

The Standard Bearer

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Equipped to All Good Works

That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

II Timothy 3:17

The apostle Paul instructs Timothy to continue in the things that he had learned from his mother and grandmother. These godly women had, from Timothy's childhood, taught him the Scriptures, which are able to make one wise unto salvation. They are able to make one wise unto salvation because they have been given by inspiration of God and thus are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness.

According to the passage we consider for this meditation, God's purpose in giving the Scriptures and its wisdom is that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished or equipped to all good works.

How important this passage is for the training and rearing of children! The man of God here is not just the adult believer but also his children. Children of believing parents are children of the covenant and therefore little men and women of God. They also must be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. The calling to do this comes primarily to their parents. For this purpose God has given the Scriptures, which make one wise unto salvation.

How timely this instruction is as another year of schooling and catechism is about to begin for our children.



The man of God!

In the Old Testament this term was limited to those who served in the office of prophet, priest, or king. With the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, every true believer has the anointing of the Holy Spirit and becomes a prophet, priest, and king in and under Christ. That gives him the right to the title "Christian." It also makes him a man of God.

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There is much involved with being a man of God.

One becomes a man of God, first, through redemption. On account of our sins we all belong to the prince of darkness, both legally and spiritually. He owns us and so controls us that we can only serve him in sin. But Christ has brought redemption through His perfect sacrifice on the cross. He has purchased all that the Father has given Him, so that they no longer belong to Satan but to Christ. This purchase makes them men of God.

Those whom God has redeemed in Jesus Christ He also makes to be His children.

We are naturally the children of the devil. So much is this true that we are the very image of the devil. Spiritually we look like him and behave like him. But God adopts those whom He has redeemed in the blood of Christ to be His own children. And through a spiritual rebirth He also transforms them into his own image. This adoption and rebirth also makes them men of God.

Those born again of grace are also given the gift of faith that leads them to cling to Jesus Christ as their Savior. This spiritual union with Christ makes them partakers of Christ's anointing, so that they become prophets, priests, and kings in and under Christ. As prophets, priests, and kings in Christ they hold the office of believer. This, too, makes them men of God.

It is important to understand that the children of believers are also men of God. This is one of the glorious realities of the covenant. God's covenant is with believers and their seed, so that God ordinarily brings salvation to families in their generations. This does not mean that salvation will always come to every member of a covenant family. But according to the promises of the covenant, God does give covenant parents elect children whom He will save in Jesus Christ. These children are redeemed in the blood of the cross. Ordinarily they are born again to be the children of God at a very early age. True faith in Jesus Christ soon becomes evident in their life, to the joy of their parents. In Christ they become little prophets, priests, and kings. They are men of God!

And this is how believing parents must view and treat their children, until such a time as they clearly show themselves to be otherwise.



Thoroughly furnished unto all good works!

God has work for His men to do. They are prophets, priests, and kings who hold the office of believer in God's kingdom. This office involves work, kingdom work. Often kingdom work is viewed as belonging to a minister of the gospel in the church or to a missionary who brings the gospel to faraway lands. That certainly is kingdom work. But kingdom work is much broader than this, and the work of preaching the gospel is given to only a few in the kingdom. Kingdom work is any work that the Lord calls us to perform in His kingdom to serve Him. There is the work of being a husband or a wife, of being a parent, of being a teacher in the

Christian school, of being a bread-winner to provide for the financial needs of one's home, of supporting the gospel ministry and helping the poor, of ministering to the sick and elderly. The list of kingdom work is as broad as life. The work that is given to each man of God varies from individual to individual. This

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work also varies from one time in his life to another time as the circumstances of his life change under the providence of God.

When men of God do the work that God has laid before them according to God's law, in loving service to God, then it is a good work. It is good in that it is pleasing to God. It is also good in that it is useful for the promotion of God's kingdom.

It is important that we be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all these good works.

To be perfect and thoroughly furnished are really the same idea. Both phrases come from the same word in the original and speak of being completely furnished or equipped. "Perfect" describes the state of one being completely equipped for a task. This comes only after he is "thoroughly furnished," which speaks of someone being

equipped over a period of time, so that he is now ready for the task at hand. Think of a soldier who goes through a period of intensive training, and then, having received all the equipment he needs, he is now ready for battle.

The Lord will have us be fully equipped for the work He has for us in His kingdom. We must be completely equipped for all good works. We must not be content to be partially equipped for the work of the kingdom. Nor will it do to be equipped for some of the kingdom's work but not all. We must be equipped for all good works. And this is not accomplished in a day. It is a lifelong process that requires great work and effort as the changing circumstances in our lives modify the work God has for us to do.

For this purpose God has given us the Scriptures. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." The God-inspired Scriptures are essential to be fully equipped for the good work of the kingdom. Notice how profitable the Scriptures are. They are profitable for doctrine or teaching. The Scriptures teach us all that we need to know about our God, about our sin, and about salvation in Jesus Christ. The Scriptures are profitable for reproof and correction. The Scriptures reprove or rebuke us concerning our sin and are used by God to correct us, so that we turn from sin to God. In summary, the Scriptures are profitable for instruction or training in righteousness. The Scriptures are the means whereby God trains us in the way of righteousness.

How essential the Scriptures are to be equipped to all good works!

And so we must give ourselves to know the holy Scriptures. We must frequent the house of God on the Lord's Day, where the Scriptures are expounded in all their riches and truth. We must be busy with the Scriptures in our daily life, studying them at home with our families and individually. And do not forget to study them in the broader fellowship of the church. Make sure you attend the Bible studies offered in your

church. Living close to the Word is the only way to be thoroughly equipped for all the good works that the Lord will have you do in His kingdom.

With the same care that we have to equip ourselves for good work we must also seek to equip the children of the covenant. Scripture is full of instruction both for believing parents and for the church to equip the children of the covenant for their future work in the kingdom. These years must not be squandered.


For the children of the covenant to be fully equipped to all good works requires that they be instructed in various natural skills. In our society the work of the Lord requires that we have a number of skills such as reading, writing, mathematics, and a host of other skills. It is the responsibility of the parents to provide these skills for their children. For those skills that the parents are not themselves equipped to teach, they must provide training through others. This has given rise to the day school.

But, above all, parents must instruct their children in the Scriptures. The Scriptures alone are able to make our children wise unto salvation. The Scriptures are absolutely necessary to equip our children for all good works. The parents must be busy instructing their children in the home, beginning at an early age. And they must bring their children to church to be

instructed in the worship service as well as in the catechism classes that the church offers. Make sure you attend a church that provides biblical instruction to children on their level with a good catechism program. And, whenever possible, it is important that the instruction that

little men of God receive in the day school is from the viewpoint of the inspired Scriptures. How important good Christian schools are to equip the children of the covenant for all good works! Let us support and use the Christian schools!

What a blessing it is to be equipped for all the good works that God has for us in His kingdom.

And what a joy it is to see our children, grandchildren, and even great-grandchildren being equipped for the good work God has for them. 

*The Scriptures alone
are able to make our children
wise unto salvation.*

The Persistent Sanctioning of Sexual Sins by Reformed Churches

When God delivers over to sexual sin, He inflicts a terrible judgment. God sometimes judges *individuals* by giving them over to sexual sin. Other times His judgment falls on churches. Today God is giving over churches—some of our ecclesiastical relatives—to terrible sexual sins. The readers of the *Standard Bearer* ought to know about these horrible developments and respond to them in a biblical way, including the loving warning of family or friends in these churches to flee like Lot from the judgments that are falling, lest they and their children also fall under them.

The June 2013 issue of the Christian Reformed Church's *Banner* is so disturbing it has shocked even many members of that denomination, though the sanctioning of sexual sin has made progress there for some years already. The recent issue features two articles about sex and the single person; a news article about the CRC 2013 Synod, which appointed a study committee regarding ministering to homosexuals; and an editorial—significant for its placement in *this* issue—defending the inclusion of controversial articles: the magazine must be a forum

for church members to engage in a kitchen-table-like conversation on important topics.

