

The Standard Bearer

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Godliness for Officebearers

“...exhort...shewing thyself a pattern of good works: in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech that cannot be condemned; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.”

Titus 2:7, 8

Paul has noted frequently in his instructions to Titus that the acknowledging of the truth is to be accompanied with godliness. Faith and acknowledging of the truth “is after [accords with, is in harmony with] godliness” (1:1). He commands Titus to “speak thou the things which become sound doctrine” (2:1). This must be the case because Jesus Christ gave Himself, not only to redeem from all iniquity, but also to purify unto Himself a people zealous of good works (2:14).

Paul then shows what “things” are consistent with sound doctrine in aged men, aged women, young women, and young men. Now in our text Paul applies

this admonition specifically to Titus as an officebearer. Thus this passage identifies for all officebearers the godliness that manifests their grasp of the truth.

Another thought that frequently receives Paul’s inspired attention in this brief letter is the reality that the godly lifestyle of Christians is a necessary and very good answer to the enemies of the Christian faith. The godliness of the Christians on the island of Crete was what prevents the Word of God from being blasphemed. In fact, a righteous and godly life in this present world (2:12) adorns the doctrines of salvation and thus silences all critics of the gospel. Just a quick reading of this short letter shows this: 1:9-11; 2:5b, 8b, 10b.

Finally, by way of introduction, notice that Paul states that Titus (and all officebearers) have a God-given authority, and thus they may not allow any to despise them (2:15). Respect must be given to officebearers. Nevertheless the officebearers must conduct themselves in such a way that they show themselves to be worthy of the respect. They are worthy of honor. But also, they that rule well are worthy of double honor (1 Tim. 5:17). Our text points out the conduct of officebearers that makes them worthy of double honor.

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Paul instructs Titus to “exhort.” The word “exhort” is very interesting. This word is translated in a variety of ways: instruct, or encourage and console, or rebuke and admonish, or beg and beseech, with its precise meaning determined by the context. Its literal translation is to “call alongside,” and thus it describes the manner in which this activity of exhorting someone is to be done. The idea is that, regardless of what Titus must say, he is to realize that he stands next to the new elders and deacons in the churches on Crete. One who exhorts must stand side by side, not toe to toe, or nose to nose. The two are said to be alongside each other because the content of the exhortation applies as much to the one speaking as it does to the one spoken to.

As an officebearer speaks the things that become sound doctrine, he must himself be a pattern, an example to be imitated.

Titus must instruct them as one who shows that he also needs the instruction. He must command them to believe and obey the teachings, and he must do so as one who shows that he also must receive the commands. He must encourage them to live a life that is consistent with the pure doctrines of salvation, as one who also needs encouragement to live such a life. He must rebuke and admonish those who fail to believe and to live as they ought, as one who also needs such admonition.

The Good Shepherd was not a sheep. Nevertheless, He did become like us in all things, sin excepted. But every officebearer is also a sheep. In his exhorting he must be convinced that whatever the Lord would have him say to others, the Lord would have him hear, for it applies also to him. Whenever he exhorts his fellow-sheep, he is calling them alongside himself!

All of our exhorting must be accompanied with an exemplary attitude and conduct. Titus must be “a pattern of good works.” He must teach, but he must also show himself a worthy example. As an officebearer speaks the things that become sound doctrine, he must himself be a pattern, an example to be imitated.

His own life must be one that exemplifies the great doctrines of salvation! Officebearers must be able to say: Do as I do. Follow my example. This is what Paul did: I Corinthians 4:16; 11:1; Philippians 3:17; 4:9; II Thessalonians 3:7; II Timothy 1:13. To lead the sheep of Christ effectively, the officeholders must walk in and be zealous unto good works.

These good works are those that are beneficial and useful to others. They promote and advance the cause of God’s kingdom. The “things” that are consistent with sound doctrine (2:1) are beneficial to the cause of God and His church. When the elderly saints teach the younger saints, there is great benefit given to the cause of the church. When young men and young women learn to love, then the cause of good in the home and church is greatly benefitted. So officebear-

ers are to seek the benefit and good of the believers they are called to serve.



There is a reason for this kind of exhorting and for being a pattern or example. The reason is expressed in the words “in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, sound speech.” Not only must Titus teach them how they are to live, he must also show them why they are to live this way. Sadly, it is not uncommon in the church world today to find preachers and officebearers emphasizing how God’s people are to live, without informing them why. When the reason is missing, then something extremely important is missing, something that is crucial to God: the heart.

The “why” for a godly life is “doctrine,” or, literally, “teachings.” The pure doctrines of salvation are the only solid basis for a godly life. Paul’s letters to the Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians all begin with several chapters of solid teachings. The teachings are the truths that reveal God, His unspeakable gift, His eternal plan to save totally depraved sinners by grace alone, through faith alone, without any works of men, all to the glory of

God. These teachings are given in Romans 1-11 and in Ephesians 1-3. But after presenting these teachings, Paul did not close the letter. He continued to write, and he showed the various ways these truths are to be manifested in the lives of those who believe them. In brief, the truth of God's electing and saving love in Christ is to be evidenced in a life of rendering grateful returns of ardent love to Him who first manifested so great a love to us. Therefore believers must be instructed in all the truths of Scripture, which serve as the foundation for a godly life.

The word "uncorruptness" refers to the content of Titus' instruction. His teaching must not be corrupted with the life of false doctrine, nor mixed with the folly of Jewish fables (cf. 1:14), nor adulterated with his own personal opinions. Titus is to teach faithfully, that is, according to God's revelation in Scripture. Only then will the teaching serve as a beautiful and solid base for a godly walk by the saints in all good works.

"Gravity" and "sincerity" describe the manner in which Titus is to exhort and teach. "Gravity" is reverence. Titus' reverence for the great doctrines of salvation should be demonstrated in the manner in which he communicates them. The use of gimmicks, slang, or humor cheapens the truths. The eternal truths about God and Christ must be conveyed with dignity—in such a manner that causes believers to respect and honor them. The attitude of the officebearers toward these truths must be one of greatest reverence. Hence, Reformed worship services should be characterized by a solemnity that arises, not out of mere tradition, but out of respect for the teachings themselves, and especially for the God and Savior revealed in the teachings.

"Sincerity" speaks to the motive for the instruction and exhortation. The precious teachings of Scripture are to live within Titus' heart. The motive of a teacher cannot often be hid from godly hearers. Self-centeredness is soon observed. The desire to gain the attention and praise or respect of men is as vain and ruinous as the desire for filthy lucre. The proper motive for bringing the gospel, whether by instruction, encouragement, or admonition, is grateful love to God for Jesus, for the members of Jesus' body, for the gospel. When one loves the truth because it is his salvation, then he loves


to proclaim it, and he fervently desires others to know the same joy he knows. Then he earnestly desires God to be glorified and praised.

"Sound speech" is a speech that is in good health, able to make one whole. This can mean that the teaching itself is wholesome and fit and does not deviate from the truth. This idea has already been taught in the word "uncorruptness." So the emphasis here is that the teachings are conveyed with the spiritual health of the hearers in mind—to make them whole. The concern of the one exhorting is for the spiritual well-being and the health of the hearers. There must be not only a concern that Scripture's truths be conveyed accurately, but also that the teaching of the truth must be with an earnest concern for the faith of God's elect (cf. 1:1).



This kind of teaching and exhorting "cannot be condemned."

The Christian believers on the island of Crete lived in the midst of those "of the contrary part." These were and are enemies of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Such are always planted by the devil to discredit the gospel by discrediting and slandering Titus and any gospel preacher. The instruction that Paul gives to Titus (and to every officebearer) sets forth the way to preach and teach so that he cannot be condemned. Preach and teach in such a way that all the charges of the enemy will be seen to be obviously false. When an officebearer's teaching and life are as Paul instructed Titus, then the enemies will be put to shame and will have no evil thing to say. They might continue their assault, but God and honest observers will see that their charges are a lie.

Officebearers are to exhort and live also with an eye on the Lord. This instruction concerning how they are to perform their calling is given them from the Lord Himself. They must do their work as before His face. They are to focus on doing the will of the Father in heaven (as taught them in this passage). Then they will not hear the dreaded words, "I never knew you" (Matt. 7:21-23). Rather, they may expect to hear Him say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant." 

No Merely Formal Ties (1)

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.

With a view to the achievement of this calling, the synod shall maintain a Committee for Contact with Other Churches....

(Preamble of the Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches)

No merely formal ties shall be established, but only such relationships as will serve the actual welfare of the churches involved and the manifestations of our unity in the Reformed faith.

