

The Standard Bearer

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Yearning for the Bridegroom

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him, but I found him not.

Song of Solomon 3:1

The bride in our text yearns for the presence of her bridegroom. So, too, the believer has a holy desire for fellowship with Jesus Christ, the bridegroom of the church. Frequently, however, we are lulled into spiritual slumber by the cares and concerns of the world, so that we do not seek Him as we ought. The result is that we do not experience the fellowship with God that we would like, and God seems far from us. But, by God's grace, we seek Jehovah's presence once more and find Him.

Solomon speaks of this yearning for Christ through the picture of the bride seeking after the bridegroom. Indeed, the entire book called the Song of Songs presents a picture of the beautiful and mysterious relationship of Christ and the church.

In the text that we consider, the bridegroom had left his bride while she slept. First she seeks him on her bed; but, he is gone. Arousing herself from her slumber, she goes into the streets of the city to seek him. Finally

she finds him and will not let him go. So it is with the church. She yearns for the presence of Jesus Christ. And when by God's grace she finds Him, she holds Him and will not let Him go.



Though the bride truly delighted in her bridegroom and sought him, sadly she does not find him immediately. "By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not."

Not that she cared nothing for her bridegroom. In fact, she delighted greatly in his presence. It is not without reason that the bride calls her bridegroom "him whom my soul loveth." Having that love, she seeks after him; he is the center of her life, the love of her soul. So it is with the church. She delights in Christ's presence through the Holy Spirit. Delighting in Him, the church gathers to worship, Lord's Day by Lord's Day, with true love in her heart for the bridegroom.

But God might seem far off. The psalmist often expresses that sentiment: "Hide not thy face far from me; put not thy servant away in anger: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation" (Ps. 27:9).

The problem with the bride, however, is that she had

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not given herself diligently to hold onto the bridegroom while he was with her. The bridegroom slipped away while she slumbered.

That's true of the church as well. The spiritual slumber of sin affects our fellowship with God. David experienced that when he had sin that he did not confess: "When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer" (Ps. 32:3-4). Isaiah expresses the same idea, that sin separates: "But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Is. 59:2). As long as we live, sin will keep us from enjoying the fullness of fellowship with God that we desire. Part of that sin is our lack of diligence in seeking after Him.

Like the bride of Solomon, we fall into spiritual slumber. Perhaps we do not prepare ourselves to worship God. Or we might not read and meditate upon God's Word and pray to God during the week. That spiritual slumber may also include a seeking after the things of this earth rather than the things above.

And yet, all is not lost.

Although the bride had slumbered and slept, and the bridegroom now seems far away, she must nevertheless know that the bridegroom has not left her permanently. After all, it was the bridegroom who had first drawn her to himself (cf. Song 1:4). That is how she came to love him.

Although we do not embrace Jesus Christ with the zeal we ought to have, He will not withdraw Himself completely from us. He initially drew us to Himself. He loved us with such a great love that He died for us. We love and delight in Him exactly because He first loved us (I John 4:19). And nothing shall separate us from His love (cf. Rom. 8:39). Surely, then, His absence will not continue indefinitely.

But Christ would have us seek after Him. It is true that this seeking is ultimately His own work in us. But still the Holy Spirit tells us, "Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double minded" (James 4:8). The more precious He is to us, the more we will seek after Him.

Do we seek Him?



When the bride did not find her bridegroom in the bed, she did not give up. She might have decided to wait until he came back. She might have said, "What's the use? I'll just have to wait for him to return when he wants." Or she might have thrown up her hands in despair, saying, "I don't deserve his presence anyway." But, rather than resigning herself to being apart from the bridegroom, the bride rises up from her bed immediately, facing the cold and dangerous night, to search diligently for him in the city.

When we as children of God do not sense the presence of Christ in our lives, we might resign ourselves to thinking, "He will make His presence known whenever He wants; I cannot change that." Or we might consider that we don't deserve His presence anyway. But a proper response is to search after Him. Do we devote ourselves to searching after God when we do not sense His presence? Surely a child of God will not be content without fellowship with Christ.

Although it may seem harsh, one reason why God afflicts His people is that His absence may lead them to yearn more for Him. God wants them to seek after Him, as the bride seeks for her bridegroom. "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near" (Is. 55:6).

The bride sought for her bridegroom. Are we seeking after Christ?

Notice that she sought for him in the city. She says, "I will rise now, and go about the city in the streets, and in the broad ways I will seek him whom my soul loveth: I sought him, but I found him not" (Song 3:2). She searched high and low in the plazas and streets of the city, that is, in the place where God's people dwell. She looked in Jerusalem, the holy city, whither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord (cf. Ps. 122:4).

That is where we ought to search for the bridegroom, Jesus Christ: in the church. Strange, then, when some feel God's presence the least, when they are at their lowest, when they most need God's grace, that it is *then* that they are tempted to stay away from the means of grace in the church.

But fellowship with Christ will be found within the fellowship of God's people in the church. "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also

may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (I John 1:3). The means by which we are brought into greater fellowship with the bridegroom, Jesus Christ, is the preaching of God's Word and the ordinances in the church. It was thus in the Old Testament too. When the people sought the LORD, they went to the place of worship, the tabernacle of the congregation (cf. Ex. 33:7).

Is it our joy and delight to seek Christ in the church, the city of God?



In her earnest and diligent seeking, the bride found her bridegroom.

Not only did she have to rouse herself from her comfortable bed; she also had to contend with the dangers of the night. In her searching, she encountered the unfriendly watchmen (cf. Song 3:3). These same watchmen were the ones who smote and wounded the bride (cf. Song 5:7). In spite of the difficulties, she kept on searching.

Finally she finds him! "It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth: I held him, and would not let him go, until I had brought him into my mother's house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me" (Song 3:4). All that mattered to her was to be with him whom her soul loved.

Notice that when she found him, she would not let him go. She desired sweet communion with Him. And,

in that connection, she wanted nothing to disturb them from their communion: "I charge you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes, and by the hinds of the field, that ye stir not up, nor awake my love, till he please" (Song 3:5).

We as the church of Jesus Christ seek after Him whom our souls love. Nothing should matter more to us than to draw near to Him. The Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it well when it asks, "What is the chief end of man?" and then answers, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." Is that our desire? Do we want to glorify our God and enjoy fellowship with Him forever?

When we diligently seek after Christ, we will certainly find Him. Not that our seeking earns Christ's presence in any way. Nevertheless, we will find Him in the way of seeking.

"And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart" (Jer. 29:13). But even our diligent seeking is the result of His grace working in our hearts. Our yearning for the bridegroom is evidence that He Himself is drawing us. And He is drawing us because we have been chosen by the Father and given to Christ: "All that the Father giveth me shall come to me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out" (John 6:37).

Our yearning will be satisfied as God crowns His gifts with grace.

Are we yearning after Christ? 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Two Books (4)

We continue our treatment of a couple of papers written by Dr. William Young on Abraham Kuyper's extensive influence on

Previous article in this series: February 15, 2012, p. 220.

Reformed thought, and in particular Kuyper's doctrine of God's covenant. These are papers that were written for theological journals some 30 years ago but have now been published in book form (*Reformed Thought*) along with other of Young's selected writings.

As stated previously Dr. Young is severely critical, not only of Kuyper's inflated view of common grace, but also, and especially, of Kuyper's covenant view and, in particular, his doctrine of presupposed regeneration.

Young charges Kuyper with de-

parting from historic Calvinism and of being guilty of introducing a neo-Calvinistic, Hyper-Covenantism into Dutch theology.

Into this camp, with these labels, Young throws Hoeksema and his covenant view—this regardless of Hoeksema’s (and our own) reiterated criticism of presupposed regeneration.

Why? Because he charges Hoeksema (along with Schilder) with teaching presumptive *election*, which to Young amounts to the same thing. “...who [while they] denied presumptive regeneration, held what amounts to a doctrine of presumptive election of the children of believers” (p. 116, Chap. 6, “Conversion”).

What exactly Young means by presumptive election is not clear. But if he means that Hoeksema taught that believers are to view all their children as elect, Young is mistaken. Such was no more Hoeksema’s covenant view than was presumptive regeneration.

But when it comes right down to it, flinging these labels left and right does not bring us to the heart of the issue. The heart of the issue (and the reason for the charge of Hyper-Covenantism) is practical, as Young himself makes plain. The very next words out of his pen after the above-quoted sentence are:

Such views [as Hoeksema’s] stand in diametric opposition to the position stated by Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) in his *Thoughts On Christian Experience* (1844): “The education of children should proceed on the principle that they are *in an*

unregenerate state [emphasis ours—kk], until evidences of piety clearly appear, in which case they should be sedulously cherished and nurtured.”

It comes down to this, how believers are to view, deal with, and address their children, their little ones. As having spiritual life, and hence as *lambs* as far as their spiritual character goes? Or as being numbered with the spiritually dead, and hence, in the language of many a Presbyterian, as *little vipers* as far as their early spiritual character goes? They are as dead to responding spiritually to spiritual instruction as children of the pagans. That, according to old Archibald A. and Dr. Young, is how they are to be viewed and accordingly educated.

