellion against God.

The answer to legalism is the continual focus upon the riches of Christ.


Let us understand the profound nature of our salvation.

Let us live with our consciences free from the bondage of ordinances that are against us.

Let us know that in Christ all is ours, and we are God's—to the glory of His name.

Let our gaze as penitent sinners be upon the preeminent Christ, as we look up to Him from the foot of the cross. In Him is our joy, and the joy of our children.

That comes to expression even in our life in the midst of this world.

In the words of Colossians 3:1, it comes to expression especially in seeking the things above. 

ALL AROUND US

REV. CLAY SPRONK

Pope Francis Grants Plenary Indulgences

This summer the newly-elected Pope Francis granted plenary indulgences during the World Youth Day 2013 event held in Brazil. These plenary indulgences were made available not only to the millions who attended the event in Brazil, but also to the 7.5 million people who follow the pope on Twitter, an online social networking service. Many major news outlets reported this story. Here is a short report from *USA Today*:

The Vatican has embraced Twitter, especially these last few months with the arrival of Pope Francis. The pontiff will soon start using social media for a longstanding Catholic tradition.

The *Guardian* reports Pope Francis will start sharing indulgences with followers of his Twitter feed.

Indulgences are granted to Catholics to reduce the time they believe they might spend in purgatory after confessing their sins.

Rev. Spronk is pastor of Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, Illinois.

As the *Guardian* notes, indulgences are earned through tasks such as attending Catholic World Youth Day next week, or even following it live through the Web.

Of course, Vatican officials warn the path to salvation can't be earned by Twitter alone. "You can't obtain indulgences like getting a coffee from a vending machine," says Archbishop Claudio Maria Celli.

The Archbishop's words indicate that obtaining an indulgence these days is apparently not as easy as it was in the past. In the 1500s a plenary indulgence could actually be acquired much in the same way one buys coffee or pop from a vending machine today. Peddlers, such as Johann Tetzel, who worked in Martin Luther's Germany, crassly sold indulgences to those who were willing to pay the price in order to fund the pope's building projects in Rome. But in today's RCC, indulgences are not for sale. Obtaining an indulgence now requires meeting certain criteria.

According to the Roman Catholic Church's Catechism, obtaining an indulgence requires membership in the Roman Catholic Church. Any non-Roman Catholic

conference attendees or Twitter followers did not receive an indulgence. And receiving an indulgence requires participation in the Roman Catholic ceremonies of the confession of sin to a priest and communion. One must be a “faithful” or “practicing” Roman Catholic to receive an indulgence.

Is an indulgence worth the work? It is if an indulgence is what Rome says it is. The Catechism of Rome states, “An indulgence is a remission before God of the temporal punishment due to sins whose guilt has already been forgiven, which the faithful Christian who is duly disposed gains under certain conditions through the action of the Church which, as the minister of redemption, dispenses and applies with authority the treasury of the satisfactions of Christ and the saints.” This official teaching of Rome is quite complicated. It involves fine (and unbiblical) distinctions and complicated reasoning. But what Rome believes and teaches is really quite simple.

An indulgence grants the forgiveness of sins. Rome attempts to distinguish between different kinds of sins. But that distinction is bogus. So it is legitimate to think of an indulgence simply as the forgiveness of sins.

Does an indulgence grant the forgiveness of sins in order to save a person from hell? No, not according to Rome. Rome believes that if a person is going to hell, an indulgence won’t help him. For Rome there are two kinds of forgiveness. One kind forgives sins and delivers a person from hell. An indulgence does not grant that kind of forgiveness.

The other kind of forgiveness delivers a person from purgatory. That is the kind of forgiveness indulgences supposedly grant. Thus, indulgences are for those who are saved from hell and bound for heaven but doomed to suffer for a while in purgatory. An indulgence frees people from purgatory or shortens the length of their stay. A living person can use an indulgence for himself or choose to apply it to a dead relative to help that relative escape purgatory (if he is still there, which as far as I can tell is impossible to know according Roman Catholic theology—meaning that it may be possible to waste indulgences on people who do not need them because they are already in heaven!).

The Roman Catholic Church grants *partial* and *plenary* indulgences. The partial indulgence does not grant full forgiveness of sins. But *plenary* means *all*. Thus,

a plenary indulgence is the forgiveness of all sins. Well, not really *all* sins. In Luther’s day Tetzel advertised the forgiveness of all sins past, present, and future. Tetzel’s indulgences were like guaranteed get-out-of-purgatory-immediately cards. But the official position of Rome (then and now) is that a plenary indulgence is only forgiveness of all sins past and present. Future sins will still count and have to be paid for in purgatory. To cut down the duration of purgatory as much as possible it is necessary to remain faithful to the Roman Catholic Church and to follow her prescriptions for doing good works (make confession of sin, partaking of the mass, etc.) and to keep seeking plenary indulgences.

All of this is of interest to us because it demonstrates that nothing has changed in the Roman Catholic Church since the Reformation, when our spiritual fathers broke from her because she was a false church. She is still a false church. She is still corrupt in doctrine and in life.

Rome is still the church that robs the people of God of the comfort of salvation through Jesus Christ. There is no comfort in Rome! The plenary indulgence does not give the comfort of the *full* forgiveness of sins and the guarantee of eternal life through plenary indulgences. In Rome there is no assurance of the full forgiveness of sins. Not through the life and death of Jesus Christ. Not through good works. And not through the indulgence. Rome makes sure her adherents never escape the fear of purgatory as long as they live. The indulgences Rome offers are as worthless as three-dollar bills to those who try to obtain them. But that does not mean they are of no value to Rome. Indulgences are part of the theology of Rome that coerces people to live all their lives in dependence on the pope and the Roman Catholic system of works in order to try to obtain salvation. But since salvation is not found through the pope or by good works or through indulgences, Rome does not save people from hell, much less purgatory.