What has drawn most attention are the feature articles about sex and the single person, particularly the one by a retired professor of psychology in a Christian college, a member of a CRC in Canada, who says that prohibiting sex before marriage is not biblical. The article provocatively claims that for the church to prohibit sex before marriage is *not biblical*. "God wants people to take pleasure in their youth—and that pleasure most certainly includes lovemaking.... Whether Christian single people should or should not practice premarital sex is a question that may have been relevant two or three generations ago, but the situation today has changed." The professor says that "today's young people have a variety of contraceptives at their disposal to minimize [the] risk" of pregnancy, and "young couples generally practice 'safe sex' to prevent sexually transmitted diseases." The author set the tone of his article in the opening paragraph by mocking the "prejudice that lingers to this day" that allows churches to admonish their young people "to ab-

stain from sex until marriage." The tone of the article shouts: "Imagine the backward church that still today would call for those old-fashioned morals." But the author blasphemes when he wonders whether God might be less "hung up" about sex than we are.

The companion feature article, allegedly the other side of this conversation, is comparatively good. In it, a Christian Reformed minister presents her case that whether you are single or married, you ought to "strive to live with integrity as God intended." Even then, her defense of biblical morality is sadly weak because it concludes with the request that her judgments be "the starting point of a conversation and journey of learning for you."

What aggravates the matter is the editorial justification of the offending article. The editorial, entitled "Why We Dare Not Play It Safe," first asserts that articles in the magazine do not necessarily present the denomination's official position. The purpose of the magazine is to give voice to perspectives across the continent. Well enough. When the editor goes on to claim that the inclusion of these different voices is "*not* to push editorial agendas

or positions, but to provide a place where important issues facing our denomination can be openly and honestly discussed," I am inclined to say, "Methinks the man protesteth too much." But when the editor says that no articles will be permitted that are outside the bounds of Scripture or that directly advocate against the doctrines taught in the creeds and confessions, the editorial itself goes out of bounds, because that editorial claim comes in the very issue in which a man says that prohibiting sex before marriage is unbiblical. In addition, the editor's short paragraph that introduces the "Sex, Intimacy, and the Single Person" articles describes them as "two perspectives to begin the conversation." After his editorial claiming that nothing will be printed that contradicts Scripture or the confessions, this "two perspectives" label is clearly an editorial sanctioning of both perspectives as biblical.

The editor is sanctioning sexual sin.

In the same issue is a news report of the 2013 Synod of the CRC. Also this report shows the wickedness afoot, now regarding homosexuality. Although attempts at synod were denied, there were strong efforts to "reexamine the CRC's 40-year-old stance that homosexual activity is sinful but the orientation is not." In the discussions, the report goes on to say, some "insisted that the CRC should revisit the biblical grounds of the policy because of new psychological, biological, and biblical scholarship over the past 40 years." Two delegates urged revisiting the 1973 decision because, as

one pleaded, "people from our own tradition are writing the books I and my friends...are reading, that are challenging the assumptions of 1973." "This is the women-in-office issue for my generation," a candidate for the ministry said to the delegates. No one present missed the emotional comparison as this aspiring preacher spoke to the assembly of synodical delegates, which, after last generation's painful struggle, now included at least 25 *women in office*. The current vocal and aggressive agenda of some is to move the churches to declare that homosexual *activity* is a godly activity. The reporter considered the debate's most dramatic moment to be one delegate's open declaration of

*Discussion...
objections...
dialogue...
but no discipline.
This is what
the proponents of
sexual sin want.*

his homosexuality. After he assured the "hushed delegates" that he was celibate, and thanked them for "being affirming of somebody like me," synod gave him a standing ovation.

The articles are available online, and the magazine encourages response to them as part of the "kitchen table discussion." There have been a flurry of objections on-

line. Much of the response has been negative, even outrage, objecting vehemently to the unbiblical stands and lamenting the direction the *Banner* is taking the churches.

These responses are encouraging from one perspective—God's people are concerned. However, enemies of the truth welcome "discussion" and "conversation," even dismay. Dialogue on such sensitive issues makes people comfortable with both perspectives, softening them to the errors, eventually. Allowing contrary opinions to be aired even gives some a sense of security that "at least someone is objecting; the cause is not lost; there are still faithful among us." Enemies of truth and godliness even welcome outrage. What they will not endure is action—calling the false teachers to repentance and removing the impenitent from the church by Christian discipline. And it is discipline that is required to preserve or restore truth and godliness in a church. Without a real cutting off by excommunication, the leaven will spread to the whole lump.

Discussion...objections...dialogue...but no discipline. This is what the proponents of sexual sin want.



Sexual sin is promoted and approved also in other large Reformed and Presbyterian denominations in the US. In some of them, homosexuality is officially approved. Same-sex marriages are allowed. Homosexual clergy occupy pulpits. In others, although the synods may hold a line somewhere, loud voices

calling for change are permitted. The organization “Room for All” (RfA), for example, is made up of homosexual activists in the Reformed Church in America (RCA), and was organized after an RCA minister officiated at the wedding of his daughter to her female partner. RfA’s affirmations include: intentional inclusion of “people of all sexual orientations and gender identities”; celebration of “the Creator’s diversity as embodied in lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people”; a challenge to “theologies, beliefs, and doctrines that oppress or exclude anyone of any sexual orientation”; and hope for “the time when the Reformed Church in America” changes and “*fully* welcomes and includes people of all sexual orientations and gender identities into the life *and ministry* of our denomination” (emphasis added). That is, RfA will not be satisfied until the denomination changes its position and allows active homosexuals as members in good standing and as leaders of the church. Individual congregations are encouraged to sign on to these affirmations and become known as congregations welcoming of LGBT people.

Here, too, there are contrary voices. Some RCA congregations insist that the Word of God condemns homosexuality. A few faithful ministers are vocal in their opposition to the movement. But without expelling the offending churches from their fellowship, and without excommunicating the impenitent advocates of homosexuality, their battle for their denomination’s pu-

rity is futile. May the leaders come out from among them, and call the people of God to follow them.

The plane is coming in short of the runway. Someone must sound the alarm. And then take action.



The PRCA and other Reformed denominations that do *not* find such evil sanctioning of sexual sin in their fellowship must be very careful both in their attitude towards those who fall away and in their own sense of security. I pray that we understand Scripture’s warning to take heed lest we also fall. With many of *them* God may be displeased, so that they perish (I Cor. 10). But these modern examples are written “for *our* learning.” The pressures

*...these modern
examples are written
“for our learning.”*

are great on all churches to condone sexual sin in a multitude of forms.

In this sad story the lessons are plentiful for the church of Christ. I mention a few, and conclude with what I judge to be most important for us.

First, churches must uncompromisingly maintain Scripture’s clear teaching about chastity and sexual faithfulness, even at great cost. Our stand on sexual intimacy and marital faithfulness has direct bearing on

our view of the church’s relationship to Christ, and of His relationship to us. The PRC’s costly stand on divorce and remarriage is one example of this.

Second, uncompromising maintenance of sexual purity requires discipline. Certainly, there is a difference between *official sanctioning* of sexual sins and what sins may be *found* in the members or officebearers. It’s one thing to have synod approve homosexuality or pre-marital sex. It’s another to have voices calling to approve these sins. And it’s yet another to find homosexual sin or other forms of fornication in church members. But without proper Christian discipline (or separation, if discipline fails to correct) in each of these cases, victory will go to the side of the devil. Even if the devil’s way is called “Christian love” or “an expression of committed intimacy,” it is a way that “inclineth unto death.... None that go unto [it] return again” (see Prov. 2:18, 19).

Third, there is a danger that a church or officebearers be silent when they ought to speak loudly, or that they speak loudly about someone else’s sins but not about their own. Refusing to give ecclesiastical approval to sexual sin is not enough to keep the strange woman at bay. No one may rest secure because “my churches’ synod would never approve these sins.” In these days when sexual sin inundates churches and entire cultures—witness the new pope’s recent hints of change in the Roman Catholic’s view of homosexuality—pulpits must not fail to warn against being entertained


by sexual immorality on television; must not fail to preach against improper dress that entices men to sexual sin, and other forms of sexual sin that the seventh commandment identifies. The devil celebrates these successes, too—when preachers in orthodox denominations overlook the sins right under their nose while calling attention to the neighbor’s wicked ways.