That is the issue.

According to Young, it is the latter that is true Calvinism and the biblical, apostolic perspective. To oppose this notion that at the baptism font children of believers are to be viewed as little vipers devoid of the Holy Spirit, needing to be born again and converted later in life, is what puts one in the camp of Hyper-Covenantism.

As stated in the last issue, while this may be the teaching of many a historic Presbyterian and Calvinist theologian, we are not convinced it was Calvin’s perspective. But even more to the point, it certainly is not the biblical, apostolic perspective and doctrine.

While there are any number of biblical passages that make this clear (and we will supply a list later in a quote lifted from Dr. Herman Bavinck [!]), there is one passage that

stands head and shoulders above all the rest and simply will not allow, will not countenance, such a perspective.

That passage is Isaiah 40:11. “He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.”

No one can deny this is Messianic.

And no one, at least no Reformed, Calvinistic man, can deny that this text is covenantal, and covenantal as pertaining to the *New Testament age and Kingdom*. Anabaptist theologians may deny it. But a Reformed, Calvinistic man?

And how, according to the gospel promise made in this text, would and does this great Messiah *Himself* view the mothers of Israel with their offspring?

Mind you, not Calvin, not Kuyper, not Bavinck, not old Archibald A., but the Messiah Himself, that great Shepherd of His sheep.

As ewes and little *vipers*?

God forbid. But as ewes and *lambs*.

And note you well that the text has reference not simply to “sheep” in the generic sense, but specifically to those carried in the arms of this Messianic Shepherd King. What is that but reference to infants and toddlers? In fact, even in the womb labeled as lambs, yes, just like John the Baptist. And, as should be evident from this great New Testament kingdom promise, the reference is not just to an exceptional few who along with the infant John

would be put in some kind of special category as being regenerated, but rather as a comforting, encouraging kingdom-rule for the children given and received.

And neither will it do to dismiss this stated reality with the argument that the text is simply speaking in terms of election, looking at these children from the perspective of God's counsel and what they will one day *become* via conversion. The very figure, the little lamb with trusting eyes and the Messiah with a shepherd-tenderness holding this little warm body in His own bosom, militates against such a view.

The great Shepherd leading ewes and carrying what are at present really little *vipers*?

That is in keeping with Mark 10:16? "And he took them up in his arms..." and held them. What Jesus held (and holds also today) were little vipers (spiritually)?

The figure of Isaiah 40 with its remarkable and attractive beauty has been turned into something grotesque.

"Lambs" has reference to the *natures* of these offspring, their being of the same spiritual 'species' as these promise-believing mothers. To be sure, not natures of their own natural conception, but the new Spirit-baptized natures (washed and cleansed) worked in them by this coming Messiah by the very power of His covenantal grace.

Such is the promise made to God's true Israel concerning the coming kingdom.

And this is not an isolated text. Consider Psalm 71:5, 6: "For thou art my hope, O LORD God: thou

art my trust *from my youth* [!]. By thee have I been holden up *from the womb* [!]..."

According to the well-known exegetical principle of Hebrew parallelism, this string of truths hangs together. In other words, this is a confession of an aged saint concerning his hope and trust in Jehovah God by God's own grace from earliest childhood, and that arising out of God's special dealings with him already in the womb.

For one to deny that these Old Testament words are to be applied to the New Testament age, and to our covenant seed as the new Israel of the Messianic age, would have everything common with the *Anabaptists'* explanation (due to their separating the Old from the New Testament way in which God gathers His church), but surely such a denial of New Testament application would have little in common with what is truly a *Reformed, covenantal* exposition.

In the end, the real issue is not whether Hoeksema is to be labeled as Hyper-Covenantal. The real issue is whether Dr. Young and old Alexander and those of like persuasion should not be labeled "Hypo- (or Sub-) Covenantal."

Say what they will, when it comes down to the language that Young and the old Princeton men used in connection with the covenantal texts found in Scripture, their application and perspective differ precious little from that of the Calvinistic-*Baptists*. In fact, the more one reads them, the more it becomes apparent that there is less difference between themselves and their Baptist brethren,

than the slight difference they claim exists between Hoeksema's and Kuyper's view.

For all practical purposes the Presbyterian view of and treatment of their children as espoused by Young is virtually indistinguishable from that of a thoroughgoing Baptist.

Not Hoeksema as *Hyper-Covenantal*, but Young as *Hypo-Covenantal*.

And then there is this issue of Calvin and what was Calvin's view of children of believers.

This in the interest of determining what is in line with historic Calvinism (not in line with certain 'Calvinists,' but *Calvinism*).

That Calvin's view was not one of presupposed regeneration (with its attendant evil of a dormant regeneration as applied to youthful church members living in a carnal way), we can all agree on.

But was Calvin's view like that of old Alexander, historic Presbyterianism, and Dr. Young? Are our little ones to be viewed and addressed as if they are spiritually dead, with no expectation of spiritual sincerity at a young age, and having more in common with little vipers than with lambs?

Of that we find nothing in Calvin.

The best Young can produce is a quote found in Calvin's *Institutes* in reply to an accusation made by the Anabaptists that Calvin based his doctrine of baptizing all infants of believers, or at least argued for it, on the one isolated instance that John the Baptist had the Holy Spirit from his mother's womb. To

which Calvin responded, “We make no such argument.”

In the interest of a brief response to what Young’s argument is on the basis of this statement of Calvin, we will quote Young’s whole paragraph on this matter.

[Dr. A.] Kuyper [for support of his covenant view] quotes from the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (4.16.17-20), to find support in Calvin, who does teach “that some infants are saved, and that they are previously regenerated by the Lord, is beyond all doubt.” What Kuyper fails to quote is Calvin’s rejoinder to the Anabaptist evasion that the sanctification of John the Baptist in his mother’s womb “was only a single case, which does not justify the conclusion that the Lord generally acts in this manner with infants.” Calvin’s rejoinder is: “We use no such argument.” But Kuyper does use such an argument, in contending that children of the covenant are to be presumed to be regenerated because, he argues, that is the general manner of the Lord’s dealing with them. Calvin does speak of a seed of future repentance and faith implanted by the Spirit, but does not state the false proposition that this is the case with all baptized infants, nor the highly disputable thesis of Voetius that this is the case with all elect children of believers. Certainly there is no hint of the presumptive doctrine of Kuyper in any of these texts of Calvin (p. 39, Chap. 3).

First, significantly, Young is compelled to concede that Calvin did teach “that some infants are saved, and that they are previously re-

generated by the Lord, is beyond all doubt.”

Keep in mind that the words between quotation marks are Calvin’s own words of argument against the Anabaptists in order to compel *them*, by reference to Scripture’s testimony concerning the infant John, to acknowledge that even they could not deny that *some* infants were regenerated by God in the womb.

And once they were compelled to acknowledge *that*, they could not then argue that, since infants cannot actively believe, they cannot be regenerated either as infants, which would mean that infants ought not be baptized, because baptism speaks not only of God’s promises but of newness of life and rebirth (the interested reader may confer Calvin’s opening statement of the section from which the above quotes are lifted—*Institutes*, 4.16.17).

The simple fact is that John the Baptist had the Holy Spirit and His life already in the womb prior to his being old enough to understand Scripture and believe. And if God could do that in one covenant seed, are we to imagine He cannot or does not do it in others?

As Calvin declares:

But to silence this class of [Anabaptistic] objectors, God gave, in the case of John the Baptist, whom he sanctified from his mother’s womb (Luke 1:15), a proof of what he might do *in others* [emphasis ours—kk] (*Institutes*, 4.16.17).

And then comes the statement found in Young’s above quote (but now per the Beveridge translation, rather than Battle’s version):

They gain nothing by the quibble to which they [the Anabaptists] here resort—viz. that this was only once done, and therefore it does not forthwith follow that the Lord always [!] acts thus with infants.

It is in response to that statement, the Anabaptists’ argument that it does not follow from John’s regeneration as an infant “that the Lord always [!] acts thus with infants” that Calvin responds thus: “That is not the mode in which we reason.” Or, as Battles translates it, “We make no such argument.”

The Beveridge translation makes plain that Calvin is not here denying that this is the general way in which God works in the children of believers. He is denying that he ever taught that *all* the children of believers receive newness of life (“that the Lord always acts thus”), or that this was the reason why the Reformed baptized infants. Nor is this what is signified by infant baptism.

Of course Calvin would distance himself from that view. That view has too much in common with Rome’s declaration, “We baptize all of our infants. And therefore they *all* must be viewed as having the washing of regeneration.”

Calvin wanted no part of that mentality.

But neither then can it be stated that by his opposition to that perspective Calvin was opting for Young’s view, namely, “Let us rather view our children as being unregenerate and spiritually dead.”