This means that the Reformation that led us from Rome was truly a wonderful work of God! Thank God for the Reformation. Thank God for the comfort we have in salvation by faith alone. In this life we are assured of full forgiveness through the death of Jesus Christ, which was sufficient to pay for all our sins. And we have, let us rejoice, certainty that after this life we will immediately be taken by God to heaven. ☞

News from the Seminary

Seminary Staff

As always a new school-year brings changes. It happens that this year, there are more changes than usual at the seminary. One change is that our long-time registrar, Mr. Don Doezema, has retired. Mr. Doezema has fulfilled the duties of registrar faithfully for some thirty years and we are grateful for his dedicated service. Mr. Charles Terpstra, the seminary's librarian, has now assumed also the registrar's duties. We want to encourage all young men who have aspirations for the ministry to contact Mr. Terpstra. If you are a senior in high school and intend to take a pre-seminary track in college, contact Mr. Terpstra. He can send you a seminary catalog, which lists all the courses that are prerequisites that must be met in order to qualify for entrance into the seminary. He can sit down with you and discuss your college schedule in order to ensure that you meet all the required prerequisites. He can talk with you about college scheduling, about the possibility of taking pre-seminary Greek at the seminary, which is our strong preference, and answer any questions that you might have. That future students contact the registrar also enables us to make projections and lay some plans for future course

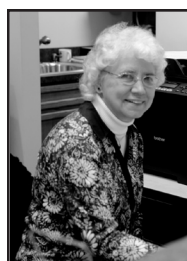


Mr. Charles Terpstra, Registrar

offerings. Mr. Terpstra can be reached at the seminary: (616) 531-1490. Anyone who desires a seminary catalog can stop by the seminary and pick one up, send a letter requesting that one be mailed, or find it online at www.prca.org/seminary/website/catalog. Inquiries should be directed to: Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, 4949 Ivanrest Avenue, Wyoming, MI 49418.



As always, the faculty is assisted this year by our faithful faculty secretary, Mrs. Judi Doezema. For many years now Mrs. Doezema has answered the phone and directed calls, assisted the faculty with keyboarding, photocopying and collating study materials, checking out and returning library books, taking care of the seminary bookstore, assisting students in many different ways, and a host of other tasks. Although we often take her for granted, we would be lost without her. But working quietly behind the scenes, she undoubtedly makes our work much easier.



Judi Doezema

Our Student Body

One big change from the last few years is the number of students in the seminary. We currently have eleven students in our student body, nine of whom are first-year students. With all the new students, the seminary is a beehive of activity. At present Mr. Joshua Engelsma is completing his six-month internship. He, his wife Courtney, and their three children, Calvin, Charlotte, and Noah, are currently living in Lansing, Illinois while he completes his internship in the Peace Protestant Reformed Church, under the mentoring of Rev. Clayton Spronk.

Mr. Ryan Barnhill is our only third-year student. He and his wife Miranda and baby daughter Mya attend the Hudsonville Protestant Reformed Church. Mr. Barnhill was licensed to speak a word of edification in the churches

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



Mr. Ryan Barnhill

this past spring. Since that time many of you have had him lead the worship services in your congregation. Mr. Barnhill's family went through a severe trial this summer in the death of his mother, Mrs. Mary Barnhill, to cancer. We trust that God arranges all these

circumstances and uses them, too, in His preparing of Mr. Barnhill for the work of the ministry. Besides preaching in the churches, Mr. Barnhill also teaches two catechism classes in our vacant Faith PRC.

We have no second-year students.

The Lord has answered our prayers and blessed us with nine first-year students. Mr. Matthew DeBoer is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Doug DeBoer. He is a recent graduate of Calvin College and is a member of the Hudsonville PRC. Mr. Brian Feenstra is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Ryan Feenstra. Brian is married to Tabitha and they have an infant son, Tyce. He is a recent graduate of Grand Valley State University and is a member of the Hope, Walker PRC. Mr. Joseph Hostege is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Holstege. He is married to Lisa, the daughter of Prof. Barry and Lori Gritters. His older brother Daniel is the angel of the Holland PRC. Joe is a graduate of Calvin College and attends Southeast PRC. Mr. Jonathan Langerak is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Langerak. He graduated from Grand Valley State University and is a member of our Southwest (Grandville, MI) PRC. Mr. Aaron Lim is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Colin Lim. He is a recent graduate of Grand Valley State University. Aaron is a member of our sister church, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church of

Singapore. He attends the Hope, Walker PRC. Mr. David Noorman is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Richard Noorman. He is a graduate of Calvin College and is a member of our Faith PRC. Mr. Nathan Price is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Price. He is married to Nicole and together they have four children: Evelyn, Lydia, Elizabeth, and Nathan. Nathan graduated from Grand Valley State University and he and his family are members of our Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, Michigan. Mr. Stephan Regnerus is the son of Mr. and Mrs. James Regnerus. He is a recent graduate of Dordt Christian College in Sioux Center, Iowa. He is a member of the Doon, Iowa PRC. Mr. Justin Smidstra is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Colin Smidstra. He is a graduate of Calvin College and is a member of the Hudsonville, Michigan PRC.

Besides to our students, the faculty have opened up a number of their classes to auditors. It is a pleasant change to have classes with up to sixteen students in them, including the goodly number of visitors auditing some of the seminary classes. It makes for livelier discussions and the possibility of more questions. If anyone in the Grand Rapids area, or anyone visiting the Grand Rapids area from the west or from a foreign land desires to spend a morning visiting our seminary classes, contact the seminary secretary and arrangements can be made. This is the sort of thing that we very much want to encourage. We want our people to know by experience something of the institution that is *their* seminary.