Last, let us remember that ecclesiastical allowance of these sexual sins *sometimes* comes as the judgment of God upon *other* sins. In His righteous judgment, God

“delivers over” men and churches to shameful sexual sins (please study the last half of Romans 1). And when God judges in this way—punishing sin with sin—it is a horrible judgment. Romans 1 holds before us a calling more basic than keeping our eyes open for signs of relaxing the biblical standards of sexual purity. That most fundamental calling is to give God (not man!) all glory, ascribe to Him (not ourselves!) all praise for salvation, devote our lives to the worship of God alone (not the creature). Failure in this roots in pride, found in each of us, and in every church that boasts herself in her

orthodoxy. Luther once said that God punishes proud men by giving them over to sexual sins. That applies to churches, too.

And the *end* of that judgment is God’s giving men over to wallow in the sexual filth of the heathen. Because men give glory to (worship and deify, really) the Creature, God debases men to do what even beasts (“creatures”) do not do: the unnatural practice of homosexuality.

In these last, evil days, may God grant us all, *daily*, “repentance unto the acknowledging of the truth” (II Tim. 2:23-25). 

O COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

Praising the Lord in the Congregation (5)

The Element of Singing

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

Psalm 111:1

Introduction

We began this series on Reformed worship by looking at various biblical principles of public, corporate worship. At this point in the series we are seeing those principles *applied* to a Reformed worship service, particularly as that is expressed in a typical Protestant Reformed liturgy.

Last time we drove straight to the heart of the covenantal assembly by examining the ministry of the Word in Reformed worship. We saw that the reading

and preaching of Scripture is the chief element of a Reformed worship service and that all other aspects of worship, indeed the very possibility of worship itself, depend upon God speaking to us in His Word.

In this article and the next we turn to one of our great responses to God’s speaking in His Word, congregational singing. Besides the doxologies, we sing four Psalms in a Protestant Reformed worship service. This singing is a significant reason why we join together and separate ourselves out from the world to meet with God face-to-face in public worship.

We are limiting ourselves in these articles to singing in public, corporate worship. Music in other contexts is a different matter, which we are not taking up here. We are talking about singing as a body in worship, where together we come before the Lord God and obey His call to “Sing forth the honour of his name: make his praise glorious” (Ps. 66:2).

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Previous article in this series: May 15, 2013, p. 368.

The Element Necessary for Corporate Worship

Singing is an element of public, corporate worship commanded by God Himself in Scripture. He does that through the psalmist in Psalm 111:1, "Praise ye the LORD." And then, He does so through the psalmist's own example of fulfilling that calling in corporate worship, "I will praise the LORD with my whole heart, *in the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.*" The psalmist, and God through him, commands us to praise the Lord among the saints.

Singing in public, corporate worship is demanded by the regulative principle of worship, for not only the Old Testament, but the New Testament as well, calls us to sing in worship. Colossians 3:16, which does not talk *only* about corporate worship, nonetheless speaks to corporate worship, calling us to sing in worship, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."

The apostolic church also provides an *example* of singing in corporate worship. Once again, following the Jewish synagogue worship, the New Testament church sang in her worship services. I Corinthians 14:15, a chapter about the public corporate worship of the church at Corinth, says that the church in Corinth sang: "What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also." The church is commanded to sing, and the example that we have of the New Testament church worshiping as recorded in the New Testament is that part of their worship was singing. Singing is not an option in corporate worship; the Word of God requires it.

The Purpose of This Element

Singing is closely connected to prayer.¹ They are not the exact same thing, of course, for one element is sung and the other is spoken. They are separate and distinct elements of worship. Nonetheless, they are connected. Both singing and prayer express praise to God. Both

¹ So Calvin: "As for public prayers, there are two kinds: the one consists simply of speech, the other of song." Preface to the *Genevan Psalter* under the heading, "Why Psalms?"

give expression to our sorrow for sin and our confession of sin. Both are means of bringing requests. Both express thanks to God.

But for *singing*, the *primary* purpose is *praise*. So often in the Scriptures, and especially in the Psalms,² the word "sing" and the word "praise" are put together, as though the Spirit defines singing as praise. Sometimes the two words are put together back-to-back and repeated, as, for example, in Psalm 47:6, "Sing praises to God, sing praises: sing praises unto our King, sing praises."

Psalm 111:1 calls us to praise through singing, using two words for praise. Though both words are translated the same way, "praise," there are actually two different words in verse 1. The first is used when the psalmist commands, "*Praise* ye the LORD." That particular word calls us to laud, to exalt, to magnify the qualities, names, attributes, and works of Jehovah God. That means, then, that praise must be intelligent. A person cannot praise God if he does not know God. Praise might be based on a simple faith at times, but it has to know something in order to praise. It ought to be the case that the deeper we know God, the more we praise and the more fervent our praise to Him is. This is what that first word, "*Praise* ye the LORD," indicates.

The second word translated "praise" in Psalm 111:1 is a little bit different. It is used when the psalmist says, "I will *praise* the LORD with my whole heart." Literally, that word means, "I will constantly hurl exaltations at." The idea is that God is so worthy that we cannot praise fast enough or proclaim fervently enough because He is so glorious. We shoot out words of praise to Him. And we do that in a very specific way.

The Nature of Singing

Singing is a poetic form of communicating to God. There are two purposes for singing. The first is to communicate an idea with intelligible words. The second is to communicate emotions or affections through the use of those words. These two things are never and can never be separated in singing. A person can express ideas via writing prose as I am doing now. A person can communicate information by speaking. In either medium he expresses some emotions through the words,

² I found this 25 times in the Psalms, though there may be some I missed.

but not to the degree that he can by singing. In singing, one puts those words, those ideas, to a melody so that the emotions that those words bring up in a person, and a people, are most fully and beautifully expressed.

In prose and spoken word it is impossible to communicate with such beauty as is found in the expression of words sung. In prose and spoken word it is impossible to capture all the emotion and beauty of expression with any number of people at the exact same time as is possible in singing.

Because of this unique ability of song to combine ideas and emotions and beauty, singing is a unique and powerful way of praising God. Expressions that include emphasis in the right places, that rhyme, and that are set to an appropriate tune represent the entire person as the person is singing. The combination of the words and the tune that is appropriate to those words affects the will as we exalt the God of majesty.³ As the psalmist says in the text quoted above, “I will praise the LORD with *my whole heart*.” That is, I will praise Him with all that I am, mind, will, and emotions. It is possible, of course, just to stand there and mumble, uninvolved in the singing at all. But if someone is singing rightly, the song uniquely represents everything that the person is as a person being set before the God of all glory in worship.

This unique way of praising may be prone to abuse. There is a danger in song and singing that it is simply an emotional release. Singing can be made into a purely subjective experience. If singing is only emotional fervor, then it is useless and even dangerous. For example, a person can sing heretical words, but still feel like he is praising because of the power of the poetry and of the music. In contrast, the power of singing must be rooted in the truthful words that in combination with

³ Similarly, the main element from God’s side, the preaching of the Word, must combine both ideas and unction.

the appropriate music produce accurate emotion. It has to be that way because the Holy Spirit is the power of singing, and the Holy Spirit always uses the truth of God’s Word.

If you would speak to a Mormon about his singing, he would say he has deep feelings of praise and worship while singing a song with a powerful tune. If you would then ask him what the words of that song are, perhaps he would tell you words that proclaim Mormonism’s heretical doctrine that Jesus Christ was merely a man and not God. Nonetheless, he may say, “I feel the Spirit is present with me when I sing those words. I can feel that the Spirit is working.”

This is not the work of the Spirit, and neither is it praise. It is genuine emotion, but it is not produced by the Spirit. The Spirit works through truth. And therefore, the only emotion that is valid as part of true worship is emotion grounded in the truth of God’s Word.

An additional abuse with singing is the error of Pentecostalism, where emotions can become so whipped up that, once again, the emotions are separated from the solid ground of the truth as appropriated by the mind. This allows one to be manipulated and deceived. Always, healthy, true emotion in song arises out of and

is grounded in the truth of the words that the Spirit is using to fill the mind.

*Always, healthy, true emotion
in song arises out of
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Singing As Spiritual Dialogue with God

You recall that the worship service is a dialog between God and His people. God our Friend-Sovereign speaks in His Word, and we His friend-servants respond in singing and prayer. It is the experience of the covenant of grace as God fellowships with us in the service.