(Constitution, V, C, 1, a, 2/)

Christ Jesus, the king of the church, calls His saints on this earth to manifest—as far as that is possible—the unity of His church. This calling rests

Previous article in this series: November 15, 2012, p. 77.

squarely on the truth taught in the Reformed confessions that the church of God is *one*. Believers are mindful of their Lord's will expressed in His poignant prayer the night before He laid down His life for her: "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are" (v. 11)—a request the Lord uttered twice more in that brief prayer. The Lord has made it clear to the church that He intends to gather all His sheep into one fold (John 10:16), to graft all the elect Gentiles into the tree of Israel (Rom. 11:16ff.), to knit all the members into one body (Rom. 12:5, et al.), and to build one holy temple of God (Eph. 2:21). And the Lord's urgent exhortation sounds through the ages—all believers must be "endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:3).

The preamble of the Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches (CC) has it right—the Protestant Reformed Churches have a "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."

That conviction of the PRC is manifest first in the countless hours

devoted to this effort by the eight members of the CC that synod appoints to the work (three elders, three ministers, and two professors). Second, this determination is evident in the willingness of congregations to release their ministers for travel to distant lands seeking unity, to say nothing of the willingness of the elders and ministers to leave their ordinary work and families to do so. And, finally, the PRC "puts its money where its mouth is," as the expression goes. Every year the PRC's synod approves a budget with a sizable amount of money for the CC's work—\$76,000 approved for 2012, and \$117,100 for next year.

Over the years the CC has pursued scores of contacts with Reformed and Presbyterian churches within North America and abroad. This diligent work has borne fruit. Currently the PRC have sister-church relationships with two congregations, Covenant Protestant Reformed Church in Northern Ireland, and Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. A lesser relationship, i.e. corresponding, is established with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. The Lord has graciously given the PRC to experience something of the oneness of the body in fruitful relationships.

More often than not, past efforts have failed to produce official

relationships due to significant differences in doctrine that could not be worked out. Such irresolvable differences preclude an official relationship.

The relatively few official relationships currently maintained by the PRC contrasts with the much higher number established by many other Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The Canadian Reformed Churches maintain ecclesiastical fellowship (sister churches) with ten churches, and are seeking the same with another. The United Reformed Churches, within North America, have ecclesiastical contact with four churches, corresponding relationships with four more, and ecclesiastical fellowship with three others. They also have relationships with eleven different churches outside this continent. The Orthodox Presbyterian Church has ecclesiastical fellowship with fifteen churches and contact with nine others. And the Reformed Churches in the Netherlands (Liberated) have thirty sister churches and relations with eighteen more.¹

Relationships of this kind and number are impossible for the PRC, not only because of the smaller size of the denomination, but also because of the requirement of the constitution that “no merely formal ties shall be established, but only such relationships as will serve... the manifestations of our unity in the Reformed faith” (Constitution,

¹ This information was taken from the official web sites of these respective denominations, and in the case of the URC, the Minutes of the 2010 Synod in London, Ontario, available on their web site.

V, C, 1, a, 2/). This is a biblical requirement. “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” the prophet asks (Amos 3:3). First and foremost we are convicted that true unity is only in Christ, who is the truth. Church relationships must manifest that unity in the Reformed faith.

The *Standard Bearer* has on more than one occasion set forth that position that unity is only in the truth and therefore churches who seek to manifest the unity of the body may and can do so only on the ground of a common confession of the truth. We will not take the time now to repeat that here.²

Our interest now is on the other significant restraint to the quick and easy establishment of ecclesiastical relationships, namely, that any relationship must “serve the actual welfare of the churches involved.” The wisdom of this requirement is transparent. Relationships are a serious matter and ought not be formed casually. It might be tempting for a church to form relationships readily with any number of churches who express interest. A factor behind this may be a reluctance to offend other churches. A church might also perhaps be inclined to form relationships in order to demonstrate the desire to manifest the oneness of the church. The church may comfort

² This was true all through the history of the PRC. Already in 1939 Herman Hoeksema wrote a paper for a joint conference with the Christian Reformed Church in which he demonstrated the need to resolve doctrinal differences. More recent editorials include six on “Seeking the Unity of the Church” (2008) and the Reformation Issue on “The Ecumenical Spirit of the Reformation” (October 15, 2010).

herself with the thought that the sister church is an ocean away, or even on the other side of the world. Must we then be so particular about what this church preaches and how she practices her religion? What could be wrong with showing the world that we can manifest the oneness of the Christian church in this way?

The CC constitution will not allow this for the PRC—“no merely formal ties shall be established.” Rather, any relationship established must contribute spiritual benefits for both parties.

Our concern in this editorial and the next is to face the issue positively: How can a relationship between two churches or groups of churches “serve the actual welfare of the churches involved”? Discussion of this matter is pertinent to any official relationship, but we will focus primarily on the newly established sister-church relation with Covenant ERC in Singapore. This relationship between two ecclesiastical bodies a world apart geographically must not be a “merely formal tie” with no significance, no real impact for either party.

When two churches agree to form an official relationship, they take upon themselves certain obligations. Both are to be active in the relationship to the extent they are able. Obligations include, first, support for one another. This support may be financial, just as the churches of Macedonia and Greece and “Asia” (Asia Minor, present-day Turkey) took collections for the church in Jerusalem (Acts 11:29, 30; I Cor. 16:1-3; II Cor. 8:1-4; Gal. 2:10). This support must be

theological. That is to say, sister churches support each other in the theological positions that they share. (Their doctrines will be in harmony, since a sister-church relation is formed only between two churches that are so similar in beliefs that they would be in one denomination if they were closer.) In their preaching, teaching, writing, and contending, each supports the other, though the other sister may not even be conscious of every effort to support her. That is taken for granted with a sister church. Each will defend the other if one is attacked in the battle of faith.

Second, both are duty-bound to encourage the other in the work. This is done through communication (letters, emails, conferences through the Internet—Skype) as well as face-to-face meetings. The inspired wisdom of Solomon applies here (Eccl. 4:9-12). “Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up.” Sister churches pick each other up with encouragement when there is failure or discouragement in the work. Indeed, the one can ‘warm’ the other to spiritual zeal, “but how can one be warm alone?” If a church has lost its first love and zeal for the Reformed faith, the sister can be used by God to admonish and encourage the other to return to the work with renewed spiritual enthusiasm. “And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.” Since this spiritual strengthen-

ing depends entirely on God’s grace, sister churches accomplish much of this by praying for each other.

Third, sisters are called to work together when and where this is feasible. The central work of the church is preaching the gospel. A mission work in a given area may call for joint labors, or for one sister to assist by taking over the work. This has happened in many ways in the past. For example, when the possibility opened for the Contact Committee to give speeches in Portugal, it made much more sense to have Revs. Stewart and McGeown travel there from Ireland and give the speeches if they were able, and maintain the contact in Portugal. They were able, and greatly assisted the PRC in that way. Likewise, in days gone by, when a work opened in Myanmar, the PRC asked the then sister denomination ERCS to take over that work. This may well be the case again, as the sister-church relationship is reestablished with CERC, and the work develops in Myanmar. Similarly, the PRC has directed contacts in Australia to the EPC. In another important church work, namely, training men for the gospel ministry, the PRC have been privileged to assist by teaching men from other denominations. What a beautiful, valuable thing to assist each other in the work!

Finally, sister churches have the calling to hold each other to the standards of truth and righteousness. Just as congregations within a denomination exercise a certain mutual oversight over one another in the love of Christ, so with sister churches. Sisters are not to lord it over one another, as is true of two congregations


in a denomination. And yet, though it be rarely done, any congregation in the PRC has the right officially to protest a decision of another congregation in the PRC. There are also certain measures taken at the classical level to ensure that the churches remain responsible to each other. Each congregation must send two delegates to each meeting of classis. They are not allowed to skip these meetings, except under the most extraordinary circumstances. All the delegates have signed the Formula of Subscription in their respective congregations, but they also sign it at the classical level the first time they are delegated to classis. All signify that they are in agreement with the Reformed truth as expressed in the Reformed confessions. This is part of mutual oversight.

In addition, the questions of the Church Order Article 41 are asked at every meeting of classis. “[T]he president [of classis] shall, among other things, put the following questions to the delegates of each church: 1. Are consistory meetings held in your church? 2. Is church discipline exercised?” etc. That is mutual oversight. There is still more. “Church visitors shall be chosen by classis and shall visit the churches annually...” (Rules of Order for Classis West).

What a blessing it is to have this kind of brotherly care between sister congregations. Individual consistories/sessions can become lax in dealing with issues of doctrine or walk of life. They can overstep their bounds and become hierarchical. They make mistakes. The same

is true of denominations. Mutual oversight between sister churches is crucially important for keeping each other faithful in Reformed doctrine and practice.

Sister churches are obligated to support, encourage, work with, and hold each other accountable. This will ensure that the relationship is “not merely a formal tie,” but rather

one that “serves the actual welfare of the churches involved.” It remains to show how this can and ought to work in a sister-church relationship. 