Besides the new students entering the seminary this year, we know of a few young men in college, and even in high school, who indicate that it is their desire to study in the seminary and prepare for the gospel ministry. For this we give thanks to our covenant God, who is making provision for the future of our churches and sister-churches, provision for replacement of a fairly large number of men who will be



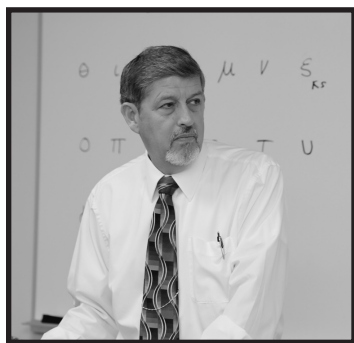
l. to r: Mr. Matthew DeBoer, Mr. Jonathan Langerak, Mr. Stephan Regnerus, Mr. David Noorman, Mr. Joseph Holstege, Mr. Nathan Price, Mr. Justin Smidstra, Mr. Brian Feenstra, Mr. Aaron Lim

retiring from the ministry and the seminary. And provision, we pray, for the growth of our denomination and sister-churches. Let us continue to pray the Lord of the harvest that He continue to send forth laborers into the abundant harvest. If there is a young man who is contemplating the ministry, feel free to contact one of the professors in order to arrange a time to discuss the matter of the call to the ministry.

Faculty Activities

The three members of the seminary faculty stay busy teaching the full array of seminary courses. In addition, the faculty frequently preach in area churches, lecture, teach catechism classes, give special presentations, write for the religious periodicals (for example, *Standard Bearer*, *Beacon Lights*, *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*, *Perspectives in Covenant Education*).

Prof. Dykstra spoke at our convocation service, which was held on Wednesday, September 11, 2013 at Faith PRC.



Prof. Russell Dykstra

Although the crowd was not nearly as large as it could have been, those who did attend, along with the members of the Theological School Committee, the faculty, and the student body, were blessed by Prof. Dykstra's stirring address entitled, "Pray For Us!" This is indeed our earnest desire, faculty and students together. Pray for us that God will keep us faithful. Pray for us that the truth will be maintained, defended, and developed. Pray for us that God will use the seminary for the training of godly, committed, gifted men of God who will be able to serve Christ and Christ's church in the office of minister of the Word.

Prof. Dykstra has completed the partial sabbatical he had during the 2012-2013 school year. He is finishing up the written manuscript that was to be produced as a part of the sabbatical, a sabbatical that was devoted to a study of the history, the principles, and the distinctive worldview imparted through Reformed covenant education.

During the present school year, Prof. Gritters will be taking a partial sabbatical. The 2013 Synod of our churches approved this sabbatical, which is intended to allow time for Prof. Gritters to do research and writing in the area of

church polity (government). "The goal of his sabbatical would be to produce materials that could possibly be incorporated into a post-Essentials catechism class, that would be helpful to elders in their work, and that could be used on the mission field to assist our missionaries in establishing churches. This work would also enhance his church polity course at the seminary" (2013 Acts of Synod, p. 164f.).

At present the faculty, with the assistance of the Hudsonville PRC Evangelism Committee, is planning a commemoration of the 450th anniversary of the Heidelberg Catechism. This celebration is planned for Thursday through Saturday, October 17-19, 2013, at the Hudsonville PRC. Besides speeches by each of the professors, speeches will also be given by Rev. Carl Haak, Rev. Jurgen Klautke, and Rev. Angus Stewart. In connection with the conference, a writing contest has been held. At the conference the winners in all the different categories will be announced. For more information, including the schedule of events, those who are interested can consult the seminary's page on the denominational website. We are anticipating a good crowd for the conference, and look forward to seeing many of you.

We covet your prayers at the beginning of a new school-year. We realize that only if the Lord crowns our efforts with His blessing will our labors be profitable. Pray earnestly for that blessing. And pray that the Lord will continue to raise up students to study for the ministry in our churches and our sister-churches, that "the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same [may be committed] to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (II Tim. 2:2).



Prof. Barrett Gritters



Prof. Ronald Cammenga, Rector

For the faculty,
Prof. Ronald Cammenga, Rector

Upon This Rock (14)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (6)

Previous article in this short series was concluded with a question: “The saints of old did have prophetic *types*, and they were not without the prophetic *word*, but can it be demonstrated that they *linked* them?”

The prophetic *type* under consideration was the expiatory sacrifice, which taught the believer that sin, *his* sin, must somehow be *atoned for*. Burdened with the crushing weight of his sin, the believer turned to the sacrifice for relief—and found none...until he looked beyond the sacrifice to Jehovah. Jehovah and blood. “These two,” wrote Ophoff, “constituted the mystery of redemption upon which the believer of the old covenant pondered and [that he] attempted to penetrate.”

And he, the believer, had *help*. He was not left simply to “ponder.” He had, besides the *picture* prophecy, the prophetic *word*. Not just, as we said, gospel to the eye (Gen. 3:21), but also gospel to the *ear* (Gen. 3:15). “I will put enmity” and “It shall bruise thy head”—“heavenly music,” says Ophoff, “in the ears of every saint of the old covenant.”

But then there’s that question, the question that has, as it were, hung over every article in this series: did the saints of old actually *link* them? The very first of the revelations of the Messiah makes reference to His *sufferings*. “Thou shalt bruise his heel”—which prophecy was followed forthwith by the shedding of blood to provide covering for the nakedness (the sin and shame) of our first parents. Did they connect the two?

Ophoff himself raised the question. He considered it to be an important one. That’s evident from the fact that, to make certain that there could be no mistaking its meaning, he rephrased it repeatedly. “The question is,” he

said, “whether the ancient believer regarded the sacrificial victim as prophetic symbol of the sufferings and death of the Messiah. In other words, was the believer of the old covenant taught to associate the shedding of blood with the promised Shiloh? Was he made to see that, according to the arrangement of God, the Man of Jehovah must bear the iniquities of His people?”

And, to remove any possible doubt yet remaining about his intention, he reiterated it:

Now, once more the question: Were the prophets of the old covenant wont to associate the blood of the sacrificial victim with the Messiah? Did the church of the old dispensation perceive that the sufferings of the servant of Jehovah, the bruising of His heel, had atoning value? Did they read in the rite of expiatory sacrifice any reference to the Man of Jehovah, whose griefs and triumphs they depicted? Were they able to link together prophecy and symbol? Did they recognize the sacrificial victim as an image or symbol of the suffering Messiah?