In the elements of worship where God speaks to us, He speaks to us in such a way that He gives Himself to us. He gives us Himself and all of His blessings contained in Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy

Spirit. And in praise of song, the children of God respond by giving all that we are, body and soul, mind and will, to Him as a sacrifice of love and thanksgiving.

Psalm 111 talks about this. The call of verse 1 is to praise God. The rest of the psalm is the *reason* why we are to praise God. Verses 2 through 4 tell us that God is the God who has given Himself to us in all of His wonderful works. And then verses 5 through 9 go into detail about what those works are and how God gives Himself to us in those works.

In verse 5 He is the God who feeds His people. He gives them His providential care. In verse 6 He is the God who gives His people the heritage of the heathen. That means that in the end, all is for the child of God. Everything is given to him.

In verse 4 and verse 9 the psalmist says that God is the God who has commanded His covenant forever, that He will ever be mindful of that covenant. The experience of the covenant is that God is ours. We are bound to Him, and He to us, in love and fellowship. Then in verse 9 the great surety of that covenant is that He gives us redemption in the death of His own Son. In redemption we have God made flesh, we have God's own righteousness imputed to us and then worked in us. Redemption gives us God Himself in Jesus Christ.

In the elements of the worship service that come from His side, God recounts all these things about Himself and His work. He sets before us Himself as the God who gives us Himself. Therefore our singing must be a giving of ourselves to Him in response. 

THINGS WHICH MUST SHORTLY COME TO PASS

PROF. DAVID ENGELSMAN

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (25)

The Reformed (Amillennial) Critique of Postmillennialism (cont.)

Introduction

This part of my treatment of postmillennialism consists of a critical examination of the biblical proof put forward by the postmillennialists for their doctrine of the last things.

I have already considered their Old Testament proof: the passages that prophesy future glories for Israel, especially Isaiah 65. I have also considered two of the main New Testament passages upon which post-

millennialism rests its case: Matthew 24 and Romans 11:25, 26.

In the preceding installment in this series, I began a consideration of another important passage in the New Testament for postmillennialism: Revelation 20, the only passage in the Bible that mentions the millennium, or period of one thousand years. I presented the interpretation of the passage by the postmillennialists.

In this article, I subject the postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 to criticism.

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Previous article in this series: June 2013, p. 396.

Criticism of the Postmillennial Interpretation of Revelation 20

The criticism that can, and must, be made of the

postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 is both exegetical and doctrinal. The criticism is fatal to the postmillennial interpretation and, therefore, to the theory itself.

First, those who reign with Christ during the millennium, according to Revelation 20:4, are those who “were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.” That is, they are humans who had been killed for Christ’s sake in the world. They are martyrs. Therefore, verse 4 states that these humans are “souls.” Their reigning with Christ on thrones is not bodily. Nor is the place of their reign the earth. Rather, they occupy a position of glory and share somewhat in Christ’s reign in heaven.

Verse 4 clearly describes the intermediate state of elect believers, particularly elect believers who have lost their (earthly) life for Christ’s sake in the world.

If postmillennialism is determined to explain the reigning of the martyrs as taking place on earth in the bodies of these martyrs, it is compelled to teach a bodily resurrection at least of some saints prior to the final resurrection at the second coming of Christ. This brings postmillennialism into conflict with the teaching of Scripture and of the Reformed creeds that there is one resurrection of the dead and that this one resurrection happens at the return of Jesus Christ. “The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation” (John 5:28, 29). “Then [at the coming of the Lord Christ]...all the dead shall be raised out of the earth, and their souls joined and united with their proper bodies in which they formerly lived” (Bel. Conf., Art. 37).

On its interpretation of Revelation 20, postmillennialism has two bodily resurrections, separated by the millennium. Large numbers of the godly, if not all the godly who have ever lived prior to the millennium, will be raised at the beginning of the millennium. All the godly who die during the millennium and all the ungodly will be raised after the millennium, at the return of Christ.

Not only does the postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20:4 bring postmillennialism into conflict with the biblical and Reformed doctrine of

one resurrection. The interpretation also involves postmillennialism in absurdity. For postmillennialism has resurrected, glorified saints, for example Deacon and Evangelist Stephen and church father Polycarp, living and working in a world of sin and death, rubbing shoulders every day with reprobate sinners, in the millennial kingdom. Notwithstanding the carnal prosperity of the world into which they have returned, it must seem to such saints, who have enjoyed the vision of the glory of God, face-to-face communion with Jesus Christ, and the perfection of heaven, that they have been banished to a kind of purgatory, or worse.

To those who teach that resurrected and glorified saints will return to this world of sin and death, in order to reign for a thousand years over continuing earthly life, the appropriate response is that which a Scottish Presbyterian minister once gave to the postmillennialists: “Mee thinkes, you speak nonsense.”¹

The truth is that perfected, sinless, glorified, heavenly saints cannot live in a sinful world, in the stream of an earthly life. Nor would God impose such misery and confusion on saints who have, through death, been delivered from this world of sin and death, and transformed into heavenly creatures.

The first resurrection of Revelation 20:5, 6, which accounts for the living and reigning of the martyrs with Christ, is Christ’s translation of His own, through physical death, from the death of sinful, earthly life into sinless, heavenly life, in their soul. When the child of God dies, he does not naturally fly off into heaven in his soul. But Christ raises him, in his soul, into the new life of heaven.

For Christ to send those whom He has raised into heavenly life back into earthly life, where death reigns and sin abounds, would be a cruel reversing of their resurrection.

A second feature of Revelation 20 that is devastating of the postmillennial doctrine, if not fatal to it, is that, according to verses 7-9, the millennium is followed by

¹ Alexander Petrie, in 1644, with specific reference to Puritans at the Westminster Assembly. With reference to postmillennialism, Petrie added: “old errores are lyke old whoores, that is, the more to be abhorred.” Quoted in Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium: Literature & Theology 1550-1682* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2000), 53.

an attack on the kingdom of Christ by Satan and his hordes for a little season.

This aspect of the teaching of Revelation 20 inflicts a heavy blow on postmillennialism's main purpose with its millennium: the millennium represents the earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ *within history*. This is the heart of postmillennial theology. The title of J. Marcellus Kik's defense of postmillennialism lays bare the heart of postmillennialism: *An Eschatology of Victory*. In his introduction to the book, Rousas J. Rushdoony, the father of Christian Reconstruction, proclaimed the message of postmillennialism: "As an eschatology of victory, it [postmillennialism] will inspire men with the power of God, and...lead...to the triumph of Christ in every area."²

The most damning, and frequent, charge of the postmillennialists against Reformed amillennialism is that the doctrine of the last things of amillennialism is "defeatist." How the zealots of postmillennialism ring the changes on this charge! Christ's kingdom is defeated in history by the kingdom of Satan, in terms of *earthly* victory and defeat. At the end of history, for amillennialism, Satan has a majority of followers; Satan's kingdom holds sway over nations and cultures; Satan's army has destroyed the instituted church and is persecuting the saints. This amillennial view of the last days of history is, charge the optimistic postmillennialists, "pessimistic."

Apart from postmillennialism's errors in demanding an *earthly* victory and a victory *within* history, the charge of postmillennialism against amillennialism is false. When Jesus Christ returns in the body, with all His mighty angels, "to recompense tribulation to them that trouble" us, "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ," and "to be glorified in his saints" (II Thess. 1:6-10), the kingdom of Satan will by no means be triumphant on earth. It will be in disarray. The Battle of Armageddon will have divided and well-nigh destroyed it (Rev. 16:12-16). By His judgments, God will have demonstrated that Satan could not erect, and maintain, a worldwide kingdom of earthly peace and prosperity. His greatest effort and best attempt at a

utopian world-kingdom apart from God in Jesus Christ will have been exposed as a failure.

But Revelation 20, favorite passage of postmillennialism, delivers a heavy blow to postmillennialism's dear doctrine that the kingdom of Christ will have an earthly victory within history. In fact, the blow is twofold.

