

# The Standard Bearer

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# Our Heavenly Citizenship

For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Philippians 3:20

In this chapter Paul speaks of himself. He tells why he might have reason to boast in the flesh (vv. 5-6). He then says that all these things he counted loss for Christ (vv. 7-8). Paul's righteousness is of God by faith (v. 9). Thus, he presses toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (v. 14).

We are to be followers of Paul's example (v. 17) in opposition to those who do not do this. They are the enemies of the cross of Christ. Their end is destruction, who mind earthly things. Our text begins with the word "for," which refers back to verse 17, where Paul gives the reason that we are to follow his example and make this confession: "for our conversation is heavenly."

Heaven is pictured as a commonwealth. The word rendered "conversation" is not really correct. It should

be "commonwealth" or "citizenship." This commonwealth is not earthly, a separate entity from heaven. No, it is *in* heaven.

An explanation of this commonwealth is in order. First of all, it is an ordered kingdom, where God dwells and rules. It is an absolute monarchy in which Christ rules as God's vice-regent and the elect are citizens. Secondly, it is a spiritual kingdom. Heaven is completely different from anything we can know or experience on earth. We cannot enter heaven with our earthly bodies. It is not physical, but completely otherworldly. Thirdly, it is perfect, because God dwells there. There is no more sin, only righteousness. There is no more trouble and suffering, only blessedness and happiness. Because it is perfect, it is the object of our hope of final glorification.

In this commonwealth or kingdom we have our citizenship. This implies three things. First, it implies the *right* to citizenship. On earth one must legally have the right to be a citizen of a certain country. So it is with heavenly citizenship; we must legally be a member of the heavenly kingdom. Secondly, there are *duties* of citizenship. Here that usually means the duty to serve in military service. In heaven we must live according

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to its laws in service to God. Citizenship also implies, thirdly, *privileges*. Here one is entitled to such privileges as police and fire protection. In heaven all of its citizens are entitled to and do receive all the blessings of salvation in Christ fully.

That our citizenship is heavenly implies that we are not citizens of this earth, which in turn means that we are not friends of this world. We have no fellowship with the enemies of the cross of Christ, whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, whose end will be destruction. We do not strike our roots deeply into this earthly life. Thus, we do not store up earthly treasure, nor set our affections on things below. Nor do we live as though this earthly life is the only life there is. Rather, we live as strangers and pilgrims on the earth. We live as temporary inhabitants of this earth. We, with the heroes of faith of Hebrews 11, confess that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth. We, with Abraham, look for a city that hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. We seek the things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

To be such a citizen is impossible of ourselves. Paul says our citizenship is in heaven. He does not say, "It will be," or, "It is possible." The question, then, is "How is this possible?" By nature we do not have the right to be heavenly citizens, for we by nature are sinners, fallen in Adam. When we fell, we forfeited any right to a heavenly citizenship and we became by nature citizens of hell. Satan was our master and we were legally his. By nature we did not fulfill the duties of heavenly citizens, for we did not have the ability to love God as we should, nor did we have the desire to do this. By nature we did not enjoy the privileges of heavenly citizens. We did not have the right to the blessings of salvation, nor did we want these blessings. In short, we were what Paul terms enemies of the cross of Christ. We wanted nothing to do with a heavenly citizenship. We had our fellowship with those whose God is their belly, whose glory is in their shame, whose end is destruction.

The reality and possibility of our heavenly citizenship is through the Savior. We are saved by Christ. He is called here by four different names, each one describing a different aspect of His work.

He is *Savior*, who delivers us from sin, both original and actual, particularly from the situation described

in verses 19 and 21. He is *Jesus*, which name means "Jehovah Salvation," for He is the revelation of Jehovah reaching down with His mighty arm to save us. He is *Christ*, the Anointed One, for He was ordained from eternity to save us. He, therefore, has the authority to save us. He is qualified to save us through His assumption of the human nature and through His reception of the Spirit without measure. He is *Lord*, ruler and master of His people according to His human nature, which was exalted and is in heaven. As Lord He has the authority, power, and ability to rule us.