Ponder that for a moment. What, do you suppose, will be Ophoff’s answer to that important question?

Ponder it in light of what he has said heretofore: “It was not for nothing that blood played so prominent a part in the typical transactions of the old dispensation. The Spirit of God empowered the people of God to sense the meaning and message of the blood. It is plain that the shadows led men to Christ.”

Ponder it, too, in the light of what we have seen from the pen of John Calvin: “And certainly ceremonies had the power not only of alarming and humbling consciences, but of exciting them to faith in the coming Redeemer. In the whole solemnity of the ceremonial everything that was presented to the eye had impressed on it, as it were, the mark of Christ. The whole law, in short, was nothing but a manifold variety of exercises in which the worshipers were led by the hand to Christ.” And, elsewhere, this: “...the sacrifices of the law plainly and openly taught

Mr. Doezema is a member of Southwest Protestant Reformed Church in Grandville, Michigan.

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2013, p. 472.

believers to seek salvation nowhere else than in the atonement that Christ alone carries out.”

In light, I say, of that, would you not expect the answer of both of those theologians to be an emphatic yes?

It wasn't. For neither Ophoff nor Calvin.

Ophoff continues, appropriately, to 'search the Scriptures.'

Fact is [he says] that the only book of the Old Testament which ascribes to the sufferings of the Messiah atoning value is the book of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah was the only prophet who asserted that "he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed...and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." In vain do we search the psalms for any such statements. This means that we have no objective proof for asserting that the church in the first periods of the old dispensation associated the shedding of the blood of the sacrificial animal with the suffering Messiah.... The church, then, for at least many centuries *did not detect in the rite of expiatory sacrifice a reference to Christ* (emphasis added).

So much for the first 3,300 years of the old dispensation. What about the last 700? Ophoff addressed that too.

The next question which asserts itself is whether these particular utterances of the prophet Isaiah were embraced and understood by the church so that, from that day on, the shadows of the old covenant spoke to the believers generally of the realities of the gospel. In other words, did the believers, with the aid of the illuminating words of the prophet Isaiah, discover in the rite of expiatory sacrifice any reference to the suffering Servant of Jehovah?

Here Ophoff looks to the New Testament Scriptures. And again he answers in the negative. "The blunders of the disciples of Christ," he says, "do not favor the view that the church, from the days of Isaiah on, associated the sacrificial victim with the Christ." Special reference, he makes, to the perplexity of the travelers to Emmaus on resurrection Sunday. The fact that Jesus had to expound Himself to them in all the Scriptures, including, no doubt, the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, "goes to show that they were very much in the dark."

Evidently Ophoff understood that this conclusion would seem to conflict with what he had all along been

striving to demonstrate. "At the outset," he acknowledged,

we averred that the shadows, being accompanied by the word, spoke to the believers of the realities of the gospel. Our words must not be interpreted to mean that the believers of the old covenant *associated in their minds* the sacrificial animal with Him to whose sufferings and triumphs the prophets often applied themselves in their songs and in their prayers. The prophetic word—the promise of Him who should gain the ascendancy over the malice of the devil—together with the symbol, had the effect of focusing the mind of the believers upon *Jehovah*. ...Word and symbol plainly declared unto the contrite of heart that *Jehovah* will redeem and be merciful unto His people. The believer would say with the poet: "Unto thee, O LORD, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in thee...." (Emphasis added.)

Ophoff must have anticipated also the next question that would arise in the minds of his readers. For he writes, in close connection with the foregoing: "This does not mean, however, that faith in *Christ* was no requirement in the days of the old covenant."

It was exactly on this point, you will recall, that Ophoff took exception to the view of Fairbairn that the expiatory sacrifice "had a meaning of its own, which it was possible for the ancient worshipper to understand, and, so understanding, to present through it acceptable service to God, whether he might perceive or not the further respect it bore to a dying Savior." Ophoff said No! What Fairbairn claimed to be not "strictly required" for "acceptable service" Ophoff claimed to be in fact *required*. And now....

Now Ophoff might seem to be backing away from that assertion by admitting that believers of the old covenant did not associate in their minds the sacrificial animals with a dying Savior. Hence his reaffirmation: This does *not* mean that faith in *Christ* was not *required* in the day of the old covenant. His explanation? Next time.

(The reader will perhaps remember that this writer has, several times in the past, anticipated the end of this "short series." The conclusion, however, is proving to be elusive. I hope, yet, to deal not only with Ophoff's explanation of faith in Christ in the old dispensation, but also with why it could really have been no other way. One more article?

... to be continued. 

The Hunger of the Living

There are people who profess not to be regenerated, but who also say that they desire God to regenerate them. Could this be? Are there any unregenerate people who honestly desire to be delivered from their sin?

To answer that question, let us begin by considering what Scripture says about how an unregenerate person views himself. Does he think of himself as one who is dead in sin, and in dire need of deliverance?

How unbelievers view themselves

An unbeliever never seeks the salvation found in Christ. Blinded in his sin, he actually views himself not to be in need of salvation.

Jesus brought this out when preaching in the synagogue at Nazareth. After making known that He was the promised Messiah, Jesus told the people that He knew full well that they would reject Him. "And he said unto them, Ye will surely say unto me this proverb, Physician, heal thyself" (Luke 4:23a).

Unregenerate sinners are proud and blind. If they hear the word of Christ, they conclude that Christ is the one who needs to be healed, not they themselves.

Jesus mentioned this elsewhere, when He said that He came not for the righteous, but for sinners. "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Luke 5:32).

In this passage, the "righteous" are the unregenerate, who in their blindness view themselves to be righteous. The "sinners" are those whom God has regenerated, and who now see their wickedness, and view themselves to be sinners. Jesus came to call out the regenerate "sinners," not the unregenerate "righteous."

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

Previous article in this series: September 1, 2013, p. 471.