LETTERS

On the Kingdom of God

Professor David Engelsma’s Reformation Day lecture November 2, 2012 on the Kingdom of God stirred the interest of some to re-read a series of editorials by him in the *SB* on the same subject. These editorials (volume 77: November 15, 2000 to September 15, 2001) were collected into a booklet by Southwest PRC. Reading these editorials either in the *SB* or in the booklet will enhance anyone’s understanding and appreciation of his valuable remarks Friday night. The first paragraph of his first editorial reads:

The kingdom of God is not as well known among us as are the covenant of God and the church of God. It does not receive as much attention in the teaching as do the covenant and the church. This is a weakness, for

the kingdom is of central importance in the revelation of Holy Scripture.

Also of interest will be the more recent editorials of Prof. Gritters in the *SB* on the Kingdom and Church, in volume 87, October 1, 2010 to January 15, 2011.

I hope the lecture and the *SB* editorials will mark the beginning of a renewed interest in the Kingdom of God.

Joel Sugg,
Redlands, CA

Note: The November 2 lecture is posted on Southwest PRC’s SermonAudio.com page. CD/DVD sets are available from Southwest’s Evangelism Committee for a nominal charge, as is also the pamphlet to which Mr. Sugg refers. (Southwest PRC, 4875 Ivanrest Ave. SW, Wyoming, MI 49418)

—ed.

TAKING HEED TO THE DOCTRINE

PROF. RON CAMMENGA

Revelation, Inspiration, and Infallibility (3)

God’s Word Written

Christianity is a revealed religion. Christians are “people of the Book.” The believer, according to the Heidelberg Catechism, the 21st A, “hold[s] for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word.” The child of God does not question, much less raise objections to or deny the accuracy of the Bible. Rather, he holds for truth—objective truth—all that God has revealed in His Word. He holds for truth

all that God has revealed in the Bible. He does not distinguish in the Bible between that which is the word of God and that which is the word of man, those portions that are divinely inspired and those passages that reflect the religious experience of the human authors, as they are called. The believer rejects this approach to Scripture. He does this on account of what the Bible is and on account of his own conviction concerning the nature of the Bible.

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

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2012, p. 8.

What is the Bible?

What is the Bible? In simplest terms, the Bible is

the Word of God. More fully, the Bible is the infallibly inspired written Word of God, which is authoritative over faith (beliefs) and life (morals).

With regard to the Bible and its inspiration, there are four possibilities.

The first possibility is that the Bible is not infallibly inspired. Then the Bible is a book like any other book, manifesting the same tendencies, weaknesses, and errors that characterize every human writing. This is the attitude of the unbeliever towards the Bible, as well as of the religious liberals. The Bible contains the opinions, judgments, and teachings of mere men. This would have been the attitude in Jesus' day of the Greeks and Romans, who considered themselves civilized and cultured. It would have been beneath their refined dignity to regard the Bible as the word of God, the word of the Christian God.

The second possibility is that the Bible is partly inspired. Some parts of Scripture are divinely inspired, although other parts are not. The Bible contains divinely inspired words of God, but it also contains the uninspired words of men. This was the view that the Sadducees of Jesus' day had of the Old Testament. It was also the view of some of the sects that arose in the early history of the church, as, for example, the Ebionites. This is the view of many professing Christians today. They hold that when the human writers of the Bible wrote on matters of doctrine, they wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. But the historical and scientific information in the Bible was not written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and is not, therefore, necessarily accurate. For this reason, it may not be accurate that God created all things in six, literal, successive, twenty-four hour days, as we read in Genesis 1 and 2. This is the view and practice that may be termed "canon reduction." Scripture is not God's word, but God's word is in Scripture, somewhere to be found in Scripture.

The third possibility is that the Bible *and* something else is divinely inspired. Not the Bible alone, but the Bible and something in addition to and alongside of the Bible are inspired in a special way by God. This may be termed "canon expansion." In Jesus' day, this was the view of Scripture of the scribes and Pharisees, who "[made] the word of God of none effect (liter-

ally, 'of no authority') through [their] tradition" (Mark 7:13). Besides the written word of God, the Torah, the Jews held to Oral Tradition, Oral Tradition that was of equal authority to the written word of God. This has historically also been the view of the Bible's inspiration on the part of the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church has always added to Scripture, as an authority alongside of Scripture, the decisions of the church councils, the decrees of the popes, and the writings of the Apocrypha. This is also a distinctive feature of the cults who add to Scripture, on a par with Scripture, the writings of the founder of the cult: in the case of the Jehovah's Witnesses, the writings of Charles Taze Russell; in the case of the Seventh Day Adventists, the writings of Mary Baker Eddy; and in the case of the followers of Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon.

Additionally, this is the view and practice of the Pentecostals. Pentecostalism views messages delivered in tongues or by means of "the gift of prophecy" as new revelations from God. Pat Robertson routinely gets the "word of knowledge" before his audiences on national television. While he is praying, God reveals to him specific people (God seems to reveal only their first name, and never their street address) living in various parts of the country, who have some ailment or have been healed of some ailment. He says something like "Jane in Detroit, Michigan is right now being healed of cancer; Bill in Abilene, Texas is right now being delivered from the bulging disk in his back." Oral Roberts once said that God had revealed to him that his life would be taken away if he did not receive a large amount of money in donations from his listeners. Benny Hinn regularly receives revelations from the Spirit while he is conducting one of his healing crusades on television, identifying someone in his audience or at home who is afflicted with a particular ailment. And then he proceeds in the power of the Spirit to heal this person of this terrible malady—some are reported to be blind and have never seen the light of day; some are lame and have never walked; some supposedly are afflicted with brain tumors. All these are examples of adding revelations to God's revelation in Scripture.

The fourth possibility is that the Bible *alone* is the divinely inspired word of God. This is the truth regarding the Bible and what the Bible is. Not only does faith

receive for truth all that God has revealed in His Word, but faith receives only the Word of God as absolute truth. Only Scripture is the inspired and infallible Word of God. The Scriptures alone and the Scriptures in their entirety are the Word of God. This is what the Bible insists upon and proclaims itself to be. This is the truth regarding the Bible and what the Bible is.

Distinguishing Between Revelation and Inspiration

At this point we ought to make a necessary and an important distinction. That is the distinction between revelation and inspiration.

These two important acts of God are involved in the production of Holy Scripture. Without either or both of them, Scripture would not be Scripture, would not be the Word of God. Scripture's being the Word of God depends on both revelation and inspiration.

Revelation is God's acts of making Himself known to men. Inspiration is God's act of moving men either to speak or to write down that which He has revealed to them.

With regard to inspiration, we ought to make a further distinction. That distinction is between inspiration to speak and inspiration to write. Inspiration to speak is God's act of moving men to speak infallibly His word. Inspiration to write is God's act of moving men to write down infallibly His word. Most of that which came to be written in Scripture was first spoken by the prophets and apostles, and then written down and preserved. But not everything that they were inspired to speak were they also inspired to write down in Holy Scripture. The inspiring Holy Spirit was selective in what He included in the canon of sacred Scripture.

It ought to be plain that the making of Scripture involved both revelation and inspiration. God revealed His truth to the prophets and apostles. Having revealed it to them, He then inspired them to speak it to His people. And then, He inspired them—not invariably, but frequently—to write down what He had revealed to them and what they had been inspired to speak. Thus, what was spoken by the prophets to one generation of Israelites could be preserved for another generation. And what was spoken by God to Israel in the Old Testament could be preserved for the instruc-

tion, comfort, warning, and edification of the church of the New Testament.

What is inspiration? Inspiration was the work of God the Holy Spirit to move certain men whom He had chosen and specially prepared to write down God's word, controlling them as they wrote so that what they wrote was God's word and His word only.

There are two classic passages in the New Testament that teach the doctrine of divine inspiration: II Timothy 3:15-17 and II Peter 1:19-21. It would be good for you to commit these two passages to memory. Of such importance are they that we ought to be able to quote them, or at least know where they are found so that we can quickly turn to them.

The first of these passages is II Timothy 3:15-17: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. 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 King James Version, in line with the Latin Vulgate, speaks of Scripture being given by "inspiration" of God. The word in the Greek means literally "God-breathed." Scripture is God-breathed. That is what Scripture is and that accounts for how Scripture came into being. Scripture is the product of the breath of God, and has been breathed forth by God. Only because this is what Scripture is, is Scripture of profit—great profit, unique profit. Because Scripture is the very word of God, it is profitable to make men wise unto salvation, God's salvation, salvation from sin, death, and hell through faith in the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Because Scripture is the word of God, it is profitable for doctrine, right doctrine, for reproof of the wayward, for their correction and instruction in righteousness. Because Scripture is the word of God, it thoroughly equips the Christian for a life of good works.

The second classic passage on biblical inspiration is II Peter 1:19-21: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts: Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any pri-

vate interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.”