Young’s view would take the Reformed right back to the camp of viewing little John’s renewal as an

isolated instance. And what is that but what the Anabaptists wanted to make of it and against which Calvin was arguing! They too were willing to acknowledge it might have been how the Lord worked in one or two *special* instances. But it must not be applied in any *general* way.

Exactly what Young wants to make of John's history. But not Calvin.

Calvin's view is more clearly stated in paragraph 20 of Chapter 4:16 of the *Institutes*.

In response to the Baptists' argument that infants should not be baptized because baptism is by Paul called a seal of the righteousness *by faith* (Rom. 4:11), Calvin responds:

In fine the objection is easily disposed of by the fact, that children are baptized for future repentance and faith. Though these are not yet formed in them, yet the seed of

both lies hid in them by the secret operations of the Spirit.

Make of this statement what men like Young will, there is no evidence that by "future repentance and faith" Calvin had in mind children in their later adult life. There is every reason to maintain that Calvin had in mind children as they reach teachable age. In fact, Young and those of the old Presbyterian persuasion had better hope that by "future faith" Calvin did not refer to decades later in life. If that is what Calvin had in mind, then Young and his friends will have to concede that Kuyper, with his view of presupposed regeneration, and that odious view of a child's regeneration lying dormant for decades, was in line with Calvin after all. For Calvin speaks here of the Spirit planting the seed of regeneration in infants. And he states it as a general rule. If Calvin's reference to infants being baptized with a view to *future* repentance and faith has reference to their *adulthood*,

there is validity to Kuyper's claim that dormant regeneration is in keeping with Calvin himself. It is not Kuyper, then, who was so Neo-Calvinistic in his covenant view, but it is Young and Alexander who have departed from Calvin's line.

In fact, we are persuaded they have.

Which is not to say we are convinced that Kuyper's view was entirely biblical, or in line with Calvin's either.

Who, in our estimation, in his covenantal view of the children of believers, was?

A theologian named Herman Bavinck.

And Hoeksema's view is strikingly similar.

If the one is to be charged with Hyper-Covenantism, honesty requires that the same charge must be leveled at the other.

Proof by extensive quotes from Bavinck, next time. 

A Critique of "Reformational" Views on Revelation (2)

Some of our young adults attend Neo-Calvinistic colleges (e.g., Calvin College, Dordt College, Trinity Christian College, and Redeemer University), where they are taught what is referred to as

the *Reformational* worldview. Although the term *Reformational* sounds like the term *Reformed*, what is being taught in these institutions amounts to a radical departure from the truth of the Reformed faith.

It is my intention to demonstrate this departure, while addressing just one subject area at a time. At present we are considering the difference between Reformed and Reformational views on the subject of divine revelation.

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Previous article in this series: December 1, 2011, p. 112.

To make it easier to grasp and to remember some of the main points on this subject, I will set forth one key principle at a time, placing that principle in a text box. The paragraphs that follow that box will serve to provide a further explanation of what was stated in the box. Hopefully this will serve as an aid to understanding and being able to recall some of the key points of difference.

The law of God concerning how human beings are to conduct themselves toward one another is found in its entirety in the Scriptures. God does make Himself known in the creation, but by this means He does not make known any additional laws for human conduct.

As was brought up last time, the law of God revealed to us in Scripture is complete. God tells us in detail how we must behave toward Him, and what duties we owe to our neighbor. This revelation is perfect and complete in all respects. There is nothing lacking in it whatsoever.

This is our confession as Reformed believers, who from the heart utter the words found in the seventh article of the Belgic Confession: “We believe that those Holy Scriptures fully contain the will of God.... For, since it is forbidden to add unto or take away any thing from the Word of God, it doth thereby evidently appear that the doctrine thereof is most perfect and complete in all respects.”

In the Scriptures alone we find the infallibly inspired Word of God concerning what we are called to do and not to do.

Yet, central to the Reformational worldview is the teaching that the creation makes known to us some laws for human society that are not found in Scripture. Albert Wolters, a professor at Redeemer University College in Ancaster, Ontario, has written a book entitled: *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*. In this work, he argues that we often must turn to the creation, rather than the Scriptures, to discover the will of God: “There are many things about which the Scriptures are silent, but

about which we must nevertheless seek to know the Lord’s will.”¹

He then goes on to state more specifically what laws he finds to be lacking in the Scriptures: “the universal normative principles that govern cultural and societal pursuits such as journalism, education, advertising, international relations....”²

Wanting to build an earthly, carnal kingdom, they fail to find in the Scriptures the directions on how to build one. So they argue that the creation itself must be the place where we are to find these cultural laws, which they call *norms* for human society.

It is true, of course, that God does make Himself known through the creation, preservation, and government of the universe. But what He makes known in this way are not additional laws for human conduct not found in the Scriptures. God’s law for us is found in its entirety in His inspired Word.

Some of what has been said so far was brought up last time, but let us go on to consider what it is that God makes known in creation and providence. Consider, for example, an unbeliever who is not aware of the Scriptures. What does God make known to that person by means of His works (i.e., His creation, preservation, and government)?

Through this means God makes known that there is a God, and that He has eternal power. “For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead...” (Rom. 1:20a).

Furthermore, the unbeliever knows that this eternal God is the one who is providing him with food, clothing, and all that he needs in order to live. Paul and Barnabas made a reference to this when preaching to the heathen at Lystra, who were intending to worship the two of them as though they were gods:

...Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein: Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways. Nevertheless he left not himself

¹ Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 34.

² Wolters, 35.

without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:15b-17).

God did not leave Himself without witness. Human beings without the Scriptures can see that there is a God who does good and provides for them the rain from heaven that they need to survive and to be glad.

So they know that there is a God who is providing for them, and they recognize that it is their calling to glorify and thank Him for doing this. Of this they are aware, and God's judgment comes upon them for refusing to do this: "Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful" (Rom. 1:21a).

Yet none of this amounts to an additional revelation concerning laws not found in the Scriptures. Rather, it amounts to a manifestation of God that is given to the ungodly, so that even those who have never heard the gospel might be without excuse.

That, of course, is not the only purpose of God with what He makes known in His works. God's works also serve to illustrate for us, His people, the truth made known in Scripture. But to see and understand these illustrations, one must believe the Scriptures that explain them. It is only by faith that we can understand the truth that God created all things by His Word (Heb. 11:3). Similarly, it is only by faith that we can understand any of the earthly pictures that point us to contemplate the things of the kingdom of heaven.

Yet again, what we believers see in the creation are not additional laws for human conduct. Rather, we see profitable illustrations that make known to us the same truth that is recorded for us infallibly on the pages of Holy Scripture.

Reformational teachers say that what they call "norms" are laws of God for human society that are revealed in the creation. But when they give examples of such norms, it becomes evident that what they are referring to are not unchanging laws of the eternal God, but merely human customs that change over time.

Reformational teachers say that God has two kinds

of laws that He reveals in creation. First there are the physical laws, such as the law of gravity. Secondly, there are laws concerning human society, which they call *norms*.

We are all familiar with the laws of nature, the regular order in the realm of physical things, of plants and of animals. These include the laws of gravity, motion, thermodynamics, photosynthesis, and heredity—all the "natural laws" discovered by physics, chemistry, biology, and the other "natural sciences." We are not so familiar with, or feel less sure about, God's laws for culture and society, which we call *norms*.³

The "norms" for human society that they speak of are not really laws that man learns from God by means of the creation. Rather, they are laws of man that human beings learn from human society by their experience within that human society. The following quote serves to bring this out:

Each institution has its own distinct nature and creational structure. All of us have some intuitive awareness of that nature or structure, an awareness that experience and study sharpen and deepen into practical wisdom. An experienced schoolteacher is likely to sense the normative structure of the school more clearly than does the average parent. Someone who has worked for years in a service organization is apt to know the creational contours of that area much better than does an academician or politician. Each area of societal organization develops its own widely accepted standards of propriety, and anyone who departs from them earns such labels as "unprofessional" or "unbusinesslike."⁴

Here we see that these norms are not laws of God, but the "widely accepted standards" of men. Such standards we do in fact learn from experience, and we sometimes do follow them, provided that doing so would not constitute a sin. But when doing this, we at the same time recognize that what we are abiding by are simply the human customs in our current time and location.

Laws of God and human customs are not the same. Laws of God apply to all human beings. But these

³ Wolters, 16. Emphasis his.

⁴ Wolters, 97.

“norms” are human standards that vary from culture to culture. Proper business practices in one country may differ from those in another country. Furthermore, what was considered proper fifty years ago may not be the same as what is considered proper today. The

standards of a certain people apply to those people, and are often in a state of flux. In contrast, the laws of God apply to all human beings, and remain the same year after year.

... to be continued. 

○ COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

The Dialogical Principle of Worship (2)

Praise ye the Lord. ○ give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? who can shew forth all his praise? Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. Remember me, ○ Lord, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: ○ visit me with thy salvation; That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance.