That the saving call of Christ comes to the regenerate is made known also by an admonition that our Lord gave repeatedly: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." Only the regenerate have spiritual ears, so that they hear, understand, and submit to this call of our Lord.

The unregenerate do not view themselves to be sinners. They do not mourn because of their sin, and they will never call out to God for salvation from sin. They may at times call out for deliverance from a certain punishment that has come upon them for their sin, but they will never call out for deliverance from sin itself.

A hungry dead person?

Strangely, there are some people who say that they are unregenerated, and yet claim that they can and do long to be freed from their sin. If you ask them whether they have been regenerated, they will say no. If you then ask them whether they desire to be righteous, they will say yes. An unregenerate person who desires to be righteous, a dead person who hungers, is what they are actually claiming to be.

This, however, is quite contrary to Scripture, which teaches that everyone who hungers for righteousness is saved. "Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled" (Matt. 5:6).

There are no unregenerate people who hunger for righteousness. Such hunger is proof that one has been blessed with salvation. Our Reformed fathers believed this, and quoted this very verse when refuting the idea that an unbeliever could desire deliverance from sin:

Error 4: Who teach that the unregenerate man is not really nor utterly dead in sin, nor destitute of all powers unto spiritual good, but that he can yet hunger and thirst after righteousness and life, and offer the sacrifice of a contrite and broken spirit, which is pleasing to God.

Rejection: For these are contrary to the express testi-

mony of Scripture. *Ye were dead through trespasses and sins* (Eph. 2:1, 5); and: *Every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually* (Gen. 6:5; 8:21).

Moreover, to hunger and thirst after deliverance from misery and after life, and to offer unto God the sacrifice of a broken spirit, is peculiar to the regenerate and those that are called blessed (Ps. 51:10, 19; Matt. 5:6). (Canons 3rd/ 4th Heads, Rejection of Errors, Paragraph 4.)

To hunger and thirst after deliverance from our misery is “peculiar to the regenerate.” That is the truth that we officially confess to believe.

An erroneous distinction

Those who teach that the unregenerate can hunger for righteousness will sometimes make a distinction at this point.¹ They will say that an unregenerate person can have an *external desire* to do what is righteous, while lacking the *internal desire* to do so. In other words, a conversation with a professedly unregenerate person who says he wants to be saved might go like this:

Have you been regenerated?

¹ This is a very common tactic. When it is clearly pointed out how Scripture exposes a certain teaching to be false, those who promote that false teaching commonly invent some distinction in an effort to circumvent what Scripture says.

No, I have not.

Do you desired to be delivered from your sin?


Yes, I do.

How can this be, since Scripture says that only a regenerated person desires to be delivered from his sin?

Well, I only have an external desire to be delivered from my sin. I do not yet have an internal desire for this deliverance.

At this point, the following needs to be considered: What is a merely external profession of a desire to obey God? What does Scripture call someone who inwardly rebels against God, while outwardly professing to want to please Him? Is not such a person referred to as a hypocrite?

That does not mean that all those people who speak this way are hypocrites. A person who says this about himself could be a regenerate believer who has been wrongly taught to view himself to be unregenerate. If his desire to do what is pleasing to God is merely an outward show, then he is a hypocrite, and his outward profession is actually a lie. But if he is not a hypocrite, and his desire is really genuine, then it is the inward desire of a regenerate heart.

If the latter is the case, the person needs to come to see this. And what a great joy it is when a person does come to realize this. To recognize that one is forgiven and spiritually alive, and that he will dwell with God forever—that is joy indeed! 

BRING THE BOOKS...

MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA

Grasping God's Word: A Hands-On Approach to Reading, Interpreting, and Applying the Bible, by J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays. Zondervan Publishing, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Copyright, 2012 third ed., 506 pages. [Reviewed by Peter VanDerSchaaf.]

J Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays are professors of Bible at Ouachita Baptist University in Arkadelphia,

Mr. VanDerSchaaf is an elder in Faith Protestant Reformed Church of Jenison, Michigan.

Arkansas. In *Grasping God's Word* they set out to fill the gap that exists between popular guides to understanding the Bible and the graduate-level texts on hermeneutics. The book is intended to help serious believers learn how to read, interpret, and apply the Bible. They wrote *Grasping God's Word* as a textbook for college students and beginning seminary students. The authors give instruction in the three primary components of biblical interpretation: 1) the practical tools for reading the Bible carefully; 2) hermeneutical issues—i.e., the nature of inspiration, and the nature of Scripture; and finally, 3) guidelines for interpreting and applying each of the major

genre, or literary types, of the books of the Old and New Testaments.

The authors succeed in the task that they have set for themselves. Their instruction on the nature and proper use of Scripture is sound. The practical steps for understanding texts within their contexts and within the overarching themes of the entire Scripture is detailed and thorough. Their chapters, which guide the reader through the proper ways to understand the various types of the Bible books, range from good to excellent, with the exception of their treatment of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. The advice that the authors give, also in detail, for applying God's Word to our lives is wise. The entire book is replete with guidance on how to avoid most of the serious interpretive errors that Christians who are unskilled in the use of Scripture commit, and how to seek and apply the meaning that the Holy Spirit has placed into His Word.

Grasping God's Word is divided into five parts. Part One introduces the reader to the basic principles and tools of biblical interpretation. Duvall and Hays give a five-part structure to the understanding and application of any text, which structure they call "The Interpretive Journey." In their words, the five components to the Interpretive Journey are: 1) "Grasping the text in their town." 2) "Measuring the width of the river to cross." 3) "Crossing the principlizing bridge." 4) "Consult the biblical map." And 5) "Grasping the text in our town." In other words, the Bible student must understand what the text meant to the original recipients of the book in which the text appears. Then he must understand what differences exist between the original audience of the book and the church in which he finds himself today. The most obvious differences would be those that exist between the old and new dispensations. The Bible reader must then list the theological truths that exist in the text. He must determine that his interpretation of the text is consistent with the immediate context, with the book in which the text appears, and with the overarching themes of the entire Bible. Last but not least, he must apply the truths of a text to his own situation, making sure that his application includes every important element of his text.