In passing, it should be noted that by “prophecy” the apostle is not talking only about one part of Scripture, the prophetic portions, in distinction, let us say, from the Psalms and from the historical sections. All Scripture is prophecy in the sense that all Scripture is the Word of God. That is what prophecy was, and that is what Holy Scripture is.

But the apostle is mainly interested in the *origin* of Holy Scripture in this passage. That is how verse 20 is to be understood: “no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation,” that is, has its origin in any private interpretation. The issue is not the interpretation of Scripture now that Scripture has come into existence, a fascinating subject in its own right. Rather the apostle is dealing with the prior question, “How did Scripture come into existence?” The issue is not the exegesis of Scripture, but rather the origin of Scripture. The question is, “From whence Holy Scripture?” The apostle denies that Scripture came into existence as the private interpretation of the men who wrote down the Scriptures. Scripture is not “of,” in the sense of “out of,” or, “from,” the private interpretation of those who penned the Scriptures.

Of special significance in regard to this matter of the origin of Scripture is the apostle’s description of inspiration in verse 21. The apostle says that “holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” The Greek word translated “as they were moved” means to bear or to carry along. It is used in Acts 27:15 and 17 of the apostle Paul’s ship that was carried along and driven on by the tempestuous wind Euroclydon. That ship was completely under the power of that wind, so that that wind took the ship where it did altogether without any aid or assistance from the sailors onboard. Just so, the human writers of the Holy Scriptures are carried along and moved by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The context in II Peter 1 is also of great importance. The apostle is making a comparison: “We have also a *more sure word* of prophecy.” More sure than what? In the context, the apostle has called attention to the event of Jesus’ transfiguration on the mount, shortly

before His crucifixion: “For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.” Both the word heard by the disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration and Holy Scripture are the word of God. Scripture is just as much the word of God as the word of God on the mount. The disciples had no doubt whose word they were hearing, who was speaking to them from the heavens. They did not have to ask each other whose voice they heard. They knew, knew without any hesitation, that what they heard was the word of God. We should have the same assurance with respect to Holy Scripture. That word of God from heaven was the word concerning His Son, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased.” Just so, Scripture is God’s word concerning His Son and the great work of the Son that He does in obedience to and in order to please His heavenly Father.

But God’s word in Scripture, says the apostle, is a “more sure word of prophecy.” How and why is Scripture a surer word of prophecy? For at least two reasons and in two respects. First, Scripture is a fuller word of prophecy than the word of prophecy spoken by God out of the mount. Scripture draws out all the implications, doctrinal and practical, of the great truth that Jesus is the Son of God, the Son in whom God is well-pleased. Second, Scripture is a more sure word of prophecy because it is the in-scripturated word of God. The word of God on the mount was heard, and then it was gone, and all that the disciples could do was bear testimony to the word that they heard. In Scripture we have the very word of God, not merely men’s testimony to the word of God. And we have the word of God permanently, in written form, so that it can be preserved for future reference and be passed on to others. That makes Scripture a more sure word of prophecy, a more sure word of prophecy that we do well to take heed to, as to a light shining in a dark place—the only light shining in the dark place of this present evil world, until

the day dawns. That is the day of the second coming of Jesus Christ. Then we will need Scripture no more. But until that day dawns, we are shut up to the only light that dispels the present spiritual darkness.

What fools they are who today are deliberately putting this light out. What fools! God keep us and our children from their influence. And God be pleased to preserve among us His more sure word of prophecy. ☁

ALL AROUND US

REV. CLAY SPRONK

■ Assistant Football Coach at Nebraska: “based on the Bible, homosexuality, the lifestyle of homosexuality, is a sin.”

Below is an article by Gene Wojciechowski for espn.com demanding the University of Nebraska fire coach Ron Brown. The article is worthy of some commentary.

Ron Brown confusing faith with rights

Let’s say there is a gay running back on the Nebraska roster. And Ron Brown is his position coach.

Now what?

Think about that for a moment. And then think about Brown’s very public stance against homosexuality.

The Cornhuskers assistant coach recently testified in front of the Omaha (Neb.) City Council that gays, lesbians and transgender people shouldn’t receive anti-discrimination protection under a proposed ordinance. He is considering testifying on May 7 in front of the Lincoln City Council, which will conduct a public hearing on proposed legislation that would prohibit discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity.

None of this would matter if Brown were an ordinary citizen with an extraordinary belief in his interpretation of the Bible’s position on homosexuality. That belief led him to compare the sponsors of the Omaha ordinance to Pontius Pilate and to tell The Associated Press that “based on the Bible, homosexuality, the lifestyle of homosexuality, is a sin.”

But Brown isn’t an ordinary citizen. He is a coach at a public university and for a revered football program whose reach stretches from Omaha to Scottsbluff.

When he speaks, his words carry more power because of his association with Nebraska football....

Brown, as well as Nebraska athletic director Tom Osborne, has said that Brown’s city council testimony reflected only the assistant coach’s personal views. But those views were made by an employee of a public university that receives 42 percent of its funding from the federal government and state appropriations.

It is also a university that prides itself on inclusion, whose Office of Equity, Access and Diversity Programs features the school’s non-discrimination statement. And there in that statement, in boldface type, by the way, is this: “It is the policy of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln not to discriminate based upon age, race, ethnicity, color, national origin, gender, sex, pregnancy, disability, sexual orientation, genetic information, veteran’s status, marital status, religion or political affiliation.”

Brown clearly doesn’t support policies that provide anti-discrimination protection to gays and lesbians. And yet he represents that university as a football coach in one of the nation’s most recognized programs?...

Meanwhile, Osborne declined any further comment. Multiple interview requests were made to Brown, who is on the road recruiting. An athletic department spokesperson said Brown wasn’t likely to respond to those requests. Brown has said he speaks for himself and for those who believe the Bible has a non-negotiable stance on homosexuality. He has said that if those views result in his dismissal as a Cornhuskers coach, then so be it.

“To be fired for my faith would be a greater honor than to be fired because we didn’t win enough games,” he told the AP.

So Brown would be a willing martyr. And if he continues to confuse faith with a person’s fundamental right not to be discriminated against, then Perlman and Osborne should fire him. Because while his religious beliefs are his own—and his opinions protected under

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the First Amendment—Brown remains a representative of a university whose core values stress the “diversity of ideas and people.”

Brown has the absolute right to express his views. But at what point do those views bleed into the workplace? It’s a small thing, but Brown’s office voice message is proudly nonsecular. And Nebraska head coach Bo Pelini has said that Brown discusses religion with his players, but, according to the AP, no team member has complained.

But what does that mean exactly? That the players want Brown to continue mixing religion with football, or that they’re reluctant to say anything, in fear that it could affect their standing with a coach who controls their place on the depth chart?

And what if there were a gay player on the Nebraska roster? Or what if one of the players Brown is trying to recruit this week is gay, or has a family member or friend who is gay?

These are not unreasonable scenarios. Would you want to play for a coach who thinks God loves gays less than women or African-Americans? Would you want to play for a coach who preaches compassion and love, but is willing to turn his back on a fellow human being because of that person’s sexual orientation?

Discrimination is discrimination. It isn’t a buffet line where Brown can pick and choose who can be protected from it. It is repugnant in all forms.

Whether he realizes it or not, Brown’s supposed private stance has public—and Nebraska football—implications. His beliefs find their way back to his players and the message is this: *I’ve got your back—as long as you’re not gay.*

Mr. Wojciechowski’s editorial is a sign of the swift decline of values in the United States. In the not too distant past there were laws in this nation against sodomy. Coaches were expected to be against homosexuality, and few would probably have even blinked if a coach expelled a homosexual from his team. Society viewed this sin as so gross that it was hardly mentioned. An article was unlikely to be written about the subject, especially not by a sports writer, and if an article was written it would more likely have been to support a coach who condemned sodomy.

Times have changed. A national sports writer of no small renown calls for the firing of a coach who condemns homosexuality. Mr. Wojciechowski is not call-

ing for mere toleration of homosexuality. Homosexuality is to be viewed as normal. It is as normal, according to Mr. Wojciechowski, to be a homosexual as it is to be white or black or male or female. Discrimination against a homosexual is as “repugnant” as discrimination against a handicapped person or a woman.

Mr. Wojciechowski’s attitude toward homosexuality is representative not only of society but sadly also of many in the church. Mr. Wojciechowski does not indicate whether he is a member of a church, nor does he claim in his article to be a Christian. But he does criticize coach Brown’s “interpretation” of the Bible as condemning homosexuality. This indicates that Mr. Wojciechowski is aware that there are so-called church leaders whose “interpretation” is that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. Those who openly condemn homosexuality are confronted with a society that views sodomy as normal and with the claim (from various sources) that the Bible does not condemn homosexuality. Therefore, those who hold to the “repugnant” belief that homosexuality is wrong should keep quiet, or else. “Or else” in Coach Brown’s case means ‘we will clamor for you to be fired.’ The attitude that homosexuality is normal and that condemnation of it is “repugnant” also has and will have more implications for churches and believers who condemn homosexuality in other contexts. The intensifying cry is ‘keep quiet or else!’