The ground of our citizenship is, then, to be found only in Him. He took away Satan's power over us. He gives us the legal right to be heavenly citizens. He gives us the power to walk as heavenly citizens. And He blesses us as heavenly citizens.

Our citizenship is realized only in principle now. Objectively, it is an accomplished fact, accomplished through Christ's death and sealed in His resurrection and ascension. But we are still on earth. We are not yet glorified, but still carnal.

The full realization of our heavenly citizenship is still coming. It comes partially through our death, for through death we enter paradise, where we will enjoy life eternal. Finally it comes in the day of Christ. This will be at the end of time and after the final judgment, when the wicked will be cast into hell and the elect taken into glory. There will be the new creation in which righteousness shall dwell. In heaven God is King, with Christ as His vice-regent. We are the citizens.

For this we are called to hope. We await eagerly Christ's coming, at which time we will be delivered from the world of sin and receive final glorification. We await patiently Christ's coming. Presently we bear the infirmities of this world while expecting a perfect life in Christ. We await diligently Christ's coming, thus living out of His Word and working for the realization of His kingdom.

We, therefore, live a life of hope, showing by word and deed that our citizenship is not here below. It is from heaven, from whence we expect the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, and who is the hope of our heavenly citizenship. Live, therefore, in the hope of that day. 

## Two Books (5)

In our last few articles we have been dealing with various statements found in a recently published book, *Reformed Thought*, a compilation of selected papers written by Dr. William Young over the past six decades.

In these papers Young makes a number of references to Hoeksema and his covenant view, not commendatory by any stretch. He contends that Hoeksema's view is to be identified with that of Dr. A. Kuyper and his presupposed regeneration doctrine, which view, according to Young, makes a man worthy of being thrown into the camp of Hyper-Covenantism. And not only does Young consign Hoeksema to this camp, but he charges him (along with Schilder) with taking Kuyper's *Hyper* covenantal views to greater extremes (cf. fn 3, p. 206).

This is no small charge. It is Young's conviction, the very thesis in a couple of his papers, that at the door of Hyper-Covenantism is to be laid the demise of piety and true spirituality in Dutch Reformed churches in the 1900s, what Young calls the death of 'experimental religion.'

In this final installment of our brief response to Young's passing but severe assessment of Hoeksema's covenant view, we will offer

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*Previous article in this series: March 1, p. 244.*

lengthy quotes from Dr. H. Bavinck's *Reformed Dogmatics*, quotes that will set forth Bavinck's covenant view, in particular how the esteemed Bavinck viewed children of believers, that is, what he was convinced was the biblical and apostolic view and, by implication, in keeping with the historic Reformed and Calvinistic view as well.

We do this in the interests of fairness and honesty.

Honesty requires that if Hoeksema is to be banished to the fringe camp of the Hyper-Covenantists, and his covenant view is to be labeled as nothing but a variant form of presupposed regeneration, a departure from historic Calvinism, and his view of covenant children is to be identified as one of those whom Young charges with contributing largely to the death of spirituality and Christian piety in the Dutch Reformed Church world over the past century, then so is Dr. Bavinck and his covenant view to be so labeled and charged.

However, it appears this is exactly what Young (along with others we have read of late) is loath to do. It is transparent that Young would shield Bavinck from such allegations. In his paper *Historic Calvinism vs. Neo-Calvinism*, Young puts Bavinck in the most favorable light, making mention of Bavinck following a reference to the "outstanding Dutch writers from the seventeenth

and eighteenth centuries (emphasis mine—kk)" (p. 38), whose writings, Young argues, did not support any Kuyperian presupposed regeneration view. In this context Young mentions Bavinck (of the nineteenth century). While Young has to acknowledge that "...Voetius championed the stronger position that all elect children of believers were regenerated in infancy," Young points out that this was "...a position rejected by Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)" (ibid.).

With the accuracy of Young's statement that Bavinck rejected the idea that all elect children of believers are regenerated in infancy, we have no quarrel.