First, evidently, there are countless enemies of Christ, His kingdom, and His people during the millennium. Outwardly, they yield to the physical power of the saints, who have dominion. Inwardly, they hate the king and His kingdom. Throughout the millennium, they await their chance to revolt, and plot the revolution. If, when the thousand years are expired, Satan marshals humans in all nations to fight the kingdom of Christ, "the number of whom is as the sand of the sea" (Rev. 20:8), all these godless foes of Christ were present during the millennium. This renders the alleged victory of the kingdom of Christ highly suspect.

The second blow against postmillennialism's dream of earthly victory is heavier. History does not, in fact, come to its close with the earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ. Rather, history closes with the most serious assault upon the kingdom of Christ that history has even known.

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, God and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city (Rev. 20:7-9).

It is doubtful, therefore, that any chapter of Scripture is more telling *against* postmillennialism, at its very heart, than is Revelation 20.

Recently, a leading proponent of postmillennialism has candidly recognized how troublesome Revelation 20 is for postmillennialism's message of victory. Martin G. Selbrede has acknowledged the force of the criticism given above, in light of the teaching of Revelation 20 that Satan will be loosed after the millennium to wage war against the kingdom of Christ. Selbrede's response to the criticism is to deny that there will be any loosing of Satan following the millennium and to affirm that during the millennium every human then living will

² J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), ix.

be converted to Christ, and saved. No enemy of the kingdom of Christ remains.³

Thus, this postmillennial theologian attempts desperately to explain away the plain teaching of Revelation 20:7-9 that, following the millennium, Satan launches a worldwide attack on the kingdom of Christ and its citizens. This attempt to solve postmillennialism's problem is an exercise in futility. The passage is too clear.

The only other solution to its problem for postmillennialism is the exceedingly painful one of giving up Revelation 20 entirely, as referring to postmillennialism's "golden age." This was the solution recommended by the Presbyterian postmillennialist B. B. Warfield.⁴

The Truth of Revelation 20

The millennium of Revelation 20 is the entire new dispensation from Christ's exaltation, when He bound Satan, to the time just before His second coming.

During all this time, Satan is governed by Jesus Christ so that he cannot deceive the nations, that is, unite them under Antichrist, in order to destroy the true churches of Christ, persecute the saints, and establish the kingdom of the beast worldwide. Were Satan not to be bound, the gathering of the church would be impossible.

Also during this time, the elect saints, particularly the martyrs, are, at their death, resurrected by Christ out of death into heavenly life in their soul. In heaven, they share in the life and glory of the enthroned Jesus Christ. So far from fooling the church in the world with the optimistic message of earthly victory, Revelation 20 thus warns the church that throughout history she and her members are objects of the persecuting, killing hatred of the ungodly world. Their encouragement and comfort in the face of this hatred are not a future earthly victory, but deliverance at death into the victory of reigning with Christ in heaven.

³ Martin G. Selbrede, "Reconstructing Postmillennialism," *Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* 15 (Winter, 1998): 146-224.

⁴ See B. B. Warfield, "The Millennium and the Apocalypse," in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1929), 641-664. "The millennium of the Apocalypse [Revelation 20] is the blessedness of the saints who have gone away from the body to be at home with the Lord" (662).

At the end of the thousand years, Satan is freed from his restricted imprisonment and bondage. This may very well be taking place now. Subject to the will of the Lord Jesus, who frees Satan, as once He bound him, Satan deceives the nations into forming the world-kingdom of Antichrist, which assails the kingdom of Jesus Christ, the true church, her members, and her works. Revelation 11 and Revelation 13 give further description of this last, still future war of Satan on the church.

The last and greatest battle of the church, which is still impending at the beginning of the twenty-first century, will be won, not by the church herself, but by the power of God, who arises for the defense of His kingdom and its citizens. As so often in the history of the Old Testament church, the victory will be a wonder.

Christ returns.


Then follow the second resurrection—the resurrection of the body—and the final judgment.

The end of history, therefore, will be the complete victory of the church with everlasting, beneficial consequences. "End," however, does not refer to the closing moments, or thousand years, of history, but to the *goal* of history.

The victory will not be the accomplishment of the heroic efforts of the saints, but a wonder of the grace of God in Jesus Christ. Jesus personally will conquer, consuming the Lawless One—the personal Antichrist—with the spirit of His mouth, destroying him with the brightness of His coming (II Thess. 2:8), and "taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel" (II Thess. 1:8).

Everlastingly, for all those "found written in the book of life" (Rev. 20:15), the benefit will be life in the new heaven and the new earth (Rev. 21:1), where are neither death, nor sorrow, nor sin, nor sinners, but perfect fellowship with God in Jesus Christ (Rev. 21, 22).

This, *this* is the hope of the church and the saints.

This, *this* is the victory of the kingdom of Jesus Christ. 

First Regenerated; Then We Seek God

A person whose spiritual heart is dead is said to be *unregenerate*. In this article we consider the fact that an unregenerate person will never call out to God for salvation. The proper order, therefore, is this: First God gives a person a new heart, and only then does he begin to seek God.

Although that is the proper order, many professing Christians teach the opposite. They say that first an unregenerate person must seek God, and only then will God grant unto him a new heart.

An unregenerate person, however, will never do this. A person whose spiritual heart is dead views himself not to have a problem. He will not call out to God to deliver him from his sin. He enjoys walking in sin, and thinks he is just fine as he is.

This is what the sinner thinks, and what he will continue to think, unless God performs a wonder within him, and raises him spiritually from the dead.

No unregenerate seekers

Scripture states emphatically that there is no such thing as an unregenerate person who truly seeks God: "As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:10-11).

No one, not one single person, seeks God. That is what this verse states explicitly.

That is also what God's people sang in the days of the Old Testament. This passage in Romans is taken from the Psalms.¹ God's people have been singing this truth in praise to God for several thousand years now. Yet many who profess to believe in Christ deny what these Psalms clearly teach.

¹ It is a reference either to Psalm 14:1-3 or to Psalm 53:1-3. Both of these passages say virtually the same thing.

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Previous article in this series: May 1, 2013, p. 348.

Some even quote this passage in Romans without really confessing what these verses say. Some may quote this passage to show that all men are sinners. But this passage says more than this. It says not only that man by nature is a sinner, but also that a dead sinner is unable to seek God.

Haters of God unable to seek Him

God demands that all men everywhere repent and seek Him. But an unregenerate person is unable to do this.

Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God (Rom. 8:7-8).

An unbeliever here is said to be "in the flesh" and to have a "carnal mind." He is enslaved to his sinful flesh, and in his mind he delights to think only on carnal things. When he hears the law of God, he is unable to subject himself to what it says.

The inability of man is stressed in the passage. The unbeliever *cannot* please God. His mind is not in subjection to God's law, neither indeed can be. God commands the unbeliever to repent and seek Him. Yet the unbeliever is unable to do this. He does not want to do this, that is true. Yet it is also correct to say that he is unable to do this.

So why is the unregenerate person unable to seek God? The passage quoted above gives the reason. It is because an unregenerate person hates God. The passage speaks of "enmity" against God, and enmity is hatred. One with a carnal mind hates God and is unable to submit to the God whom he hates.

An unregenerate person loves his sin and hates the God who demands that he repent. He despises the God who punishes those who refuse to turn from their wicked ways. The more he hears what God says, the more he hates Him. He goes deeper and deeper into his sin.

A person can obey God only out of a love for Him. One cannot and will not seek a God whom he hates.

Must love God to seek Him


God calls all human beings to seek Him. Yet a man must love God first, before he will do this. So who, then, *will* seek God?

The ones who truly seek God are only those whom He has first regenerated, giving them a heart in which they love the God who calls them. First God gives a person a living spiritual heart. Only then does the person love God, and come to Him when He calls.

Therefore, the verses quoted above serve to expose the error of those who say that first man must seek God, and only then will God give him a new heart. If that were the case, then no one would be saved. Out-

side of Christ there is none that seeketh after God—no not one.

It is in the way of believing what God says about the depravity of the natural man that we come to understand why it is that we seek God when others do not. It is not because of anything we did. It is solely because God has loved us, and has given us a heart in which we love Him. That is how we have come to seek Him, and to long for communion with Him.

With humility and great joy, we confess that our salvation did not depend upon an act of our own will. We were spiritually resurrected because God willed it, not because we willed it. We have nothing of which we can boast. The glory belongs solely to our Father in heaven, who has looked down upon us in mercy, and has given us a heavenly life that we did not even seek. 