Psalm 106:1-5

Introduction

In our last article we saw that public worship, which is the covenantal assembly meeting with God, is carried out as a dialogue between God and His people. We rooted this principle theologically in the covenant of grace itself, and then in the very nature of God. We then began to prove this principle from Scripture. In this article I will expound one final Old Testament text that is helpful for understanding this principle, and then in a general way show how the principle applies to a typical Protestant Reformed order of worship. The passage is Psalm 106.

The Psalmist Teaches the Dialogical Principle of Worship

Psalm 106 and Psalm 105 are closely connected to one another. The two Psalms were written late in

Israel's history and represent a reflection back on the faithfulness of God in their history in spite of the sin of His people. The psalmist recounts the history for this purpose: to call God's people to respond to God's mighty acts for His chosen in worship and praise.

In verse 2 the psalmist looks back and calls to Israel's mind the mighty acts of God all throughout the history of the Old Testament when he says, Psalm 106:2, “Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise?” He then lists many of these mighty acts of God and the people's response to them. One of these mighty acts is the deliverance from Egypt recorded in verses 9-11: “He rebuked the Red sea also, and it was dried up: so he led them through the depths, as through the wilderness. And he saved them from the hand of him that hated them, and redeemed them from the hand of the enemy. And the waters covered their enemies: there was not one of them left.”

How did God's people respond to this deliverance? The psalmist points out that they responded dialogically in praise. Psalm 106:12: “Then believed they his words; they sang his praise.” You can read Exodus 15, where on the other side of the Red Sea they wrote a song and held a worship service with two million people singing in response to what God had done: “I will sing unto the LORD, for he hath triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea.” The psalmist is pointing out the dialogical principle in history.

However, as the psalmist continues to recount the history, things start to go downhill. And the point he is making is that they went downhill, not because God was unfaithful, but because His people forgot His

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mighty acts and stopped responding to them dialogically with praise. Verse 13 begins, “They soon forgot his works; they waited not for his counsel.” The great contrast in the chapter is in how Israel responds to God. After verse 12 the Israelites are found responding in a wrong way. Instead of responding to God’s mighty acts with belief and song (12), they responded by lusting (14), envying (15), forgetting (21), despising (24), complaining (25), provoking (29), etc. Therefore the psalmist is compelled to cry out at the end of the Psalm, “Save us, O LORD our God, and gather us from among the heathen, to [in order to, CG] *give thanks* unto thy holy name, and to triumph in *thy praise*.” In other words, “Save us, O God, in order that we might carry out the dialogical principle again!”

Do you see what the psalmist is doing in Psalm 106? He is teaching the Israelites the dialogical principle of worship with both a positive and negative example. He records some of God’s mighty acts and the people of God responding in praise to those acts. Then he records times when they responded wrongly to His mighty acts, using these instances for a lesson.

Both Psalm 105 and 106 end their history of Israel with the command, “Praise the Lord!” That is the nub of the psalmist’s teaching here. He is saying, “Look, this is the pattern of how we are to worship. We hear God recount His mighty acts and His promises as He has revealed them in His Word, and then we praise Him in response. And now that I have recorded them in this history, praise Him in response to them as recorded! We failed at so many points in history to carry out the dialogical principle when the acts were actually happening, but now they are recorded for us, and when you hear about them in the Psalms, ‘Praise the Lord!’ in response.”

It is on the basis of these mighty acts of God now recorded in Scripture that the psalmist calls the people to worship in Psalm 106:1-2: “Praise ye the LORD. O give thanks unto the LORD; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. Who can utter the mighty acts of the LORD? who can shew forth all his praise?” Praise the Lord and keep praising in response to His mighty acts, every time you hear them, because that is worship, and because you will never exhaust the praise that is due to Him for them.

We Follow the Command of the Psalmist in Our Worship

We also come to worship and hear God’s mighty acts recorded in Scripture. Often we hear of the same mighty acts that the psalmist recounts in Psalms 105 and 106, and we are called to respond in the service the same way the Israelites were: “Praise the Lord!” But we have more to respond to than the Old Testament saints did. We have all the mighty acts recorded in the New Testament as well. We hear of His mighty acts in the cross and resurrection and ascension. We hear of His mighty act in sending His Holy Spirit. We hear of mighty acts that are happening right now in our lifetimes, and mighty acts that will be yet in the future. All throughout the service these mighty acts are recounted for us. We hear them in the reading of the law. We hear them especially in the reading and preaching of Scripture. We even hear them in the greeting and benedictions.

And we must (and how can we help ourselves?) respond to them in praise. These mighty acts are mighty acts for us! They are declared on our behalf. They are declared over us in the service. We are the recipients of the promises that are grounded in those acts. We are motivated then to sing the songs and pray the prayers in the service because of the mighty acts we hear recounted to us in the assembly.

The Dialogical Principle Embodied in Liturgy

The Reformed saw this dialogical principle in the covenant and more specifically in the worship of covenant history, and they sought to capture that dialogue in their orders of worship. And truly Reformed and Presbyterian churches carry this on today. A typical Protestant Reformed order of worship is governed by this principle. God speaks, and we respond.

There are two types of elements in the Reformed worship service—those that come from God’s side, and those that come from our side. And while there are certainly other ways to order the elements (the order is not inspired by any means), what we have in a typical Protestant Reformed order is for the most part the traditional Reformed order. When, the Lord willing, we go through each element I will expound this more, but

for now let's get the overview and see how the whole service is a dialogue between God and us.

God speaks first, calling us to worship. We respond in prayer and song. God speaks in the greeting. We respond with the votum: "Our help is in the name of Jehovah who made heaven and earth."¹ God pronounces upon us His blessing in the benediction. Then we respond in song. God speaks to us in His law, and we respond in song and prayer. God speaks to us in His Word and its exposition. We respond in prayer and song. God dismisses us with His blessing. We respond in song of praise.

We Know God Dialogues with Us Because He Really Speaks in His Word

It is important to be conscious of the fact that *God* speaks to us in the service. His mighty acts are recorded in the inspired Word of God. Not only has He performed them in history, but He recounts them to us in the present when He meets with us in the covenantal assembly. It is God Himself in His Word speaking to us in the greeting and benediction, the reading of the law, and the reading and preaching of Scripture, not the minister. It is His voice that speaks to our hearts. And we respond to Him as He speaks His mighty acts and their implications to us personally. Therefore, when we respond to what we hear, we respond not to the minister, not first of all to each other, but to God Himself.

This is another reason why it is important that the Word of God be taken up in every point. Only if the greeting is God's Word; only if the benediction is a benediction of Scripture; only if the word proclaimed is an exposition of His Word, are we confident that God is truly speaking to us, and we are truly dialoguing with Him. When the Word speaks, God speaks. Then we can be confident that it is not the minister's words, nor a showman trying to manipulate us, but it is God in His word speaking to us. And therefore we respond back to Him.

¹ I am of the opinion that the votum should be spoken in unison by the congregation. Though there are other aspects of the service where the minister speaks on behalf of the people to God (for instance the congregational prayer), it is unnecessary for the minister to speak for the people in the votum. To have the congregation speak it in unison would highlight the dialogical character of the opening service, something that can easily get lost when the minister says both the greeting and the votum.

An Exciting Reality

This dialogical principle ought to make worship appealing to us. We are coming actually to hear Him and respond to Him! We ought to have the desire to come and hear God Himself speak over us His acts and the salvation He has purchased for us. The psalmist certainly had this desire. In 106:4-5 the psalmist shows that he grasps this dialogical principle not only as a principle that must be carried out, but as a loving condescension of God to him personally in the church. He expresses that it is his personal desire to be in the worship of God's name and to hear God speak to him. This dialogical principle has driven him to a personal, fervent love for the unique fellowship of corporate worship. Psalm 106:4-5: "Remember me, O LORD, with the favour that thou bearest unto thy people: O visit me with thy salvation; That I may see the good of thy chosen, that I may rejoice in the gladness of thy nation, that I may glory with thine inheritance." The psalmist desires to hear God speak to him personally in the service, "O visit me with thy salvation!" That is, "Be present in the service with Thy people and speak to us, and we will know Thy salvation." And he desires to respond with worship, "that I may rejoice," and "that I may glory." And he desires to rejoice and glory *with the assembly*. He adds, "That I may glory *with thine inheritance*."

Do you say that as you come to the service? "God, visit me! Speak to me! Tell me I am Your beloved in the greeting. Tell me of Your mighty acts of salvation in the preaching of the Word. And with Thy inheritance I will respond to Thy glory." Let's come to worship in this frame of mind, brothers and sisters in Christ. Our God calls us to dialogue in the worship service. We are coming here before His face to hear Him speak of all His mighty acts, and we are coming to offer our praise and adoration and thanks to Him for all He has done, is doing, and promises to do. If we are aware of this and think about this as we come to the house of the Lord, it will make our worship much more meaningful and beautiful. God will meet with us and we will dialogue with Him in covenant love. 