The first part contains a chapter on how to choose a Bible translation, and has three chapters on how to read a

text carefully within its context. The list of items to look for as one carefully reads a text is, all by itself, worth the price of the book.

Part two introduces the concepts of historical and literary contexts. Duvall and Hays teach the Bible reader that the single most important factor in the correct interpretation of any text is its context. The historical context of a text includes the author, the audience, and any historical or cultural factors that appear in the book. The literary context consists of the genre, or type of literature, of the book or of the context. Part two devotes an entire chapter to the issues of preconceived notions that impair one's understanding of the Bible, and to fundamental beliefs concerning the Scriptures. This section of the book ends with a thorough chapter on word studies.

Part three deals with issues of meaning and application. A chapter is given to the question of who determines the meaning of a text. Duvall and Hays are emphatic, even repetitive, in their insistence that the Holy Spirit has given the Bible objective meaning by His work of inspiration. Meaning is not a subjective construct of the Bible reader. The authors are equally emphatic that the Scriptures are the work of the Holy Spirit down to the vocabulary and grammatical details of the autographs, and are factually accurate. The chapter on the levels of meaning in Scripture addresses the misuse of allegory. There is also a chapter devoted to the role of the Holy Spirit in the believer's understanding of the Bible, and another chapter on the proper ways to apply God's Word to our own lives.


Part four gives detailed, practical instruction on the proper ways to interpret the four different genre, or types of books, that exist in the New Testament. These are letters, gospels, Acts, and Revelation or apocalypse. Part five does the same for the Old Testament, and identifies the types of literature as narrative, law, poetry, prophets, and wisdom.

The book is not perfect. The chapter on Bible translations gives much good advice in directing the reader away from paraphrases; but the authors also direct the reader away from the King James Version. While the authors state that the covenant is a primary theme of the Bible, they believe that the covenant is conditional. Their understanding of the themes of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon is seriously flawed. They contrast

the Proverbs with Ecclesiastes, teaching that the Proverbs give the rational or predictable rules of life while Ecclesiastes shows us the irrational side of life. They see no more in the Song of Solomon than a legitimizing and celebration of the physical aspects of marriage. This reviewer can only guess that these shortcomings arise from the authors' abhorrence of the abuse of allegory and from their insistence that the Bible interpreter must not see more types in the Old Testament than those that are cited in the New Testament.

Duvall and Hays are good teachers. Their book

is clear. Their writing style is engaging. They restate important points at the end of each chapter to improve retention.

The shortcomings of the book can be easily discerned by readers of the *Standard Bearer*; and the book's strengths outweigh its weaknesses. I hope that readers of the *Standard Bearer* will read *Grasping God's Word*, and apply its good instruction to their own Bible study. I recommend that leaders of Bible study groups read the book and teach the sound principles and methods it provides to their discussion group members. 

PERTAINING TO THE CHURCHES...IN COMMON **MR. PETER VANDERSCHAAF**

Re-Introduction of the BERG – to the PRCA

The Contact Committee is the standing committee of the PRCA that has the responsibility to conduct the official relationships of our denomination with other churches. Our mandate is to carry out the principles that are stated in the first paragraph of the Preamble to the Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches. That paragraph reads: "The Protestant Reformed Churches in America, in obedience to Scripture as interpreted in our three forms of unity, confess that there is one holy, catholic church. They believe, further, that it is their sacred duty to manifest the true unity and catholicity of the church on earth in as far as that is possible, not only in their denominational fellowship but also in conjunction with all churches which have obtained like precious faith with us, both domestic and foreign" (*The Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches*, p. 42).

To fulfill this mandate, the committee conducts the PRCA's official relationships with our sister churches and with the denomination with which we have a corre-

sponding church relationship. We also have meetings and discussions with churches with whom we are exploring the possibility of an official relationship. One of these churches is the Bekennende Evangelisch-Reformierte Gemeinde, or BERG. In English, that is the Confessing Protestant Reformed Church of Giessen, Germany. The Contact Committee thought it would be good to re-acquaint our people with the BERG, especially since two of its elders hope to come back to Grand Rapids this October, D.V. One elder, Dr. Jürgen-Burkhard Klautke, will give one of the speeches at our Heidelberg Catechism Conference. Together with another elder, Mr. Carsten Linke, the two men from the BERG will also meet again with the Contact Committee as a part of our ongoing conversations.

The BERG is a Reformed congregation that was founded in 1999 in Giessen, Germany. Giessen is about one hour's drive north of Frankfurt in the German province of Hesse. The congregation took its name, Confessing Protestant Reformed Church, not in emulation of the PRCA, but for much the same reasons as our forefathers took the name that we bear. They wanted to confess that they are a congregation that is based on and that testifies to Reformed confessions, and that they are the spiritual heirs of the Re-

Mr. VanDerSchaaf, an elder in Faith Protestant Reformed Church of Jenison, Michigan, is a member of the Contact Committee.

formed wing of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century.

The preaching of the BERG is soundly Reformed and free of any sort of conditionalism. The sermons expound God's Word and apply it to the lives of its members. Their preaching is also antithetical and refutes the errors that its members encounter in twenty-first century Europe. The congregation uses the Reformed forms for baptism and the Lord's Supper. The congregation's worship is orderly and biblical. The BERG uses the German translation of the Geneva Psalter with organ accompaniment, and some hymns. The Consistory of the BERG has adopted a church order that is an adaptation of Reformed principles of church polity to an individual congregation. The congregation is not guilty of the sin of independentism. It is their prayer, and the focus of the congregation's outreach, that there may be again a confessional Reformed denomination in their land.