SEARCH THE SCRIPTURES

MR. DON DOEZEMA

Upon This Rock (11)

Robbing Christ of His Honor (5)

“**B**ut whose blood?”
That was the question of Ophoff with which we ended our previous article.

He asked the question from the perspective of the saints of old.

Not, surely, from *our* perspective. In the clear light of the antitype, the saints of God in the new dispensation not only *know* the answer to that question but *glory in it*. “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Gal. 6:14). “...being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. ...we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son” (Rom. 5:9, 10). “In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace” (Eph. 1:7). “How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the

eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God” (Heb. 9:14). “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things,...but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (I Pet. 1:19). “...the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (I John 1:7). “Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood” (Rev. 1:5). “And I saw heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True,... And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood” (Rev. 19:11-13).

That’s what we have. In the clear light of the antitype.

And what did believers in the old dispensation have? The blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 9:13).

The contrast is...stark.

In comparison to the reality, the type, the blood of an *animal*, seems almost to have been an “empty

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show”—which is what it would have been, says Calvin in his *Institutes*, “if the power of Christ’s death and resurrection had not been displayed therein.” And the testimony of Scripture is that they were. “Wherefore the law [that is, ‘the whole economy by which the Lord governed His people under the old covenant’] was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ” (Gal. 3:24).

This was the aim of all the ceremonies; for why were there sacrifices and washings except that men might continually consider their pollution and condemnation? When a man sees his uncleanness before his eyes, and the innocent animal is held out as the image of his own death, how can he indulge in sleep? How can he fail to be roused and desire a remedy? 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 (Calvin’s *Commentaries*).

Ah, yes, “how can he indulge in sleep?” As Fairbairn put it so well, the believer

...could not but know that God was far from delighting in blood, and that death, either in man or beast, was not a thing in which He could be supposed to take pleasure.... And when death, under God’s own directing agency, was brought so prominently into the divine service, and every act of worship, of the more solemn kind, carried in its bosom the life-blood of an innocent creature, what more striking memorial could they have had of the evil wrought in their condition by sin? With such an element of blood perpetually mingling in their services, they could not forget that they stood upon the floor of a broken covenant, and were themselves ever incurring anew the just desert of transgression.

But hardly were the saints of old left there—that is, with the blood of bulls and goats to drive home to them the awful reality of their guilt. God commanded the sacrifices, writes Calvin in his *Institutes*, in order to “lift their minds *higher*.” That’s what we would expect if everything in the ceremonial “had impressed on it, as

it were, the mark of *Christ*.” How else could we explain the repeated testimony of the psalmists to the *blessedness* of those who, already in the old dispensation, “put their trust in *him*” (2:12), those “whose transgression is *forgiven*, whose sin is *covered*” (32:1)—that is, to those who had learned by experience to expect nothing from the ancient sacrifice but absolutely all from Jehovah their God. And how so? It was from the sacrifices themselves, the ceremonies of the law, impressed as they were “with the mark of Christ.” In a very real sense, it was the Spirit of Christ who, already in the old dispensation, led the believer to look beyond the blood of a bull—to Christ. In his *The Temple: Its Ministry and Services*, Alfred Edersheim expressed it in this way:

Thus the Old Testament sacrifices were not only symbols, nor yet merely predictions by fact (as prophecy is a prediction by word), but they already conveyed to the believing Israelite the blessing that was to flow from the future reality to which they pointed.

Blessing...by anticipation...of what would flow...from a future reality.

We cannot help but think of Hebrews 11:4: “By faith Abel offered..., *by which* [excellent sacrifice] *he obtained witness that he was righteous*.” From the beginning, therefore, *peace*. Peace of mind and of heart. Peace that, for the sinner saint, could come only out of an assurance that his sin was *pardoned*. And all this—*from the sacrifice*.

Yes, from the sacrifices. But was it, we might ask, from the sacrifices *alone*? Did the sacrifices *by themselves* have the power to lead the worshiping saint, by the hand, to Christ? As we have already suggested, the slaying of the sacrificial animal was indeed sufficient to demonstrate the great truths of redemption, namely that the justice of God requires *payment for sin*, and that there can be no forgiveness of sin *without the shedding of blood*. But was the “mark of Christ” so clearly impressed on the rite that it could be discerned by mere *intuition*? Ophoff’s answer was, No. Humbled consciences is one thing. Faith in the coming Redeemer is quite another. For the latter, Ophoff insisted, more is needed. And that something is the *word*. The question, therefore, he said, was “whether the shadows of the old covenant were accompanied by the word explaining

their function.” And he went on, at considerable length, to demonstrate that they *were*. Right from the beginning. Genesis 3:21 (God’s provision of a covering for the nakedness of our first, just fallen, parents) was not without Genesis 3:15. From the mother promise in the garden of Eden, to Jacob’s blessing of his son Judah (from whom the scepter would not depart “until Shiloh come”), to Balaam’s prophecy of a “Star out of Jacob,” to the matchless prophecy of Isaiah, who was “transported to those sublime heights from where he can see in the distance the spectacle of a suffering Savior”: “...with his stripes we are healed!” (53:4, 5).

Ophoff concludes, therefore, that the symbols and rites of the old covenant did indeed *not* stand alone. The prophetic *types* were accompanied by the prophetic *word*. The Spirit of God, he says, “empowered the people of God to sense the meaning and message of the blood. It is plain that the shadows led men to *Christ*.”

Calvin says much the same in his *Institutes*. He writes concerning the people of Israel that, “even though they had to come forward daily with new sacrifices to appease God, yet Isaiah promises that all their evil

deeds will be atoned for by a single sacrifice [Isa. 53:5].” In an earlier chapter in the *Institutes*, Calvin declared concerning the “sacrifices of the law” that they “plainly and openly taught believers to seek salvation nowhere else than in the atonement that Christ alone carries out.”

It might seem as if that should be the last word in this short series of articles that began with the question, what did Abel and Cain *understand*? Clearly, the faith on the basis of which Abel “offered a more excellent sacrifice” had to be a faith in *Christ*. Clearly, Cain’s offering of the fruit of the ground was therefore a “robbing Christ of His honor.” Such would have to be the case if, in their linking together of prophecy and symbol, they were given to understand that salvation could be found nowhere else than in the atonement of Christ. Simply put, faith in Christ would then not only have been *possible* for the saints of old, but *required of them*.

But it’s not quite so simple. 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? More on that, next time.

... to be concluded. 

SPECIAL ARTICLE

MR. CARSTEN LINKE

Jesus Christ Reveals the Name of God

Comments on John 17:6-11

Introduction

The seventeenth chapter of the Gospel of John is commonly called the high-priestly prayer. The reason for this is that Jesus Christ comes before God for those who are His, as the head and mediator of the church. He comes before God as their high priest in prayer, in order, first, to bring to Him their concerns, and second, to worship Him in their name.

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A prayer is more than a presentation of a wish-list. Certainly, petition is a central component of a prayer to God. The word itself intimates that. But belonging to prayer is also the worship of God. Prayer must have a basis. We lay the foundation for our petitions in that we praise God, and in that we acknowledge His being and works. Only when we know who God is, what He does, and what we may expect from Him can we ask something of Him. Our petitions are, then, grounded on that which we believe about God.

It is no different in the high-priestly prayer. John 17 does not consist simply of a list of prayer requests. Much more, it contains confession and instruction.

For that reason it is important that we listen carefully. It was not for nothing that the disciples were present at this prayer. Just before, Jesus spoke to *them*; and now He lifts up His eyes to heaven and turns Himself to *His Father*, as we read in the short introduction in John 17:1.

The name of God is the content of revelation

We will deal in particular with verses 6-11. The Lord begins this part of His prayer to His Father with the words, "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world..." Jesus' manifestation of His Father has primarily to do with His *name*.

Names are important in the Bible. They are not mere designations that help us tell the difference between one person and another. Today when we hear a name, we can associate that name with a person. That person pops up before our mind's eye, and we know whom we are talking about. On the other hand, if we hear a strange name, we normally don't have any associations. The name tells us nothing about the person who bears it. To be sure, if we were curious, we could look up the meaning of a name in a dictionary; but whether that meaning has anything to do with the person is doubtful.