God

The word God itself actually tells us very little about God. Its root idea and etymology are disputed. Its meaning is generic. Its use is not limited to Scripture, or even as a reference to the one true God. Theologians rarely treat the word itself, but usually apply various teachings of Scripture overall to the divine being, and then often using so many Latin and philosophical terms that the fascinating, warm, and instructive use of the word God in Scripture is lost. The danger is that the triune, true, and living God to whom it alone belongs becomes distant, cold, and abstract.

The word God appears over 4,400 times in Scripture, second only to LORD as the most frequent noun. Strictly speaking, God is not a title or proper name, but an appellative or categorical term for divine being, more akin to the words man or spirit than Jesus or Jehovah. This explains why Scripture speaks of the name of God, not the name God; and why prayers are rarely addressed using only that term (although of note is that almost all exceptions such as, O God, are in books II and III of the Psalms, usually when the character of God is being denied, appealed to, or praised).

The Greek for God is *theos* (origin of the word theology) and is used both with and without the definite article 'the' (usually omitted in the KJV). The Hebrew word is *el*, often combined with titles, names, or attributes such as God Almighty (*El Shaddai*), God Most High (*El Elyon*), and most frequently, LORD God (*Jehovah El*). It is also used in common names such as Ezeki-el (*Strong is God*), El-ijah (*Jehovah is God*), Beth-el (*house of God*), and Isra-el (*Fighter of God*).

Although the word God by itself says very little, its contextual use in Scripture is rich. Generally, it denotes the absolute difference between the one, true God and everything else, particularly man and the gods that man makes. But this is not done mainly, as we might expect, by association with various incommunicable qualities of God, say by referring to the almighty (Gen. 17:1), eternal (Deut. 33:27), or everlasting God (Gen. 21:33). Rather, the featured and glorious use of the word God in Scrip-

ture is primarily relational, i.e., it reveals the uniqueness of the living God through His persons, perfections, works, and attitudes in relationship to the creation and His chosen people in the covenant of grace through Jesus Christ. Several examples make this plain.

First, it is specifically God who creates, upholds, and governs heaven and earth. He creates man living in His image (Gen. 1:26-27). Man dies and creates dumb images of god in heaven and earth (Rom. 1:25; Is. 44:18). This living God not only speaks, but sees, calls, commands, moves, makes, forms, causes, sets, divides, blesses, gives, ends, breathes, plants, puts, takes, brings, ends, and rests—all this in only the first six days with regard to man and creation.

Secondly, God is the God of someone, more so than the God of something, like heaven or earth (Gen. 24:3). He is God of hosts (Ps. 80:7). He is the God of people: Of our fathers (Acts 22:14), of families (Jer. 31:1), of holy prophets (Rev. 22:6), and of Jews and Gentiles (Rom. 3:29). He is God of specific persons: My God (John 20:28), our God (Mark 12:29), your God (Deut. 5:32), God of Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:7), God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex. 3:6), God of David (Is. 38:5), and most commonly, God of Israel (literally, God of the Fighter of God).

Thirdly, the perfections of God most commonly associated with God are those He shares with us and exercises on our behalf. He is the God of truth (Deut. 32:4), of knowledge (I Sam. 2:3), of glory (Ps. 29:3), of salvation (Ps. 68:20), of judgment (Is. 30:18), of patience (Rom. 15:5), of hope (Rom. 15:13), of peace (Rom. 15:33), of comfort (II Cor. 1:3), of love (II Cor. 13:11), and of all grace (I Pet. 5:10). Furthermore, He is this for us personally—He is God of my salvation (Ps. 18:46), my righteousness (Ps. 4:1), my life (Ps. 42:8), my strength (Ps. 43:2), my mercy (Ps. 59:10), and my praise (Ps. 109:1).

What blessedness then it is to be called the children of God (Matt. 5:9), to walk with God (Micah 6:8), and to live with God (I Cor. 7:24). He is not the God of the dead, but God of the living (Luke 20:38). And His great covenant promise is "I will be your God; you will be my people" (Jer. 30:22). This God is our God for ever and ever, who will be our guide even unto death (Ps. 48:14). 

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The Seasons of God's Sovereign Providence

Ecclesiastes 3: 1-15

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven" (Eccl. 3:1).

Having pointed us to the transitory character of life and its vanity under the sun, Solomon turns to the seeming pattern of life in the world. The text presents a series of contrasts that embrace the bearing of children and birth, death and dying, planting and rooting up, and killing and healing. The contrasts encompass the circumstances and affairs of life or "purposes under heaven," both of joy and sorrow, activity and labor, gain and loss. Yet this is not a mere description of the things under heaven, for he is speaking not simply of what comes to pass or happens in the life of the world, but of what God is doing. This is not the heathen doctrine of karma.

All of these affairs of life, both the events themselves and the joy and sorrow in them, are seasons or times set by God and in God's purpose. They are His works in the life of men. They are, on the one hand, repeated patterns in the unfolding of time under the sun, so that he can say of them, "that which hath been is now; and that which is to be hath already been" (Eccl. 3:15). Yet they are, on the other hand, "the work that God maketh from beginning to end" (Eccl. 3:11).

It is God who ordains a time to bear and give birth in human life and a time to die. It is He who ordains the season to plant not only crops, but also the works of men, and the time or season to uproot them. He sets the time to kill and to heal, to break down and build up. He is God, the everlasting sovereign Lord of all. This is the first point Solomon would have us to discern.

It is God who sends the set time of weeping and laughter, of mourning and rejoicing. This is true whether one speaks of the personal life of men, or of the times and seasons of the church, or of men and na-

tions. Our Heidelberg Catechism echoes this passage when it says that "...herbs and grass, rain and drought, fruitful and barren years, meat and drink, health and sickness, riches and poverty, yea, all things come, not by chance, but by His fatherly hand" (Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 10, q/a 27).

The sovereign, everywhere-present power of God, which is His providence, so embraces the life of man that he cannot escape it. Man would ordain when it is time to get and to lose, to rend and to sow. He would determine in his own wisdom the time of love and hate, of war and earthly peace. But it is not under his hand. The affairs of life come by God's sovereign appointment.

It is not, however, random. That there is a set time, an appointed time, means that everything comes in its season according to God's counsel and purpose. God has a purpose and a design, a work that He does, that runs "from the beginning to the end" (Eccl. 3:11). That design, too, is both from the beginning and end of the world, in the absolute sense of the word, and from the raising up, for a season, of a man and then of casting him down into death.

That counsel and purpose we know from the Word of God, as it stands in Christ from the foundations of the world. It is God's purpose to glorify Himself in Christ and His church, in the salvation and gathering of His elect. Running through the repeated patterns of life and its times and seasons, there is a straight line, the line of God's counsel. Solomon does not turn here to the contents of that counsel, as his viewpoint is that which is manifested under the sun. Rather, he speaks of its sovereign efficacy: "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever; nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it, that men should fear before him" (Eccl. 3:14).

God's counsel determines the boundaries of man's life. All things are "of him and through him and to him" (Rom. 11:36). It is unconditional, sovereign, and complete, so that nothing can be "put to it, nor any thing taken from it" (Eccl. 3:14). It leads the history of this

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world through all the seasons of His sovereign appointment to the final end and consummation. Nothing turns that purpose. No man can hinder it. Nor does any work of man add to or subtract from it. The whole life of the world and the history of creation is so under His almighty power that “whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever” (Eccl. 3:14).

Those works of God shape the life of men in such a way that God “hath made every thing beautiful in his time” (Eccl. 3:11). Man, by contrast, though he labors and toils, exerting and wearying himself in his labor and task, yet finds that the outcome is not in his hands. “What profit hath he that worketh in that wherein he laboreth?” (Eccl. 3:9). What has man really achieved? He has nothing of his own, but vanity. None of it abides. God’s works accomplish their purpose, in His set time, and they are beautiful. They are good, serve His purpose, accomplish His end, and manifest that it is so in their time. They endure. He it is who works all things for good to them that love Him, and judges the works of wicked men.

The sons of men, sons of Adam, who are creatures of the dust and fallen in sin, have their respective tasks or travails given them. Each has his set time, his place in this life. Man spends his strength in the exercise of it. Yet man is always dust, and to dust he returns. He looks for something that endures of all his labor, deceiving himself that it will endure, but it abides not. There is a reason for this. God “also hath set the world in his heart” (Eccl. 3:11). The word “world” is really the word for eternity of time. We may say here that this looks at the passing of time as a stream that flows unto that which is eternal. That such is set in the heart of man, distinguishing him also from the animals, means that he is aware of that flow of time, is aware that there is that which abides and endures but that it is not of man. He knows that there is an eternal end.

Thus man seeks also to find it out, to understand that line as it runs through the repeated pattern of life. He would know from the things that are seen under the sun “the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end” (Eccl. 3:11). But his very place within time and the transitory character of his place make it impossible that he should find it out. That he is bound in time by the hand of God in all his life, which he cannot control,

testifies that men should fear before God (Eccl. 3:14). He sees also from that which is past and now present, that repeated pattern, that the works of men have consequences, that there is judgment. He knows that there is a God who “requireth that which is past” (Eccl. 3:15).