Two of Mr. Wojciechowski’s wrong assumptions, which are commonly held also in the church today, need a response.

First, something must be said about the belief of Mr. Wojciechowski, which he shares with many others today, that the Bible’s teaching on homosexuality is open to interpretation (and, in their opinion, the best interpretation is that the Bible approves of homosexuality). The Bible’s teaching on homosexuality is not open to interpretation. To interpret is to explain the meaning of words when the meaning is not immediately clear. No interpretation is needed to explain that Leviticus 18:22 condemns homosexuality by calling it an “abomination.” No interpretation is needed, either, of Leviticus 20:13. So abhorrent is the sin of homosexuality in the eyes of the *Lord* that, in the Old Testament economy, it was among the sins that demanded the *death penalty*. Romans 1:26-27’s meaning is also clear without inter-

pretation. According to this passage, homosexuality is “vile,” “against nature,” “unseemly [shameful],” and a sin God gives men and women over to as a punishment or “penalty of their error which was their due.” To say these passages condemn homosexuality is not an interpretation but a mere statement of what the Bible clearly reveals.

Secondly, we comment on Mr. Wojciechowski’s belief that condemnation of homosexuality is not compassionate or loving. Again Mr. Wojciechowski would find many even in the church who agree with this position. Mr. Wojciechowski is concerned the gay players may be penalized in terms of playing time and position on the depth chart. But the issue of homosexuality is not about equal playing time on the football field. Nor is it about equal pay in the business world or other less important matters. Since it is a sin, homosexuality has to do with a most serious issue indeed, the salvation of one’s soul.

Homosexuality is not an unpardonable sin. But impenitent homosexuals will be punished with eternal death. For coach Brown to know this and say nothing

would be unloving and even callous hatred for the souls of those gripped by the sin of homosexuality. Ironically, Mr. Wojciechowski and those in the church who claim they promote the love of homosexuals by tolerating the sin are actually promoting a cruel policy of hatred. By preaching against sin, including homosexuality, the true church brings the gospel of forgiveness through Jesus Christ and lovingly calls sinners to repentance.

Condemning homosexuality is not the same as saying God loves gays less than other people. Just as condemning murder does not mean God loves murderers less than other people. God loves all His people. His love was shown in Christ’s death for all His people. By His death Christ paid for the sins of all kinds of people, homosexuals included. But that is not all God’s love accomplishes. The powerful love of God calls and brings sinners out of their sins in the way of repentance. By speaking the truth Coach Brown may be used by God to bring a homosexual player to repentance to the saving of his soul. Coach Brown is willing to lose his job for that possibility. That’s love! ☺

GO YE INTO ALL THE WORLD

REV. WILBUR BRUINSMA

God’s Covenant Established with All Nations

The mystery! From the beginning of the world it has been hid in God. God gave all kinds of evidence regarding the mystery in the Old Testament. The pieces of the puzzle were all there. But the mystery was not solved by the sons of men then. They could not assemble the facts, even though they had them all. This is true because that mystery takes a work of God through His Spirit. Today that mystery has been revealed to the church in the New Testament by the holy apostles and prophet: “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body,

and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (Eph. 3:6). That is the mystery revealed to us!

Now that we know the mystery, we can discover all the evidence of a universal church in the Old Testament too. In our last article we considered the prophecy of Noah concerning Shem and Japheth. In this article we will examine another piece of evidence given in the Old Testament: the covenant with Abraham. There is an important aspect of the covenant that is far too often overlooked. It is recorded for us in Genesis 17—no, not verse 7—but verses 4-6, “As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations. Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee. And I will make thee exceeding

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fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.” These words to Abraham reveal that when God established His covenant with Abraham, God already had in view His universal church, that is, a church that included all nations and peoples of the earth. That universal body of the church was viewed by God in Abraham!

This truth is often overlooked because of the focus that is placed on Genesis 17:7, a verse we have been made to memorize from childhood: “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” Oftentimes we harbor the mistaken notion that God’s covenant with His people is the whole of this verse. God’s covenant is His friendship established only in the line of the generations of the church. In the Old Testament the covenant is defined as God’s friendship with Abraham and his natural seed, the Jews. In the New Testament the covenant is this: God’s friendship established with believing parents in the church and their natural seed. This sounds orthodox enough! But the error in this idea is that we include in our definition of the covenant those with whom God establishes His covenant. We include more in the definition of the covenant than we should.

The covenant is simply this: the intimate union of love and fellowship God enters into with His people in Christ. It is that relationship of friendship in which God is our God and we are His people. In that covenant God inseparably binds believers unto Himself. He becomes their Father and they His children for Christ’s sake. That is the covenant. The covenant is a relationship—nothing more.

But attached to the covenant are promises. The promise to which believing parents of the church cling is that God will save their children in their generations. He promises to be a God unto them too. He promises to enter into that intimate relationship of friendship with them as well as with us as believing parents. God does not promise to be a God to every one of our children of course. God is not a friend to every child born to believing parents within the sphere of the church. To say so would deny the plain teaching of Scripture. But that God does not establish His covenant with

every child born into the church does not make God’s promise null and void. God by His grace alone saves in the generations of the church.

Though believing parents cherish this particular promise of God to them and His church, they may not overlook another promise to Abraham. “And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.... As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations” (Gen. 17:2 and 4). This promise to Abraham is that He will establish His covenant also with all the nations and peoples of the earth. God repeats this promise later. Notice Genesis 18:18: “Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him.” This particular promise of God’s covenant brings joy and hope to God’s saints on the mission field, since they cannot, oftentimes, trace their lineage to believing parents.

Just as the promise that God saves in our generations does not include every one of our children, the same is true of this particular promise to Abraham. Peter’s instruction on the day of Pentecost rings true in both instances. Acts 2:39: “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.” The promise is to the children of believing parents. The promise is also to those who are afar off. But the key phrase here is: *even as many as the Lord our God shall call*. When God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, this promise does not mean that those entire nations would be saved with Abraham. God never refers in His promises to the natural seed. His promise is always and ever to the spiritual seed of Abraham—those characterized by faith. The same is true from among the nations of this earth. Abraham would be the father of believers out of every nation of this world. And in him, therefore, all the nations of the earth would be blessed.

With each new generation God prunes from the vine of His church those who do not belong to His covenant. The natural but carnal seed born to believing parents in the church, but who, though being outward members of the church, never were chosen by God and saved in Christ; the natural seed who never were a part of God’s intimate life of love and fellowship—these are cut off

by God from the church on account of unbelief. God prunes them from the church. With each new generation God, in turn, grafts into His church new converts, who become partakers of God's love and fellowship with the saints. These are grafted in from all over the world. This church was already viewed in Abraham, therefore, as a universal body of people who would be blessed in Abraham—in Abraham! He is the father of a universal church—not just a church chosen out of Israel, but from all over the world!

Maybe it was not evident right then, or for many years afterwards, but it was true! Abraham is the father of New Testament believers from all nations (Rom. 4:16).

How is this possible? How is it possible that God saw in Abraham already a church made up of all peoples and nations of the earth? How can we say that, way back in Old Testament times, hundreds of years before Pentecost and the pouring out of the Spirit on all flesh, Abraham was the father of a church made up of Jews and Gentiles from all nations? Because of *the* seed of Abraham. This is the seed referred to in the promise repeated in Genesis 22:18: "And in *thy* seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice." Who is this seed? Paul explains in Galatians 3:16: "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ." Abraham and all the covenant line were viewed by God in the one central seed of the covenant, the one in whom all the promises of God are yea and Amen (II Cor. 1:20), Jesus Christ.

All those bound together with Christ by a true and living faith are bound together with Abraham. All believers are Abraham's seed. Galatians 3:28, 29: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." This gives us a much broader picture, then, of the covenant line. Never may the church institute in any given age or location consider itself to be the only seed of Abraham. This was the error of the Jews, of the Pharisees, and the elders of the people. They thought that they alone were the recipients of the covenant blessings because

of their natural ties to Abraham. They felt themselves superior to the Gentile nations. They forgot about the truth that God's covenant is always a covenant *of grace*. This is why John the Baptist was so vehement in his condemnation of the Pharisees: "And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9).

The point is that this account of God's establishment of His covenant with Abraham so long ago is but another piece of the mystery that is now revealed to the New Testament church. The saints in the Old Testament were given to know of this covenant, but were not given to know how this covenant with Abraham and his seed was going to include all the nations of the earth. We now know. We are given the full picture. We know that God not only saves in the line of the generations of believers in the church, but He also, with each new generation, grafts others into the line of the church. We know that we are not the only ones with whom God establishes His covenant in this world! We know that we belong to a universal church in which all the nations of the earth are blessed! Now, we need to learn from this knowledge.