The BERG has a weekly study of its creeds in addition to weekly Bible studies for its members. The Consistory of the BERG testifies and preaches the truths that are contained in the three forms of unity. (The creeds that have been adopted by the Consistory of the BERG are the Heidelberg Catechism, the Berlin Declaration against Pentecostalism [1909], the Chicago Declaration on the Infallibility of the Bible [1978], and the Theological Declaration of the Kamen Initiative [2000].) These are creeds that address errors that have afflicted the church of Christ in Germany during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. These creeds spell out the broad outline of the Reformed faith and assert the infallibility of Scripture, the truths concerning the church and the Holy Spirit over against Pentecostalism, and the truths related to justification by grace alone through faith alone.

The contacts with members of the BERG go back to 2004 or 2005. Carsten Linke had found the website of the PRCA and asked permission to translate into German some of the sermons that appear on our website for his own website. All four of the children of Dr. and Mrs. Klautke came to Grand Rapids at different times to stay with some Protestant Reformed families in order to fulfill an English language requirement at their own high school. While these teenagers were here, they sat in on classes at Covenant Christian High or attended the Young People's Convention.

Official contacts began in 2006 when Dr. Klautke met

with the Contact Committee and spoke to Grand Rapids area PR pastors on the state of the Reformed faith in Germany. This speech was published in the November 2007 edition of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. In our meeting we discussed each other's understandings of the Canons of Dordt; and it became apparent that there was a common interpretation of this basic creed of the Reformed faith. Since then there have been exchanges of visits in 2007, 2011, and 2012, as well as a conference call. Dr. Klautke spoke again for Grand Rapids area pastors at the PR seminary in 2011. That speech appears in the April 2012 issue of the *PR Theological Journal*.

In all of our reading of the BERG's materials, listening to its preaching, and our meetings together, the Contact Committee has found a soundly Reformed group whose leaders are able and willing to assert the Reformed faith, the infallibility of the Scriptures, and the antithetical life, and to refute the errors of doctrine and life that they encounter in their country. The preaching of the BERG assumes the unconditional nature of God's sovereign work of salvation. There is extensive agreement on the doctrine of the covenant.

The BERG is active, with some other Reformed believers in Germany, in publishing a magazine called *The Confessing Church*, in German, *Die Bekennende Kirche*. Their journal is published quarterly and has a circulation of about 4,200 hard copies and 10,000 internet downloads per issue. They also maintain a seminary, the Academy for Reformed Theology, or ART. The leadership of the BERG and some other German Reformed believers had maintained the ART for some years with support of Reformed theologians and Reformed denominations in the Netherlands. Within the past two years, the faithfulness of the elders of the BERG to the inerrancy of Scripture, their consistency in the Reformed faith, their willingness publicly to refute error, and their growing friendship with the PRCA have resulted in the nearly complete loss of the seminary's support from the Netherlands. For that reason, for the past few years our Faith, Jenison (MI) congregation has been taking collections for the seminary and the Journal.


Several members of the PRCA have visited the worship services of the BERG during their trips to Germany. There is normally at least one member of the congregation who can translate the sermon for English-speaking guests. For

members of our churches who can read German, or who are willing to copy and paste German text into Google-translate, here are the websites of the BERG, of *The Confessing Church*, and of the ART: www.berg-giessen.de www.bekennende-kirche.de www.reformatio.de

We will conclude our re-introduction of the BERG to Protestant Reformed people with a quote from a recent article on proper worship by Dr. Klautke in *The Confessing Church*.

In the worship service the people of God gather before His face. The worship service is the gathering together of those who stand in the covenant of grace. This covenant is grounded on the blood of Christ; and in this blood the

elect church is founded. In every worship service she goes to meet her ever-returning Lord. She does this in the expectation of glory, when she will pray to Him in perfect fellowship. This hope must undergird every worship service, beginning with the *votum*, through the *doxology*, through the *hearing of the Law with the concluding confession of sin and assurance of forgiveness*, through the *song of thanksgiving*, the *confession of faith*, the *preaching of the Word*, the *congregational prayer*, the *collection*, and all the way through to the concluding *benediction*.

Jürgen-Burkhard Klaute, *Biblical-Reformed Worship, Die Bekenende Kirche*, March, 2013, vol. 52, p. 45. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

As we consider the Word of God found in I Corinthians 12:20, "But now are they many members, yet one body," we extend our congratulations to two congregations celebrating anniversaries this month. The Kalamazoo, MI PRC organized on October 20, 1927, and the Byron Center, MI PRC organized on October 20, 1983.

Since October is the month that most of our congregations begin again Bible Studies for the fall and winter months, we thought it appropriate to include the following, taken from the September 15 bulletin of the Lynden, WA PRC. Bible Studies: "In parts of Myanmar (Burma) a permit from the government is needed to hold a Bible Study or even read a Bible. In Iran and Saudi Arabia, a person found

reading a Bible has their hands and fingers shredded. But here in the US we can meet to study God's Word in complete freedom! What a privilege and a blessing we have. Let's take advantage of these opportunities and do what millions of Christians worldwide would give anything to do: meet together to study God's Word!"

The Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA began a new Men's Bible Study group on Saturday mornings. Their first meeting was scheduled for Saturday, September 21, 8:00 A.M. at church. For that week the men of Covenant planned to consider and study the role of the man in spiritual leadership. An introductory article by Rev. C. Haak entitled, "To Provide and Protect," helped introduce the subject.

The Choir of the Loveland, CO PRC recently was instrumental in the purchase of a used organ from the Allen Organ Company in Edgerton, MN for their church.

Money for this purchase came from Loveland's Organ Fund. Rev. A. Brummel and Elder R. Streyle, from the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD and delegates to the meeting of Classis West meeting October 9 in Loveland, agreed to transport that organ to Loveland when they came for Classis. In turn, Loveland's Council decided to donate their old organ to the Heritage congregation, as they do not have an organ in their church. Rev. Brummel and Elder Streyle planned to take it back with them after Classis.

Due to popular demand, the annual Men and Boys' Camp-out of First PRC in Holland, MI, was held at PJ Hoffmaster State Park on September 13 and 14. PJ Hoffmaster State Park is located on the shore of Lake Michigan, less than an hour north of First PRC. If we trust our memory, that weekend was dry, but temperatures were rather cool, dare we even say, cold, with a light frost possible Saturday morning. We would expect that

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

some campers still went for a swim.