The apostle Paul set forth the same thought in his sermon to the heathen in Derbe when the people there would worship him and Barnabas. He says of God as Creator, but also Lord of providence,

Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness (Acts 14:17).

Paul sets forth the same truth in his more extended sermon on Mars Hill (Acts 17:22-31). He says that God

hath determined the time before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: for in him we live and move and have our being... (Acts 17:27, 28).

In both these instances there is also an indictment, that man, seeing these things, did not seek after God. The same charge is brought in Romans 1:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse” (Rom. 1:18-20).

The very sovereign providence of God and man’s own life bounded by His will, and the very truth of judgment for that which is past, ought to lead men to fear before God. It should lead man to humble himself under the hand of God and to worship Him. That does not happen by nature. Rather, what it does is leave him without excuse.

Solomon points out another conclusion from this same truth, that with respect to the things of this present life, this truth of God and His works and the set times of man’s life ought to lead him also to a true appreciation of the value of his own labor and what is good in it. “I know that there is no good in them, but

for a man to rejoice, and do good in his life. And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God" (Eccl. 3:12, 13). This ought to be the value of the transitory things of a man's labor and toil. It does not abide. By contrast he says, "I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever" (Eccl. 3:14).

Yet, as Solomon has already shown, that is not the outcome in the life of sinful man. "To the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up" (Eccl. 2:26). This truth of God's sovereign providence and disposition sinful man does not want to confess (also many, in the corruption of the Christian gospel, do not want to hear it). Yet man is confronted by it. Man would sew, and it is God's time to rend. He would build up, and it is God's time to break down. He would get and keep, and it is God's time to lose and cast away. God's curse

rests upon the ground and the life of man so that all his labor is subject to vanity. This striving with the power of God, which man discerns, and to which he can neither add nor take away, belongs to the travail of man's life in his rebellion against God.

To His people who walk by faith, God gives a spiritual blessing in the midst of the trials of life, for He gives us to see and confess that the set times and seasons of God's providence come by His Fatherly hand, are for our good, and are the blessings of His care and grace. To that child of God is given the gift, not only of food and drink, but to eat and drink with thanksgiving in the fear of God. To him also is given to hold loosely to the things of this life, for he knows the end of God's way from His Word, and rather than having all his life and work be made merely subject to vanity, is made by grace fruitful unto every good work. 

ALL THY WORKS SHALL PRAISE THEE

MR. JOEL MINDERHOUD

Hibernation

When considering some of God's marvelous creatures, as we have had opportunity from time to time in this rubric, we find that our thoughts always go back to the beautiful twelfth article of the Belgic Confession, in which we make a precious confession regarding God's work of creation and providence.

We believe that the Father, by the Word, that is, by His Son, hath created of nothing the heaven, the earth, and all creatures as it seemed good unto Him, giving unto every creature its being, shape, form, and several offices to serve its Creator; that He doth also still uphold and govern them by His eternal providence and infinite power, for the service of mankind, to the end that man may serve his God (BC Art. 12a).

Winter is truly a fascinating time of the year. Because winter does not bring the fruit and fullness of spring and summer, God upholds and governs His creation in special ways. Of the many different ways in

Mr. Minderhoud is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and an elder in Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

which God especially cares for the creation during the winter months, we will focus for the purpose of this article on "hibernation." This phenomenon is particularly fascinating because of the unusual and amazing physiological changes that God brings an animal through during this time.

Hibernation

Hibernation is a state of lethargy that various mammals enter into during the winter months, the goal of which is to conserve energy while fresh food supplies are limited. Ask a child to name an animal that hibernates and likely the response will be "bear." If hibernation is thought of only in terms of a coma-like state associated with significantly reduced body temperatures, then bears technically would not qualify for "hibernator" status. Mammals such as woodchucks, chipmunks, and squirrels truly hibernate. In hibernation, body temperatures drop, breathing and heart rates lower, and body metabolism slows. For example, a squirrel's body temperature drops to within a degree or two of the outside temperature. Chipmunks have a dramatic change

in heart rate—from 200 beats per minute to 5 beats per minute. These hibernating mammals experience a coma-like state and are not easily awakened. Nevertheless, these animals, like the squirrel for example, must come out of their hibernation every few days in order to urinate and defecate (removing harmful wastes that build up in the body as fat cells are metabolized) and dig up a quick snack from a previously-made cache. This explains why you may have seen squirrels darting around your yard in the dead of winter. They do hibernate, but must break from that from time to time.

Hibernating Bears

Bears, however, differ from other mammals in hibernation. Although a bear experiences a somewhat lower heart rate, its body temperature drops only a little, and it need not awaken to eat or rid itself of wastes. This difference has caused some to suggest that bears are not “true” hibernators. They have attached instead the term “denning” to the activity of a bear. For the purpose of this article we will still refer to the bears as hibernators.

Grizzly bears, for example, hibernate for 5 to 6 months of the year. (By the time this article goes to print, many grizzlies may be coming out of hibernation. Depending on location and the harshness of winter, they exit their dens sometime between March and June). In order to hibernate, grizzlies must amass a great amount of fat during the summer months. In order to do this, they spend most of their time searching for food and eating it. Grizzlies obtain 80 to 90 percent of their food from vegetation and insects. Their diet consists mostly of berries, nuts, plant roots or bulbs, and sometimes insects or their larvae. Some grizzlies, in Alaska and the west coast of Canada, have access to salmon, which serve a large place in their diet.

Once bears have obtained sufficient winter reserves, they retreat to a den to hibernate. Although their heart rate drops to one-fifth of its normal rate, and their oxygen usage is half of its normal rate, their body temperature drops only a few degrees. Therefore, bears do not fall into a coma-like state as the chipmunk and squirrel do, in which state one could mistake the creature for dead. Their regular body temperature keeps bears in a somewhat “active” state—in which they could readily attack enemies if prematurely awakened. Because of this,

a grizzly’s metabolic rate remains fairly constant, and it continues to burn calories at the high rate of up to 8,000 per day—thus the need for a great energy reserve. We need to put that into perspective to appreciate how much fat must be stored to keep the bear nourished for 6 months of sleep. Picture a large three-pound tub of margarine. That tub of margarine contains about 7,000 calories. A large bear, in hibernation for half of a year, would need the equivalent of 180 margarine containers of fat in order to survive its hibernation. That is an amount of fat that a bear must accumulate—not from eating pure fat, but from eating fish, berries, and insects. What an enormous quantity of food must be eaten to produce that quantity of fat!

Although the grizzly’s metabolic rate changes little, other bodily functions do change. For example, the grizzly will not need to eat or drink anything during its hibernation. This is quite remarkable. With its large storehouse of fat providing sufficient energy to survive, the bear has no need to eat. But it does not and cannot store water for the winter months. How does the Lord provide the bear with the necessary water without it awakening? When fat cells are broken down to obtain the necessary calories for the bear’s needs, water molecules are formed. This newly-formed water compensates for any loss of water the bear experiences—thus preventing dehydration. In addition, the bear will not release any wastes during its hibernation. As cells are broken down during hibernation, toxins are produced that would normally be released in its urine. Here too the metabolism of the bear is remarkably different from what it is when it is not in hibernation. The toxins that are formed by the decomposition of muscle cells are recycled and converted into new muscle tissues. Consequently, there is no need to release the toxins, and the grizzly does not need to urinate during the entire length of its hibernation. In God’s wise design, this recycling of toxins serves two purposes: not only will the bear be protected from an accumulation of toxins, but the bear also will not lose muscle mass or bone density during its hibernation, thus staying strong and ready to exit the den in the spring. This recycling is truly a marvel, and it remains much of a mystery to the modern scientific community—one of many testimonies, in the creation, of how great our God is (and how weak man is who

would desperately love to replicate such a recycling process in the human body).

By these amazing biological changes, a grizzly bear will hibernate throughout the winter months in order to conserve necessary energy. God, in this way, provides for the survival of the bear while the vast food supplies are unavailable during the harsh winter months.

Providence

As we have seen with so many other creatures, so we see again the marvelous design of God. We are impressed with God's wise provision for all His creatures. Scientists estimate, based on grizzly scats, that a single grizzly in the Yukon may eat up to 200,000 soapberries in *one* day. When we consider the number of berries, moths, insects, larvae, fish, and other nutrient-rich foods that a single grizzly must consume in order to live throughout the year, we stand amazed at God's bountiful provisions. And that is just for one bear out of many, and one species out of many. Our good God, the Creator and Sustainer of all, provides for all His creatures, including us. Therein is great comfort! "These all wait upon thee: that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good" (Ps. 104:27-28).