We need to learn from it, first of all, that the place God has given us in His covenant, be that in the generations of believers or newly grafted in, is all of grace! Just because I can trace my lineage back into the generations of the church does not make me any better a believer than that person newly grafted in. The sentiment conveyed to the saint who has been recently grafted into the church, and who might feel at a disadvantage to those born and raised in the covenant line, is not a haughty: "Well, now you have attained!" It is, rather, God has chosen you from eternity as a member of His church. He has known you in Abraham since the time He has established His covenant. You are, in your new place in the church, just as important and necessary to the church as the one who was born and raised there!

On the other hand, just because I am a new believer in the church does not mean I may despise those who have long been in the church as stuffy and obsessed only with human traditions. We have much to learn from them too. We may never view the safety and security found in the sphere of the covenant as if that is a bad

thing that will only lead to complacency. The long and fruitful heritage of the church is a blessed gift!

In the second place, we learn that the church today, as difficult as it may be, may never ignore the mandate of Christ to preach the gospel to every creature! God fulfills His covenant with Abraham by gathering in the nations through the mission work of the church. There are still many in our world that have not yet heard the gospel. There are countless more that have

heard the gospel in their generations and need to be called back unto repentance and faith. The church has a never-ending task to proclaim the truth of God's Word in order that indeed the promise of the covenant with Abraham might be fulfilled, "in thy seed [Christ] shall all the nations of the earth be blessed!"

What a blessing to have the mystery of the church revealed to us today! We pray for the children of Abraham. ∞

GUEST ARTICLE

REV. DAVID OVERWAY

Our Psalter: 100 Years of Praise (2)

The Psalms Sung Through History

"I will praise thee, O Lord, among the people: I will sing unto thee among the nations."

Psalm 57:9

"I will sing unto the LORD as long as I live: I will sing praise to my God while I have my being."

Psalm 104:33

In our previous article, we considered that the Psalms were given to us in the Scriptures especially so that we would sing them. We also noticed that the Lord's command to us in His Word is that we sing the Psalms. Our Psalter, the 100th anniversary of which we celebrate this year, serves us well as we seek to obey the biblical calling to sing the Psalms.

Our Psalter is also part of a long and glorious history of following this calling in the church of Christ. Singing Psalms is not a Dutch peculiarity. Nor is it a practice

unique to the Reformed tradition. Although psalm-singing has an important place in the Reformed tradition, it has been practiced by the church universal throughout her history.

The Old Testament Church Sang Psalms

Singing Psalms is at least as old as Moses. Psalm 90, for example, was written by this Old Testament leader in the church and recorded in the church's inspired songbook. David sang to the Lord with Psalms and appointed Levites to learn and sing those songs of the Lord. Old Testament saints used the Psalms in worship both in the temple and later in the synagogues.

The Early New Testament Church Sang Psalms

Following this good beginning, the church of the apostles' time continued to sing the Psalms. As we noticed already, the church was instructed to do so by the apostles as recorded in Scripture in Ephesians 5:19, Colossians 3:16, and James 5:13. The apostles themselves, consistent with the instruction they gave the churches, sang Psalms—the only songs known by the church at that time. This is how

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we understand Acts 16:25, for example: “And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God....”

In the time period of the post-apostolic church, the Psalms were widely sung and were the songs by which the faithful people of God praised Him. The church fathers of this period wrote of the fact that the practice at that time was to sing the Psalms. Tertullian (c. A.D. 155-230) tells us that psalm-singing was part of worship and daily life. Eusebius (c. A.D. 260-340) wrote: “The command to sing psalms in the name of the Lord was obeyed by everyone in every place.” Augustine (A.D. 343-340) reports in his *Confessions* regarding the Psalms: “They are sung through the whole world.”

Heretics, on the other hand, used hymns at this time to promote their false teachings. Those who sought to spread the error of Gnosticism, for example, employed this tactic. Because of this, the church took official action. In A.D. 363, the Council of Laodicea took a decision prohibiting the singing of uninspired hymns in the church. This decision the church again later confirmed at the important Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451), the Council that also gave us the Creed of Chalcedon. The early church was conscious of its calling and was committed to being a psalm-singing church.

During the Middle Ages, along with generally all other aspects of its spirituality, the church also atrophied with regard to its singing. The monks sang, rather than the common people. The tunes were complex and became increasingly so as the centuries passed. The songs were usually sung in Latin, a language the common people did not understand. Interestingly, however, what the monks chanted was often the Psalms. In this time period too, then, the church, albeit through her monks, continued to sing the Psalms.

The Reformation-Era Church Sang Psalms

However, the Lord’s calling to sing the Psalms was not meant only for church clergy, but for all of God’s people. The Reformation era reinstated this understanding of psalm-singing as well as the biblical practice. The Reformers restored congregational singing and singing in one’s own native language. They also emphasized again the importance and superiority of singing the Psalms.

There were, at this time, many who were busy in writing songs for the church to sing in praise to the God who, it was rediscovered, was a God of sovereign, free grace. Many of these songs for the church, written by thank-

ful hearts newly liberated from Rome’s tyranny, were the Psalms set to music.

Both Luther and Calvin themselves wrote versifications of the Psalms. Many others did as well. Calvin worked toward a publication of a psalter that was first published in 1539, and went through various editions in the years following. In 1562, a complete edition of this “Genevan Psalter” was published that contained versifications of all 150 Psalms.

In the Preface to the Genevan Psalter, Calvin explained his commitment to psalm-singing. He wrote, “The Psalms incite us to praise God, to pray to Him, to meditate on His works to the end that we love Him, fear, honor and glorify Him. What Saint Augustine says is quite true, one cannot sing anything more worthy of God than that which we have received from Him.” Calvin believed that singing the Psalms best served the end goal of the child of God—that of glorifying His God. He explains, “Wherefore, although we look far and wide and search on every hand, we shall not find better songs nor songs better suited to that end than the Psalms of David which the Holy Spirit made and uttered through him. And for this reason, when we sing them we may be certain that God puts the words in our mouths as if He Himself sang in us to exalt His glory.”

The Post-Reformation Church Sang Psalms

These convictions of Calvin other Reformed Christians came to share as well. The commitment to psalm-singing, and in many cases singing Psalms exclusively, was reflected in the practice of Reformed churches for the next 200 years.

But psalm-singing was so widespread it was really the *Christian* practice at this time, rather than the practice in Reformed churches alone. The Scottish Presbyterians insisted strongly on exclusive psalmody. Singing the Psalms also prevailed among Congregationalists, Baptists, Puritans, and even among Anglicans and Episcopalians. In fact, the first book printed in America was a psalter, the *Bay Psalm Book*, printed in 1640. The Psalms were the songs of Protestantism until around 1800.

Around 1800, many began to include hymns in their songbooks, but still usually with the psalms given place of preference, being placed in the front of the books. Over time, however, more and more hymns crowded out the

psalms in the churches' songbooks and worship. In 1871, the United Presbyterians created a book of psalmody entitled *The Book of Psalms*, to attempt to withstand the trend toward including hymns in the songbooks of the church. This publication provided the basis for the Psalter of 1912.

In 1893, the same United Presbyterian denomination formed a committee that was to work with the other denominations with which it had ecumenical ties to produce a new psalter that would be the mutual property of the churches. Again, this was done to stand *against* the growing tide of hymns used in worship and to stand *for* the use of versifications of the God-breathed Psalms. The committee labored over the next several years to produce a psalter that was faithful to the Psalms of Scripture, po-

etic, and of high musical quality. In 1912, the work was complete and nine denominations saw the publication of a new psalter, which became known as the Psalter of 1912, or simply "The Psalter."

One of the denominations that officially adopted the Psalter of 1912 for use in its churches was the CRC, our mother church, who adopted it in 1914. The Psalter was the songbook of the CRC until the publication of the first Psalter Hymnal in 1934.

When our fathers were separated from the CRC in 1924, they continued to use the 1912 Psalter, and we have continued to do so to the present. In using the Psalter, we sing the Psalms. In singing the Psalms, we sing with the faithful church, as throughout her history she has recognized and obeyed the calling to sing the Psalms.

... to be concluded. 

GUEST CONTRIBUTION

MR. and MRS. GERALD KUIPER

2012 Seniors Retreat—Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, South Dakota

On September 18-21, 2012 the Seniors Retreat was held in the Holiday Inn and Conference Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, where Heritage PRC then held their Sunday worship services. 108 seniors from age 51 to 87 were kept busy from morning until night, enjoying the spiritual instruction as well as the fellowship and fun of new and renewed acquaintances.