In the Holy Scriptures this is normally different. In many cases a name was consciously chosen to describe specific characteristics of a person or a place. This is especially true as concerns the names that God Himself gives. We think for example of Abram, to whom God gave the name Abraham (the father of multitudes). We also think of Jacob who became "Israel" (the prince of God). We remember especially Jesus, whose name in Hebrew means "Jehovah Salvation." This is underscored in Matthew 1:21, when Joseph received the instruction, "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

The name reveals the nature. If that is the case with men, how much more true would it be of God Himself! In the Scriptures we find a number of names for God. All of these names have something in common: each of them reveals something of God's being. Each name shows us something of who and what God is.

In His high-priestly prayer, Christ says that He has revealed the name of God. What does that mean? Did

He tell His disciples *what* God's name is? That would have been unnecessary. The disciples knew the designations of God. As Jews, they were very familiar with the Old Testament. They knew which names for God were used there. No, to reveal the name of God means much more than that.

In connection with the name of God, there is an especially important Bible text: "And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations" (Ex. 3:13-15).

The expression "I am" has in Hebrew the same roots as the name of God "Jehovah," which in many translations is given as "LORD" usually in capital letters. Whenever we read the name "LORD" in our Bibles, then we think of "Jehovah" and know that this name means the same as "I am that I am."

A few chapters later the LORD speaks anew about His name:

And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them. And I have also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, wherein they were strangers. And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel, whom the Egyptians keep in bondage; and I have remembered my covenant. Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will rid you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give

it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD (Ex. 6:6-8).

Here we discover why God designates Himself with “I am.” Verse 8 expresses the meaning of this name: “And I will bring you in unto the land, concerning the which I did swear to give it to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; and I will give it you for an heritage: I am the LORD.” God is the Unchangeable, the Faithful, and the True. His Word stands immovable. When He, biblically speaking, lifts up His hand to swear, He means it seriously. He does not behave like a man, who today promises one thing, but in the morning offers the opposite. “Why should I worry about whatever I promised yesterday?” When God promises something, or swears, then He certainly carries through.

The central promise to us is that He saves us from our sins, reconciles us to Himself, and will make us to be His children. Nothing else stands behind the promises that were made to Abraham and the other patriarchs. The bringing of His people out of Egypt is a picture of the salvation of His people out of the power of sin. The land of Canaan is a picture of the eternal fellowship of God with His people in His kingdom. Behind the earthly promises stand promises that point to heaven. Behind the earthly fulfillment of the promises stands, just as truly, a heavenly fulfillment. The earthly fulfillment serves as a picture or as an earnest for that which will finally be fulfilled in the actual sense. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob understood the prophecies that they received in this way, as Hebrews 11:8-10 makes clear.

The promises are fulfilled in Christ

When Jesus says in His prayer that He reveals the name of God, He is proclaiming the truth that God faithfully fulfills His promises. But Christ has done still more. He has not only proclaimed. He has not only *pointed to* a treasure chest. He has, much more, *opened* this treasure chest and shared its contents, the treasures of salvation. That Jesus reveals the name of God means that He has revealed *Himself* as the promised Redeemer of His people.

The fulfillment of the promises of God stands or falls with Jesus Christ. In His person the promises

come together and become reality. He is the incarnate fulfillment of the promised Word of God. For the Savior immediately adds, “Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me” (John 17:7-8).

Christ was sent by the Father so that the Father’s promises would be efficacious. Christ had given to His disciples the words that He had received from His Father so that they would receive them. That means that Christ communicated Himself to His disciples in a way that made the promises of God effective in them. This truth the apostle John proclaimed in his first epistle in this way, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.”

John calls Christ the “eternal life.” Not only does Christ *proclaim* eternal life. Not only does He *work* eternal life. No, He *is Himself* eternal life. Some few verses later in the same epistle, the apostle explains what this has to do with us, “He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (I John 5:12).

Christ is the fulfillment of the promise. He is that eternal life. But how do we come into possession of this treasure? In that we receive this very Christ. “He that hath the Son hath life.”

In order for us to possess Jesus Christ, He had first to reveal the name of God to us. One could say, He must *communicate* Himself to us. That Christ communicates Himself to us means, for one thing, that He *reveals* His being and work to us, but also that He makes us *partakers* of His being and work. That is the decisive thing. For only when Christ reveals Himself to us so that we lay hold on Him and take Him for our own by faith do we have eternal life.

... to be continued. 

Minister Activities

Since our last "News," Rev. R. Kleyn declined the call he received from the Randolph, WI PRC to serve as their next pastor; and Rev. C. Haak declined the call he received from the Doon, IA PRC to serve as their next pastor.

Candidate Erik Guichelaar has been extended two calls since our last "News." Our vacant churches in Randolph, WI and Doon, IA have both called him to be their next pastor.

Due to Candidate Guichelaar considering two calls from churches in Classis West, and his anticipated examination at the next meeting of Classis, that meeting has been postponed one month, from September 4 to October 9, in the Loveland, CO PRC.

Sister-Church Activities

A recent bulletin from our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, included the following encouraging quote, and it reminded us that God has His church in every nation. "Thank you for your e-mail and the Covenant Reformed News. It is a great opportunity to receive it every month. I am pastor of a small church in Cuba. When I converse with others I am as a 'strange bug' for my position on supralapsarianism and my position regarding

common grace. I have read all the material on your website in Spanish and it has been very good."

And from the "Stories from Singapore" blog, we include the following about our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. "The CERC has a committee called the Family Support Ministry (FSM). One of the ongoing projects of the FSM right now is the showing of videos on *Shepherding a Child's Heart* by Tedd Tripp, followed by discussions on the videos. The FSM also sponsors an annual family seminar. This year's seminar was held Saturday, July 27. The topic chosen was, 'Growing Together in Faith As Husbands and Wives.' There was a speech, followed by discussion groups and then a question and answer session. During all these things there were activities for the children. The evening concluded with dinner together."

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a summer singspiration entitled, "Come Before His Presence with Singing," July 28, in their auditorium. There was audience singing and special numbers, with participation by old and young. An offering was taken for the work of evangelism at First. Refreshments and fellowship were enjoyed afterwards.

The congregation of First PRC in Holland, MI was invited to an

Evangelism Workshop on July 15 and 16 at their church, entitled, "God's Calling to Witness."

Members of our churches in West Michigan were invited to a speech on Congregational Evangelism by Missionary Pastor Wilbur Bruinsma, on the topic, "Today's Evangelism," Wednesday, July 24, at the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI. In this speech Rev. Bruinsma showed the connection between planting new congregations and the work of evangelism as done by the local congregation. A question and discussion period followed the speech.

Young Adult Activities

The young adults and congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada hosted a Young Adults Retreat on the theme, "The Antithesis in History." This retreat was held at the Goldeye Center, near Nordegg, Alberta, from July 29 to August 1. The speakers were Rev. T. Miersma, pastor of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, and Rev. J. Marcus, First's pastor.

The young people and young adults of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL hosted a canoe trip at the Boundary Waters in Northern Minnesota July 29 through August 3.

The Young Calvinist group hosted a Bike Hike on Saturday, July 20, riding the Kent Trails around Grand Rapids, MI. The group met at John Ball Park on the west side of Grand Rapids at 8:30 in the morning. The bike ride would take place rain or

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

shine, so everyone was reminded to dress accordingly.

Mission Activities

Missionary Pastor Wilbur Bruinsma gave a presentation on the important work going on in the PR mission in Pittsburgh, PA on Sunday evening, August 4, at the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI. All interested were encouraged to come and hear how this important work is going and the efforts being made by Rev. Bruinsma, the Southwest PRC in Grandville, MI, the calling church, and our denomination's Domestic Mission Committee, to spread the gospel in the greater Pittsburgh area.

Early in July, while Missionary Pastor R. Smit and his family were in the United States on furlough, four young adults from our sister

church in Singapore, the CERC, were able to visit the Philippines, the churches there, and Missionary Pastor D. Kleyn and his wife. The Kleyns wrote that they enjoyed getting to know them and taking them around. "But most of all we were thankful for the fellowship they could have with various groups and churches here, especially the young people."

Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA was invited to their church on Friday, July 12 for a volleyball tournament. All ages and skills were welcomed, and fans were invited to come and support their favorite teams and enjoy some ice cream along the way. Donations were for the Young People's Society.

On Friday, July 19, the members of the Hudsonville, MI PRC met

together for dinner. The occasion that brought them together was Hudsonville's first (we hope annual) Grill Off and Tasting Bee. Dinner was served from 6-7 and consisted of tasting a variety of meats and fish prepared by Hudsonville grill masters, desserts, potatoes, salads, and rolls. The younger members also were able to enjoy their favorite menu of hot dogs and ice cream. Money raised went for the support of their Activities Committee and the boys Build Group.

The Council of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI approved a request to survey their congregation to gauge interest in starting another daughter congregation.

The Byron Center, MI PRC was invited to join their Sunday School July 28 to hear from Mr. J. VanBaren and Mr. H. VanderWaal regarding their recent trip to Myanmar. ☞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ With grateful hearts we thank our heavenly Father for the 40 years of marriage (observed on August 23) in which He has blessed our parents and grandparents,

JIM and CAROL SCHIMMEL.

We are thankful for the beautiful example of Christ and His church they have given us. Together they have raised their five children in the fear and honor of the Lord. We pray that our marriages will also reflect the beautiful example of a godly marriage. Romans 8:38, 39: "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Thank you Dad and Mom!

In Christ alone, and with all our love,

- ☼ Erin and Sarah Windemuller
Noah, Hannah, Malachi, Chloe, Simon
- ☼ Dan and Naomi Guajardo
- ☼ Jim and Stacey Schimmel
Kayli, Aubrey, Abrielle, J.D., Easton
- ☼ Matt and Beka Bolton
Mikayla
- ☼ Joe and Jennifer Schimmel
Mason, Sydney, Lucy

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ With gratitude and glory to God, we celebrated on August 10, 2013 the 40th wedding anniversary of our parents,

JOE and MARY BRUMMEL.

We are thankful for the covenant upbringing they have given us. "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name" (Psalm 103:1).

- ☼ Ryan and Marijo Van Overloop
Trevor, RYANNE, Caleb, Renae, Lauryn, Kendra
- ☼ Joel and Belinda Brummel
Noah, Brynn, Jonah, Eli, Jacob
- ☼ Ted and Shannon Brummel
Raeanna, Simon, Josie, Aleta
- ☼ Lori Brummel
- ☼ Tim and Sarah Dykstra
Jade
- ☼ Andrew and Ricci Brummel
Olive
- ☼ Katie Brummel(in glory)

Grandville, Michigan

Wedding Anniversary

■ With praise and thanksgiving to God we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

PETE and JAN POORTENGA,

as they celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on August 27, 2013. We give thanks to our heavenly Father for the many years He has given them. We pray that God will continue to guide them and keep them in His loving care in years to come. "He is the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations."

Love,
From your children and grandchildren
Lynwood, Illinois

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Southeast PRC express their Christian sympathy to the family and friends of

JAMES SWART,

who was taken to glory on July 9, 2013.

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40).

Rev. W. Langerak, President
Gerald Van Baren, Asst. Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Consistory and congregation of the Grandville PRC express their heartfelt sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Stuart Bylsma and their families in the death of her brother,

MR. JIM SWART,

and in the death of their grandson,

MR. JON TEN HAAF.

May they be comforted in the assurance of God's Word that "...all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Rev. Ken Koole, President
Tom Bodbyl, Assistant Clerk

Classis West

■ The meeting of Classis West originally scheduled for September 4 has been postponed. Classis will now convene in Loveland PRC on Wednesday, October 9, at 8:30 A.M.

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness and praise to God, we rejoiced with our parents,

RAY and JEAN EZINGA,

as they celebrated 60 years of marriage on August 27, 2013. When we contemplate the marvelous works of God in their lives and His care for us through them, gratitude fills our hearts. Surely God is good and faithful to His promise to dwell with His people, leading them and the little ones that they, by His grace, have faithfully taught according to His will. We trust that He who has begun His good work will continue as they live to His honor and glory. "Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God" (Psalm 90:1, 2).

✿ Steve and Jodi Ezinga

Matthew, Andrew

Richard and Rachel Ezinga

Natalia, Lilly

✿ Larry and Pamela Kooienga

Jack and Jennifer Kooienga

Cory, Brennan, Adam

Mark and Holly Kooienga

Jace

James and Kelly Jansma

Derrick, Dylan, Thomas

Lee and Laura Kooienga

Calvin, Jake, Amber

Chad and Paula Kamminga

Dale (in glory) and Nicole Kooienga

Dalia

✿ Robert and Tammy VanUffelen

Derek, Ashley

Michael and Stephanie Uittenbogaard

Zoe

Loveland, Colorado

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hudsonville PRC express their Christian sympathy to Elder Gary Lanning and his family in the death of Gary's sister,

MRS. MARY BARNHILL.

We pray that our Lord comforts them with His word in Isaiah 43:2: "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Rev. Garrett Eriks, President
Ralph Vander Veen, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ On August 8, 1963 the youngest son of the Edgerton, Minnesota general store owner married the youngest daughter of an Edgerton, Minnesota preacher. After 50 years, four daughters, and six grandchildren,

JON and JOANNE HUISKEN

still show all who know them that they are children of our heavenly Father, that their marriage is based on the perfect example of the union between Christ and the church, and that both individually and together, they are here on earth to serve. We, as their children and grandchildren, are so very blessed with the knowledge that God has held our very diverse family in His tender care throughout the many challenges that every covenant family experiences. We are humbled by the unconditional love and commitment to each other, to us, and mostly to Christ, that our parents have demonstrated throughout their lives together. We join our parents in praising God for His care with these words of confidence and hope, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever."

✿ Amy and Jens Praestgaard

Sofie, Erik, Matthew Praestgaard

✿ Shelley Huiskens

Emily, Jonathan Spencer

✿ Jana Huiskens

✿ Jennifer and Lynn LaPointe

Tahlia DeCory

Jenison, Michigan

OUR ONLY *Comfort* Heidelberg Catechism 450 Years

Sponsored by the
Protestant Reformed
Theological Seminary

Hosted by
Hudsonville Protestant
Reformed Church

October 17–19, 2013
ouronlycomfort.org

What is thy only comfort in life and in death?

The answer to this question has been music to the ears of Christians throughout the world for more than 400 years. That I belong to Jesus...who with His precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins..., who makes all things subservient to my salvation..., and who makes me sincerely willing and able to live unto Him. That's Lord's Day 1. A stirring introduction to the Heidelberg Catechism! But, more than that, a grand theme that is woven throughout the whole of this precious creed.

This year marks the 450th anniversary of the first publication of the Heidelberg Catechism, a creed that arose out of the Protestant Reformation in Germany during the sixteenth century. An anniversary, it is, that ought not to pass unnoticed—especially by those heirs of the Great Reformation who still today profit from Heidelberg Catechism preaching...every Sunday.

The Protestant Reformed Seminary is pleased to sponsor this special conference on the Heidelberg Catechism, commemorating its 450th "birthday."

Seminary Convocation

■ Seminary Convocation will be held in Faith PRC on September 11 at 7:30 P.M. Prof. Dykstra will be the speaker for the evening. His speech is entitled "Pray for Us." The seminarians will be introduced as well. You are welcome to join the seminary in this convocation for the new year and to fellowship with professors and students alike.

*"Reading has a significant place in the covenant of grace
as an instrument of God for the fulfilling of His promises."*

Rev. Brian Huizinga

"Encouraging the Next Generation to Read"

RFPA Annual Meeting
September 19, 2013 at 7:30pm
Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church
7146 48th Ave, Hudsonville, MI 49426

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM: "CHRISTIANIZING THE WORLD?"

A lecture by Prof. David J. Engelsma
emeritus Professor of the Theological School of The Protestant Reformed Churches

What is the kingdom-calling of the Reformed Christian? Is he to flee the world? Or, is there a positive kingdom-calling given with, and empowered by, salvation by the particular, saving grace of God in Jesus Christ?

October 4, 2013 at 7:30 p.m.

Westminster Seminary California
1725 Bear Valley Pkwy, Escondido, CA

Presented by Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Redlands CA

www.hopeprc.org