We are reminded that God, in providing creatures their food, must so govern all things in order that the food may grow and be available. For a grizzly to eat 200,000 soapberries in a day, there must have been the right rainfall, sunshine, and warmth for those berries

to grow. For a grizzly to obtain salmon, the salmon, in God's wise plan and direction, must spawn, and therefore pass through the rivers in high numbers, in part, so that the grizzlies may feast. While this fish "migration" is necessary for the salmon's own reproductive purposes (to be able to sustain its population), the large number of spawning fish at the same time provides also abundant food for another of God's creatures. So it is throughout the creation. God wisely directs *all* things—rain, atmospheric temperature, carbon-dioxide levels, and so forth, in order that food may be prepared for all His creatures. May we rejoice in our all-wise, sovereign God!

Finally, we must be reminded that God has given to each creature the exact anatomical and physiological features needed to survive and live where He places them. For the bear to survive it must have a metabolism that changes from summer to winter in order to hibernate as it does. The difficulties of winter-life necessitate a period of hibernation. This period of hibernation and the appropriate metabolism, God gives, in His wise design, to each bear. May we learn, from this, to have great peace in our lives—in plenty and in want; in happiness and in sorrow—knowing that the great God of creation is *our* loving Father. He who provides for all creatures throughout the seasons of their lives is able and willing even more so to equip and provide for us, His covenant people. God is for us—of whom shall we be afraid? Who or what can be against us? Praise God for His wondrous works, and trust in Him. He *will* provide exactly what we need to serve Him in this life and in the next! 

SPECIAL ARTICLE

PROF. RONALD CAMMENGA

News from the Seminary

The second semester of instruction in our Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary is well underway. After the holiday break, professors and students alike are "hitting the books" once more.

The second semester was preceded by the annual interim course. By rotation it fell to the undersigned to teach the interim. The subject of the interim course was

"Contemporary Roman Catholic Theology." Together professor and class examined the distinctive doctrines and practices of the Roman Catholic Church in the light of history and Holy Scripture. We concluded that, beyond doubt, Rome has not changed. Rome holds today the same false doctrines and practices, as well as the same idolatrous worship, as at the time of the Ref-

ormation. They are mistaken who suppose that she has changed and that these changes are a justification for dialogue with Rome. The judgment of the Heidelberg Catechism in Q.A. 80 remains true, that Rome's worship "is nothing else than a denial of the one sacrifice and sufferings of Jesus Christ, and an accursed idolatry." Q.A. 80 must not be removed from the Heidelberg Catechism, as some maintain, but its witness must be upheld. The class ran from 9:00 A.M. until about noon for eight consecutive school days. The presence and contributions of a goodly number of visitors greatly enhanced the value of the class. Digital recordings of the classes were made and uploaded to the Seminary's website. If you are interested, you can access them there.

Speaking of the Seminary's website, our librarian, Mr. Charles Terpstra, will be working with Mr. Derek Van Overloop in order to revamp and improve the site. If you have not yet visited the site or examined the materials available on the site, we encourage you to do so. The web address is: www.prc.org/Seminary/seminary.html. If you have any suggestions for improvement, I'm sure that Mr. Terpstra and Mr. Van Overloop would appreciate hearing from you.

With the beginning of the second semester, the seminary welcomed back as a full-time student Mr. Vernon Ibe. The first semester Mr. Ibe spent completing the internship program that he began in July of last year in our Grace PRC, under the supervision of Rev. Ronald Van Overloop. The internship continues to be of great value in the preparation of young men for the work of the ministry. During the internship, Mr. Ibe made and preached several new sermons, taught two catechism classes, led two Bible study classes, sat in council, consistory, and deacons' meetings, went on pastoral calls, attended classis meetings, and participated in several other aspects of the calling of a minister of the Word. Mr. Ibe is now concluding his course of study at our seminary. The consistory of the Berean PRC of Manila is requesting Synod 2012 to examine Mr. Ibe. The faculty and the Theological School Committee are in the process of working out an examination schedule for Mr. Ibe that will be presented to the synod. After the examination, Mr. Ibe, his wife, Melody, and their young son, Martyn, will be returning to the Philippines. They

will be missed in the seminary, but it is our confidence that the Lord will use our brother as an ordained native



Vernon, Melody, and Martyn Ibe

Filipino, along with our missionaries, for the furtherance of the gospel in the Philippines. We believe that the years of training that the brother has undergone in our seminary will pay rich spiritual dividends for many years to come.

At present, besides Mr. Ibe, the student body of our seminary consists of three "diploma pre-licentiate" students. A diploma pre-licentiate student is a student who intends to enter the ministry in the Protestant Reformed Churches and who will eventually in his seminary career be licensed to speak a word of edification in the Protestant Reformed Churches. The three diploma pre-licentiate students are Mr. Erik Guichelaar, Mr. Joshua Engelsma, and Mr. Ryan Barnhill.

Mr. Erik Guichelaar is finishing his third year of study. Beginning July 1, 2012, Mr. Guichelaar will begin an internship under the supervision of Rev. Steven Key and the consistory of the Loveland Protestant Reformed Church in Loveland, Colorado. He and his wife, Cherith, will spend six months in Loveland, and after fulfilling the requirements of the internship, they will return to complete his last semester of study at the seminary. The Lord willing, Mr. Guichelaar will undergo his oral examination before Synod 2013, with a view to being declared a candidate for the ministry of the Word in our churches.

Mr. Joshua Engelsma is completing his second year of study in the seminary. Mr. Engelsma, his wife, Courtney, and their two small children are members

of our Hope PRC of Walker, MI. After Mr. Engelsma completed the Catechetics course in the first semester, the faculty assigned one catechism class for him to teach. He is presently teaching the Old Testament for Seniors in our Byron Center PRC. The opportunity to teach catechism is always an enjoyable experience for the seminary students—a taste of another aspect of the work of the ministry.

Mr. Ryan Barnhill is completing his first year of study in the seminary. He too completed the Catechetics course and is teaching a catechism class this semester. Mr. Barnhill teaches the Old Testament for Juniors class in our Hudsonville PRC. And although the seminary encourages the students that when they become ministers, they must be jealous to teach as many of the catechism classes as they are able—all of them, if possible—we are grateful for the opportunity afforded our students to get practical experience in the work of the gospel ministry. By the time Mr. Barnhill begins his second year of study at the seminary, his marital status will have changed. He and his fiancée, Miss Miranda Buitter, plan to marry on July 27, 2012. We pray the Lord's blessing on their marriage.

This semester the faculty have opened up a number of their classes to auditors (sitters). By way of bulletin announcements, we invited the members of the Grand Rapids area churches to attend designated classes. We are pleased that a number of people have taken up our offer, and hope that more will do so in the future.

Besides teaching in the seminary, the faculty also continue to preach regularly in the churches in the Grand Rapids area, and occasionally beyond. Prof. Dykstra and his wife, Carol, spent the weeks between semesters preaching in Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore. Besides preaching twice on four Sundays, Prof. Dykstra gave four speeches, taught several classes on the Canons, and participated in various other meetings. Prof. Gritters spent part of the time between semesters in Redlands, CA and preached several times to help out Redlands' new minister, Rev. Brian Huizinga.

Two of our students are presently licensed to speak a word of edification in the churches: Mr. Erik Guichelaar and Mr. Vernon Ibe. They, too, have had

plenty of opportunity to preach, leading services nearly every Sunday.

The faculty is gratified by the number of men who are presently in college pursuing a pre-seminary course. Seven of these men living in the Grand Rapids area take Greek Grammar with Prof. Gritters four mornings each week. And we hear of others also, outside the Grand Rapids area, who have made public their intentions to study for the ministry. This bodes well for the future and ought to be reason for gratitude to God in the churches. He is hearing our prayers! He is raising up capable and spiritually-minded young men! But our need is great. We encourage parents and grandparents, pastors and elders, Christian school teachers and concerned church members to put the call to the ministry of the gospel before young men who give evidence of possessing the gifts for the ministry. Urge them seriously to consider whether this might be the Lord's will for their life's calling. And we encourage any young man who might be considering the ministry to talk to his pastor or one of the professors. We are always willing to meet with a young man who has questions about the ministry, or who is struggling with the call to the ministry.

In closing, we once again covet the prayers of God's people. We know that petitions on behalf of the seminary are regularly a part of the congregational prayers of our ministers. We are thankful for that. We are also confident that the seminary is remembered in family devotions, Christian school devotions, prayers at church gatherings, and in the personal prayers of God's people. Pray that God may preserve our seminary. Pray that the professors remain faithful to God's Word and our Reformed standards in all their instruction. Pray that the Lord will raise up young men and put the call to the ministry in the hearts of young men. Pray that young men continue to graduate from the seminary who are prepared intellectually and spiritually for the gospel ministry. Pray for men who say with the apostle, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" (I Cor. 9:16).

For the faculty,
Prof. Ronald Cammenga,
Rector 

Conference at Hudsonville PRC

Hudsonville PRC recently hosted a conference with the theme, “The Answer in an Age of Uncertainty,” on Friday, January 27. Rev. Garrett Eriks spoke on “Knowing the Truth in an Age of Uncertainty,” and Rev. Andrew Lanning spoke on “Finding True Freedom in an Age of Uncertainty.”