Following registration on Tuesday morning we toured the beautiful city of Sioux Falls. One of our stops on the tour was at the church building that the Heritage congregation hoped to purchase as a permanent home for their church. After we returned from the tour, Rev. Allen Brummel, pastor of Heritage PRC,

introduced us to the Heritage congregation, recounting for us its history of organization and showing slides of the members and families of the church.

After dinner Rev. Kenneth Koole, pastor of Grandville PRC, spoke to us on the theme, "A Goodly Heritage: Our Heritage of Faith." Rev. Koole reminded us that through the centuries we have received the legacy of the Reformation that has formed our identity and character and distinguished us from other Reformed and Presbyterian churches. He began by reminding us that we must, as did the Reformers, start with the supreme authority and infallibility of the Scriptures. Second, Rev. Koole pointed out the importance of our heritage of the doctrine of grace, that salvation is all of God and none of self. Third, he spoke of the cluster of doctrines restored by the Reformers that have to do with the nature of the church and membership in it, namely Scripture-based Ecclesiology. He pointed

Mr. and Mrs. Kuiper are members of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan.

us to the great blessing we have of belonging to a federation of churches of like mind, and especially for the esteem we have in our churches for decisions of our Classes and Synods, making us one in doctrine and confession. His last two points spoke to our legacy of Psalmody and the emphasis on living the antithesis in our Christian life. Thanks be to God for that heritage! Following the speech we were given an opportunity to meet in groups to discuss it.


Wednesday morning Rev. Audred Spriensma, pastor of Byron Center PRC, spoke to us on “A Goodly Heritage: Our Heritage of Family and Friends.” He began by reading Psalm 61, which teaches that we receive our heritage from the Lord, and Psalm 127, which tells us that our heritage from God is the gift of marriage and children and family. In addition, and perhaps more importantly as we get older, our heritage also consists of our grandchildren and our communion with all the members of our church family. He showed from Scripture how God, by sovereign election, largely in the line of continued generations, and through His providence and grace, has formed our churches. Rev. Spriensma then brought in the joy of raising our children and the special joy of being a grandparent, with emphasis on how we can as parents and grandparents pass on this legacy by words, love, and example to those who follow us. He pointed out that we often neglect not only our families, but also the precious heritage of our church families.

After dinner on Wednesday evening we were treated to a World War II slide presentation by Glenn Kooima, of Calvary PRC in Hull. This program was made in memory of his uncle, Lawrence Kooima, a member of Rock Valley PRC, who died in 1943 during a B-17 bomber raid in Germany. Glenn had many artifacts, including letters to Lawrence from his pastor and letters about him from his fellow officers that testified of his good witness and walk of life. It was good to be reminded in such a personal way of our goodly heritage. God in His providence has placed us in a land of freedom. As Christians we must show ourselves to be His children in all circumstances of life.

On Thursday morning Professor Russell Dykstra, from our Protestant Reformed Seminary, gave the third speech, “A Goodly Heritage: Our Heritage and the Fu-

ture.” He began by talking about the future—the end times and the signs that precede Christ’s coming—and about the end times of our lives when we face troubles and sorrows. He beautifully pointed out that in times of trouble, with God’s covenant of grace, we are *never alone*, and that because of God’s sovereignty we are *never defeated*. Therefore we have the assurance that God is good! He loves His church. We are guided by God’s counsel, and His grace is sufficient. Knowing this we are not pessimistic, fearful, or doubting! Christ is victorious, and we trust in Him. In His strength we must contend for the faith, standing against the lie and being faithful witnesses to all those in our family, our church, and those about us, by teaching and living our heritage.

After we discussed the speeches of Rev. Spriensma and Prof. Dykstra, an opportunity was given for many of us to take a bus tour to see the churches and schools in nearby Hull and Doon, Iowa. We took brief tours of Trinity Christian High School in Hull and the new Calvary PRC sanctuary, also in Hull. What a reminder of God’s covenant faithfulness in providing facilities and church families here. Many of us did not realize that there are five churches in this area within about 50 miles of each other. We did not get to Edgerton, Minnesota because of time constraints and therefore missed seeing the Free Christian School, the oldest PR school in this area.

After an evening meeting of fellowship and games we met for our last breakfast together on Friday morning and watched slides taken during the Retreat. As we mingled once more to say our Mizpahs and wish one another well before we returned to our homes, we experienced a feeling of immense satisfaction—that we as people of God with one faith, one hope, one love, and one church could meet together in God’s love. We learned from the Word, from each other, and from our experiences, that we are not alone. We have a goodly heritage. As we learn from Psalm 16:6, “The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.” We must guard that heritage through teaching, guiding, and loving those who come behind us. May God help us in that task! 

New and Noteworthy Books

Once again we feature a few brief book notes on some new titles that are worthy of your attention.

● *Envisioning Hope College: Letters written by Albertus C. Van Raalte to Philip Phelps Jr., 1857 to 1875.* Edited by Elton J. Bruins and Karen G. Schakel. Van Raalte Press & Eerdmans Publishing, 2011. 519 pp. \$49.00 (hardcover).

This new title in the “Historical Series of the Reformed Church in America” (No. 71) will be of value not only to those who have ties to Holland, MI (which Van Raalte founded) and to Hope College (of which Phelps became the first president), but also to anyone with interest in the challenges facing the Dutch Reformed immigrants to this country, also when it came to Christian education.

This fascinating collection of ninety-four Van Raalte letters to Phelps reveals not only the personal nature of this “dominant” pastor but also the personal sacrifices he made to secure the start of Hope College. The editors perform a valuable service to the reader in explaining the context of and the events involved in these letters. The book is replete with pictures and sketches of prominent people and places related to this history. A valuable addition to Dutch Reformed, West Michigan, and middle American history!

● *The Two Empires in Japan: A Record of the Church-State Conflict,* John M.L. Young. Crown & Covenant, 2011. 193 pp. \$12.00 (paper).

The above title is a significant reprint of the 1961 edition by the same name with three new forewords by men presently involved with missions in Japan. The author was personally involved in Presbyterian mission work for 25 years, being one of the founders of the Presbyterian church in Japan (some 50 churches). Here he traces the history of the great spiritual battle between the power of Christ’s gospel and the power of the kingdom of darkness represented by the pagan Japanese government and the Shinto religion.

Young divides this history into three main parts: the mission of the Roman Catholic Church (the “first effort”); the mission of the Protestant denominations (the “second effort”); and the mission of the Evangelical Societies (the “third effort”). Throughout, this is the history of agonizing struggle and intense persecution. Yet, by the power of Christ and His gospel a faithful Reformed church was established in this land.

The book is enhanced by numerous pictures of key persons and places. ∞

Heritage PRC Purchases a Church Building

Since January of 2007, the Protestant Reformed believers in Sioux Falls worshiped in rented rooms at the Holiday Inn in the City Center. With thanksgiving to God we note that, during the course of those five years, we were able to hold not only all our regular Sunday worship services but also all the special worship services in one

room or another at the Holiday Inn. We found the staff of the hotel to be eager to accommodate all our needs; the rooms and environment to be, for the most part, conducive for worship; and the rent cost to be reasonable. But we were nevertheless reminded weekly that we were renting a space in a hotel. As we walked our children through the hotel to the elevators, we passed the televisions of the bar, people coming out of the swimming pool, and others heading to the restaurant for breakfast. As we left our morning service we competed for elevators with those checking out

Rev. Brummel is pastor of the Heritage Protestant Reformed Church in Sioux Falls, South Dakota.

of the hotel and met others coming for the heavily advertised Sunday Brunch. We pray that our presence and conversations, in addition to the sign and the literature we set out, served as a witness to the higher purpose for which God brought us to the hotel. We are thankful that very few Sundays went by without a visitor in attendance.

Soon after worship services began in Sioux Falls, a Building Fund was set up and collections started in earnest toward the goal of being able to purchase a parsonage and church building, should God so bless us with the goal of organizing into a congregation. As the mission grew under God's blessings and the Building Fund increased, the Steering Committee, and later the new consistory, continued to keep abreast of real-estate developments in Sioux Falls with respect to church buildings. E-mails were sent out to dozens of churches and pastors in town expressing an interest in renting or purchasing a church building and asking them for advice or leads. In August of 2011 one of the pastors who had received the e-mail replied to Rev. Brummel, and this led eventually to the consistory making an offer on a church building in September of 2011. That offer was rejected, and Heritage was informed that the church was not willing to sell.

But in August of 2012 our realtor contacted the consistory to inform them that the church we had been looking at had now taken a decision to sell their building and were soliciting offers. Our consistory secured financing and made the same offer as a year before, which was accepted almost immediately.