Again this fall, members of the Hull, IA congregation were encouraged to sign up and volunteer to share their Sunday noon meal with Dordt College students not from the area. With the current number of volunteers, families would expect to host Dordt students from other of our churches, once, or maybe twice per semester.

The annual Fall Fellowship Dinner of the First PR congregation in Grand Rapids, MI was held Tuesday evening, September 10. All ages were invited to begin the catechism and Bible study season with this time of fellowship with their church family. After the meal, their pastor, Rev. J. Slopsema, gave a short talk meant to encourage everyone in their catechism and group Bible studies this year.

The Dordt College Bible Study began their meetings again this fall on the Dordt College Campus on September 10, we believe under the sponsorship of the Hull, IA PRC. Plans called for the study to begin with the study of the Belgic Confession at Article 29: "The marks of the true church, and wherein she differs from the false church." Rev. R. Miersma consented to lead the

study this year. All college students and college-age students were encouraged to attend.

Young People's Activities

It was recently pointed out to the "News" that there have been 73 Young People's Conventions in the history of our churches, not 72 as we reported in the September 15 issue of the SB. So, in our on-going effort to "get it right," we make that correction.

The Consistory of the Grace PRC in Standale, MI recently took a decision to grant the request of the PR Young People's Federation to host the 2016 YP Convention.

Grace also granted a request of the Presbytery of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia to have their pastor, Rev. R. Van Overloop, speak at their Youth Camp on December 28 - January 3. Grace saw this as a positive, that the EPC asked a PR minister to speak, and it was judged to be a good way to further the corresponding relationship we have with this denomination.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI hosted a "Summer Lecture" at the nearby Hudsonville PRC on Friday,

September 13. Their pastor, Rev. N. Decker, gave a speech on the "Power of the Tongue," an especially relevant subject with school just starting.


Denomination Activities

The 2013 PR Seminary Convocation, marking the beginning of the new school year, took place on September 11 at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. Prof. R. Dykstra spoke on the topic, "Pray for Us." The seminarians were also introduced at that time.

The Hope Herald's gave a musical concert on Sunday evening, September 8 at First Jenison CRC. Members of our West Michigan churches were invited as this men's chorus of 65+ members praised God for His loving faithfulness and care in song. That concert was repeated the following Sunday at the Crete, IL PRC.

Minister Activities

On Sunday, September 15, the Doon, IA PRC voted to extend a call to Rev. R. Kleyn, currently serving our churches as pastor of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA.

Rev. C. Griess declined the call extended to him from the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Southwest PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Dan Kooienga and his family in the loss of their brother and uncle,

JORDAN KOOIENGA.

May they take comfort from the promise given in Revelation 4: 21: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

Rev. denHartog, President
Gary Boverhof, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Elaine Triezenberg in the death of her sister,

LOIS GUNNINK.

May her comfort be found in God's Word in Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Rev. Michael DeVries, President
Dan Kiel, Clerk

Lecture:

*Earthquakes,
Cancer,
Wildfires,
Violence,
Tornadoes,
Terrorist Attacks,
Car Crashes,
Heart Attacks—*

Do things happen by chance?
Does everything have a reason?
Who is in control in this world?
What comfort is there in the calamities of life?
How can this be for my good?

Hear Rev. Ronald Van Overloop speak on:

**“Calamities: The Mighty God,
Our Father, Has the Answers!”**

FRIDAY, November 8, 2013
7:30 P.M.

at Covenant United Reformed Church
3724 Lovers Lane
Kalamazoo, Michigan

sponsored by the Evangelism Committee of
Kalamazoo Protestant Reformed Church

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Young Adults' Society of Hope PRC, Redlands CA expresses heartfelt sympathy to Phillip and Marie, Nick and Sarah, John and Emily, Charlie, and Carol Hopkins in the recent death of their father,

BENTON HOPKINS.

Psalm 40: 1-4: “I waited patiently for the LORD; and he inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust, and respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies.”

Rev. Huizinga, President
Kayla Feenstra, Secretary

Wedding Anniversary

■ On October 16, 2013 our beloved parents,
GORDON and EILEEN TERPSTRA,
will celebrate their 60th wedding anniversary. We, their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren, rejoice in this wonderful milestone—a gift of God's grace and love. We thank the Lord for their love for Him, for each other, and for us, and for the godly witness of God's faithfulness they have left for us and many others. May God continue to bless them and use them for good in our family and in the church of Jesus Christ. “It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. ... Great is thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:22-23).

◆ Suzanne Looyenga

Jim and Lissa VerHey

Elise, Colin, Caleb, Casey, Arie

Brendan and Kelly Looyenga

Makaia, Lynnae, Carissa, Lauryn, Kierra

Jason and Brianna Brands

Jaron, Isaiah, Quinton

Darren and Caitlin DeBoer

Cody, Ethan

Meghan, Drew Looyenga

◆ Tom and Luanne Schipper

Jason and Kimberly Schipper

Levi, Jadelyn

Dirk, Nicki, Andrew Schipper

Andrew and Betsy Krikke

◆ Chuck and Verna Terpstra

Corey and Brenda Terpstra

Carson, Laelle, Melise

David and Amber Decker

Chloe, Logan, Graeson, Trey

Matt and Kimberly Kuiper

Abbey, Gavin, Finley, Nolan

Thad, Kyle, Justin Terpstra

◆ Todd and Valerie Terpstra

Gordon, Jillian, Ian, Madelyn, Jacelyn Terpstra

◆ Jeff and Kathy Terpstra

Blake and Lindsey Wieringa

Cameron

Kyle and Kelsey Glass

Michael, Melanie, Allison Terpstra

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Bound Volumes

■ With the September 15th issue of the *Standard Bearer*, volume 87 was finished. If you would like your own issues bound, please deliver them to the **RFP** office before the end of October. For additional orders, call Paula at (616) 457-5970.