The conference was encouraging on many levels. Hudsonville’s large auditorium could not fit even one more person in its packed pews. Those responsible for hosting the event estimated that around seven hundred people filled the auditorium, overflowing into the narthex. The advertising targeted young adults, and come they did! Many college students and young couples, both dating and married, came to the conference. Those who attended the event also had the opportunity to browse various book tables during the intermission and after the speeches, and to socialize over a cookie and coffee.

Hudsonville and Faith PRC’s evangelism committees spent much money on advertising for the speeches, and for good reason. The topic was an important one. The postmodern mood in our society undermines Truth found in God’s Word. The uncertainty that characterizes postmodernism is the deathblow to Truth, and it especially manifests itself in colleges and church movements today. Rev. Eriks and Rev. Lanning brought this philosophy before the standard of Scripture, and found it to be a dangerous and deceitful enemy of Truth. Our evangelism committees felt the burden to sound this sharp warning to our churches and to the community. If you live in the West Michigan area, you may have

Mr. Barnhill is a member of Hudsonville PRC’s Evangelism Committee.

seen a few billboards along the freeway advertising the conference. Area businesses were stocked with fliers and business cards, a YouTube video was produced, bulletin announcements were written up, and Facebook was used, among much more advertising.

The evangelism committee members have expressed their great joy and thankfulness for the wonderful night. God, the God of all Truth, was glorified Friday night. Let us rejoice together at the large attendance of the younger generation, and the interest shown in such a vital topic! Then let us reflect for a bit—all of it of grace. Let those words never become empty or turn into a catchphrase. All of grace! God is faithful to His people; He has given them the Truth, and He sounded that Truth Friday night. Many heard, and many were confirmed in that Truth.

If you could not make it to the church Friday night, or missed the live-streaming of the speeches, you can still access them. Hudsonville PRC has a Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/hudsonvilleprc>) with links to Sermonaudio to hear the speeches, and links to the YouTube videos of the speeches (not to be confused with the YouTube video made before the speech). The audio of the speeches can also be accessed on Hudsonville’s website (www.hudsonvilleprc.org). We ask you to share these links at work, school, or wherever else you have opportunity.

May God continue to give us all continued boldness, courage, and humility to witness to and speak about His beautiful, unchangeable Truth in our homes, churches, schools, and community, for the glory of His name. 

Denomination Activities

A delegation of Rev. William Langerak and Mr. Sid Miedema was appointed by our churches’ Contact Committee to visit our sister church in Northern Ireland, the Covenant

PRC in Ballymena, as well as Covenant’s on-going mission work in Limerick for the annual church visitation. The men left Thursday night, January 19, arriving in Dublin Friday morning, January 20. On Sunday

Mr. Wigger is a member of the Protestant Reformed Church of Hudsonville, Michigan.

Rev. Langerak preached twice in Covenant PRC. During the week Rev. Langerak also had the opportunity to lead an Adult Bible Study, deliver a public lecture on "The Biblical Identity of the Antichrist," and conduct church visitation with the Council of Covenant. The delegation then traveled about five hours south to Limerick in the Republic of Ireland. The second Sunday Rev. Langerak preached both services in the Limerick Reformed Fellowship and on Monday delivered a public lecture entitled, "Why Does a Good God Allow Suffering?" Rev. Langerak and Mr. Miedema returned home to west Michigan from Dublin on January 31. May the Lord use this visit to strengthen and bless the sister-church relationship we have with the saints in Northern Ireland.

Mission Activities

A delegation of Mr. Glenn Kooima (an elder from Calvary PRC in Hull, IA and a member of the Foreign Mission Committee of our churches) and Mr. Perry Van Egdome (an elder from the Doon, IA PRC, the calling church for our denomination's mission work with the Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines) visited metro-Manila from January 19 to 31. This annual visit is part of the FMC's efforts to oversee the labors of the Revs. Daniel Kleyn and Richard Smit, our churches' missionaries there. As you can imagine, the visit was a busy, event-filled twelve days. On Sunday, January 29, the men had a Lord's Day they will not soon forget. They attended the First Reformed Church of Bulacan in the morning, and the Berean PRC in the afternoon. The delegation

was able to have the unique experience of four worship services in one Lord's Day. They were also able to witness an adult baptism, followed by the baptism of five of that family's children. It was a full but most enjoyable day in the Lord and in the fellowship of His saints there. We conclude with the words from our missionaries themselves,

We cannot fully express our appreciation for their visit. We and our families enjoyed having them live with us in our homes, and accompanying us to meet the churches and fellowships we are privileged to work in here. Their visit will no doubt help them in their understanding of our life and work here, but it also helps us in maintaining good contact and communication with our churches. We appreciate the men's willingness to come here, and also the sacrifice of their families as they did this work on behalf of the churches. Once again, a sincere thanks to them and to the whole denomination for this concrete evidence of your support.

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Society of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI received a thank you from the Holland Rescue Mission for leading the men's Monday Night Bible Studies in 2011. Plans call for Georgetown to continue doing this into 2012 as well, with their leading the chapel services at the Holland Rescue Mission the third Thursday evening of the even-numbered months of 2012.

In highlights from a recent meeting of the Evangelism Committee of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI, we read that, among other matters, they decided to support financially Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI in

publishing a book on the speeches from the 2010 BRF Conference, and they discussed the *Standard Bearer* audio cassette distribution for the blind.

On Friday evening, January 27, the Evangelism Committee of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, along with the Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC, hosted a conference at Hudsonville on "The Answer in an Age of Uncertainty." Rev. Garrett Eriks and Rev. Andrew Lanning addressed the topic with two excellent speeches. Rev. Eriks spoke on "Knowing Truth in an Age of Uncertainty," and Rev. Lanning followed, speaking on "Finding True Freedom in an Age of Uncertainty"—two speeches that looked at the Emergent Church movement and postmodernism. The conference attracted about 700 people, with another 80 listening to the speeches on line. If you were not able to be present, the speeches are available on line at youtube.com/hudsonvilleprc or through their Facebook page.

Congregation Activities

The men of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI were able to enjoy another Men's Breakfast on Saturday morning, January 21, with breakfast being served at 7:30 and discussion beginning at 8:00. This breakfast discussion centered in chapters 7 and 10 ("Ungodliness" and "Unthankfulness") of the book *Respectable Sins*, by Jerry Bridges. All young, old, and men in between were invited to join in a tasty breakfast and what always turns into a lively discussion.

The Building Committee of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI recently informed their congregation that on two different dates, January 23 and 28,

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the congregation would be invited for a walk-through of their old parsonage to see if there was anything of interest to be saved prior to its demolition.

Minister Activities

Since our last "News," Rev. Clayton Spronk, pastor of the Peace PRC in

Lansing, IL has received two calls, the first coming from the Edgerton, MN PRC to serve as their pastor, and the second from the Hope PRC in Walker, MI to become their next undershepherd.

We extend to Rev. Brian and Michelle Huizinga of the Hope PRC in

Redlands, CA congratulations on the occasion of the birth of their son Quinton James, born on January 20. We could also add a footnote here that God in His good providence blessed Hope with four babies that week, quite an event for any congregation. ☺

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Men's Conference

■ Attention men: Mark your calendars!

March 8 and 9, 2012

Thursday evening

Pastor Spriensma
"The Godly Man:
Living Soberly, Righteously
and Godly in This Present World"

Friday evening

Pastor Haak
"The Godly Man:
Looking for the Glorious Appearing
of Our Saviour"

Following each speech will be refreshments and a selection of interesting and informative sectionals from which to choose:

- God Created Men and Women Differently;*
- Battling the Temptations That Christian Men Face Today;*
- Practical Ideas for Personal Devotions and Family Worship;*
- Cultivating the Desire to Serve the Church and the Covenant Community;*
- Balancing Priorities of Family, Church, Work, and Play Through Various Stages in Life;*
- When and How to Discipline in Love;*
- The Role of a Godly Grandfather, Using His Time, Influence, and Experiences;*
- Gaining Others to Christ by Our Godly Conversation (LD 32).*

Registration is still possible; e-mail your information asap to kooienga@yahoo.com or call Doug at 616-896-1206.

Visit the new
RFPA website
www.rfpa.org
and listen to
audio sermons
from the archives of
the **PRCA**

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Kalamazoo PRC express their Christian sympathy to Rev. Michael and Dawn DeVries in the death of their grandfather,

CONRAD DEVRIES.

May they be comforted with the words found in 1 Thessalonians 4:14: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Tom Kiel, Clerk

Reformed Witness Hour
March 2012

Date	Topic	Text
March 4	"May God Bless Your Marriage!"	Ruth 4:11-12
March 11	"A Blessed End to a Beautiful Book"	Ruth 4:13-22
March 18	"Weep Not for Me, but for Yourselves"	Luke 23:28
March 25	"Our Savior's Unique Suffering"	Lamentations 1:12