From the outset there was concern about the amount of debt that we as a small congregation should take on. Synod 2012 approved our purchase of the parsonage from the denomination, so we were faced with the possibility of purchasing both the parsonage and the church building at the same time. When the consistory solicited pledges from the congregation, the members responded liberally and sacrificially, so that we were able to pay cash for the parsonage and make a down payment of over 55% on the church building. The consistory is thankful to God for His bountiful provision, so that our congregation of fifteen families now faces a loan that is manageable and approximates the amount that we raised over the past four years for our Building Fund.

The brick church building was built in 1962. In addition to the sanctuary, which has a 40-foot high ceiling and seats 250 people on hardwood pews, the original building includes a nice size narthex, three offices, infant and tod-



Heritage PRC's new facilities

dlar nurseries, and three restrooms. A two-story addition came later, which includes an upstairs fellowship hall, 13 small classrooms, a kitchen, lower level restrooms, and an all-purpose room in the lower level, bringing the complete square footage of the building to 14,100. And, because the congregation from whom we purchased the building had disbanded, we were able to purchase not only the building but all of its contents. This enabled us to move into the building with minimal additional expenses. The church building has been well maintained, needing only a thorough cleaning before it was ready for our congregation to begin worship services in it on Sunday, October 28, 2012.

We stand humbled before God in His gracious provision for our needs. We look back and marvel at His providence in ordering all things to make this building come available for us. We are thankful for the peace and unity in the truth that God has given our congregation, and we pray that He will preserve that truth among us so that we will be able to use this building for faithful ministry and God-glorifying worship until Christ returns.

We invite you to visit us here in Sioux Falls and worship with us in the new building that God has provided. Join us in thanksgiving as we marvel in the wonder of God's grace, for we do not deserve the blessings He has provided. For Christ's sake God blesses His people, giving them to know forgiveness of their sins through the blood of the cross. Our prayer is that we may dedicate this building to the service of God and be given the grace to go forward in faith until He takes us to the true, Heavenly Tabernacle—the building not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. May all our glorying be in the Lord! We look forward to a dedication service on November 30th at 7:30 P.M. and an open house that same evening as well as on Saturday, December 1, Lord willing. 🌀

Evangelism Activities

With thanks to God, we can testify that the PRC is known for Reformation Day lectures. This year, as in the past, many of our churches again sponsored lectures around the end of October. Thankfully, most of those lectures, if not all, will have been recorded and will be available on-line, on CDs, or in print.

Lectures started this October on the 19th, when the members of Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL sponsored a Reformation Day lecture at their church. Rev. S. Key, pastor of the Loveland, CO PRC, was this year's featured speaker. Rev. Key spoke on the subject, "Amazing Grace: The Life of John Newton."

That same evening, in Northern Ireland, Rev. A. Stewart, pastor of our sister church there, the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI, spoke on the subject, "Martin and Katie: The Reformation of Marriage." This lecture told the story of the greatest romance of the Reformation: the escaped nun, Katie von Bora, who married the former monk, Martin Luther, provoking the anger of many in Europe, including Henry VIII of England and the pope in Rome. Rev. Stewart promised to teach about their courtship, wedding, and family life, with its joys and struggles, and its significance for the Reformation, pastoral home life, and the Christian family. Slides of the key people and places in Germany were also shown.

The Evangelism Committee of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA sponsored a lecture given by Prof. B. Gritters on October 26 at their church. Prof. Gritters spoke on the subject,

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

"The Prince of Darkness Grim: The Reformed Teaching About Satan."

Everyone from the Lynden, WA PRC was invited to a Reformation Day lecture on October 26 in their sanctuary. Rev. J. Marcus, pastor of the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada, spoke on the topic, "Scripture in the Hands of the People," from I Timothy 3:16.

The members of our PR churches in Iowa were invited to an area-wide lecture on October 26 at the Hull, IA PRC. Rev. D. Kuiper, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, spoke on "Guided into All Truth: The Formation of the Canon of Holy Scripture." Some of the interesting questions that Rev. Kuiper promised to answer were: What do we mean by "Canon"? Which books are truly part of the Holy Scriptures? How can we be sure? By what process were the various inspired writings collected into the canon of Scripture? Was this an infallible process? Why can we be sure that no more inspired writings will be found anymore and have to be added to the Scriptures?

The Evangelism Committee of the Byron Center, MI PRC asked members of their congregation to invite their neighbors and friends to the evening worship service on Sunday, October 21. Byron's pastor, Rev. A. Spriensma, was asked to preach a sermon on the believer's obligation to the civil government. Byron Center believed that this was a timely topic, which could generate some interest in the community. Rev. Spriensma preached from the Word of God found in Romans 13:1-7, under the theme, "Heavenly Citizens in Earthly Kingdoms."

Congregation Activities

With thanksgiving to God, the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD announced plans to close on a church building at

3800 E. 15th St. on Monday, October 22 and take immediate possession. Heritage's final worship service held at the Holiday Inn was October 21, and their first worship service in their new location was October 28. Heritage is looking forward to holding a dedication service and open house during the first week of December, the Lord willing. Pictures of their new building are posted on their website at www.reformedsiouxfalls.org.

A new church building also means many new opportunities to serve Christ and His church. Heritage was looking for volunteers to serve on: Audio, Nursery, Kitchen, Library, and Building and Grounds. Just a reminder to all of us of the many different talents used in the visible body of Christ.

All the ladies of our churches in Iowa and Minnesota were invited to attend their annual Fall Ladies League Meeting, held this year at Calvary PRC in Hull, IA, November 1. Rev. C. Griess, Calvary's pastor, spoke on the topic, "What is Mormonism?"

Everyone in the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI was invited to their annual Fall Harvest Supper on October 31 at the greenhouses of one of their members. Activities, including hayrides, pumpkin painting, and a slide, began around 5:30 P.M. with dinner following.

On Saturday, October 27, the men of Providence PRC, meeting at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, met at their church property in Jamestown, for an ambitious day of work. The men were needed to help with taking down a cow shed on their property, cutting down some trees, and clearing some fields around their parsonage.

Sister Church Activities

The Council of the Grace PRC in

Standard Bearer

1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

PERIODICAL
POSTAGE
PAID
AT JENISON,
MICHIGAN

Standale, MI granted the recent request of our Contact Committee to send their pastor, Rev. R. Van Overloop, to labor for three Sundays in our sister church in Singapore, the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church. Rev. Van Overloop left on October 18 and returned on November 5. In addition to supplying the pulpit of CERC, Rev. Van Overloop was also scheduled to speak, on October 24, on the theme "The Exhortation


to be Single," and again on October 31 on "The Honourable Position of the Single Member." The general theme of these two speeches was "The Single Member of the Church—Their Honour and Holiness."

Minister Activities

Rev. W. Bruinsma, PRCA missionary in Pittsburgh, PA, declined the call

extended to him to serve as pastor of Hope PRC in Walker, MI.

Rev. J. Marcus, pastor of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada, declined the call he received to serve as pastor of the Randolph, WI PRC.

Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, declined the call he received from the Faith congregation in Jenison, MI to serve as their next pastor. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Consistory and congregation of Crete PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mrs. Joan Van Baren, Mr. and Mrs. Keith VanDrunen and family, and Mr. and Mrs. Dale VanBaren and family in the loss of their husband, father, and grandfather,

MR. GIL VAN BAREN.

May they be comforted by the Word of God in John 11:25, 26: "Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President
Mr. Bert Worries Jr., Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Consistory and the congregation of Crete PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Mr. Raymond Bruinsma, Mr. and Mrs. Jerrold Bruinsma, and Mr. and Mrs. Melvin De Boer following the death of their wife, mother, and sister-in-law,

MRS. TENA BRUINSMA.

May they find comfort in God's Word in Ephesians 2:8-10: "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

Rev. Nathan Langerak, President
Mr. Bert Worries Jr., Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council of Southeast PRC expresses Christian sympathy to Duke and Jan Vandenberg and their family in the death of Duke's sister,

SHARON VANDERHEIDE;

to Don and Gail Kuiper and their family in the death of Don's father,

CLARE KUIPER;

and to Bernie and Henrietta Kamminga and family in the death of Henrietta's sister,

AUDREY DEN BESTEN.

We say with Job, "For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth...yet in my flesh I shall see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

William Langerak, President
Edward Ophoff, Asst clerk

Classis East

■ Classis East will meet in regular session on Wednesday, January 9, 2013, at the First Protestant Reformed Church, Grand Rapids, Michigan. Material for this session must be in the hands of the stated clerk by December 12, 2012.

Jon J. Huisken
Stated Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour
December 2012

Date	Topic	Text
December 2	"Walk As Children of Light"	Ephesians 5:8
December 9	"God's Command to Husbands and Wives"	Ephesians 5:33
December 16	"Every Creature Received with Thanks?"	1 Timothy 4:4, 5
December 23	"No Room for Mary's Firstborn"	Luke 2:7
December 30	"Alpha and Omega"	Revelation 1:8