But if that is what protects a man from being identified with Kuyper and his presupposed regeneration doctrine and from the charge of being Hyper-Covenantal, then Hoeksema ought not be so identified, labeled, or charged either. Hoeksema no more taught the regeneration of all the elect seed at birth than did Bavinck.

In fact, a case can be made that when it came to presupposed regeneration (with its erroneous idea of dormant regeneration), Hoeksema was more critical than Bavinck was.

The problem is, as is clear from Young's statements elsewhere, as far as he is concerned, when it comes to the charge of Hyper-Covenantism,

with all its attendant evils, rejection of presupposed regeneration (along with the error of dormant regeneration) is not the decisive issue. The decisive issue is, how does one view, address, and deal with the children of believers? As little lambs having renewed hearts and able to receive spiritual things, or at the baptism font as little vipers, that is, as being spiritually dead, devoid of the regenerating Holy Spirit until years later in life?

According to Young, it is the first mentioned view, children of believers dealt with and addressed as lambs having spiritual natures, that warrants the charge of being ‘Hyper’ when it comes to the covenant; and with it the charge that it is this view that looms large in explaining the spiritual deadness that took hold of vast segments of the Dutch Reformed denominations in the past century.

All we intend to demonstrate at this point is that, if this is true, then Bavinck is to be numbered with the ‘Hypers’ and indicted with these charges as well.

Bavinck’s convictions concerning the seed of the covenant?

Let us see.

From page 525 onward (DeVries’ translation of Bavinck’s *Gereformeerde Dogmatiek*, vol. 4) Bavinck builds his case for infant baptism and for how covenant infants are to be viewed.

Having stated over against the Anabaptist argument that “... children could not experience or demonstrate faith and repentance and therefore were not permitted

to be baptized,” that “...the Reformed argued that though children could not—as the Lutherans held—possess the acts of faith, they could most certainly possess the disposition (*habitus*) of faith” (sect. 536, p. 525), Bavinck introduces his biblically based view with these words:

The validity of infant baptism depends exclusively on how Scripture regards the children of believers and hence wants us to regard them. If Scripture speaks about such children *in the same way it does*

*The validity of infant baptism depends exclusively on how Scripture regards the children of believers and hence wants us to regard them.*

*about adult believers*, the right and hence the duty to practice infant baptism has been established. For we may not withhold from the children what we grant to adults. In the case of infant baptism, therefore, we are permitted to require neither less nor more than in the case of adult baptism.... Those who want absolute certainty [when it comes to a person’s spiritual life] can never dispense any sacrament. The question is only whether the

certainty that in dealing with the children of believers we are dealing with *believers* [!] is the same as the certainty we possess concerning those who confess their faith as adults. We do not need and may not demand another or stronger kind of certainty. *Scripture offers a clear answer to the question thus framed* (sect. 537, pp. 525-6). [Note: Italics has been added, for emphasis, in this quotation and all subsequent quotations in this article.]

What Bavinck is convinced that answer is, becomes clear in the following quotes:

Specifically the children [of believers] are regarded in their connection with [their parents]. There is a kind of communion of parents and children in sin and misery. But over against this, God has also established a *communion of parents and children in grace and blessing*. Children are a blessing and heritage from the Lord (Ps. 127:3). They are always counted along with their parents and included with them. Together they prosper (Exod. 20:6; Deut. 1:36, 39....) *Together they serve the Lord* (Deut. 6:2; 30:2; 31:12-13; Josh. 24:15....).... While grace is not automatically inherited, as a rule it is bestowed along the line of generations. “For the infants of believers their first and foremost access of salvation is the very fact of their being born of believing parents” (pp. 527-8).

The question is, what does Bavinck have in mind when he speaks of this “first access to salvation” that infants have by virtue of being born

to believing parents? That he does not have in mind simply a 'parental advantage' that may bear fruit later in life, but rather a *grace* that shows itself already from little on, becomes plain.

Reflecting on the significance of the household baptisms in Acts 16 and the I Corinthians 7:14 reference that speaks of the children of a believing parent being holy (in an objective sense, set apart from other children, though not all necessarily saved), Bavinck states:

The believer has the calling to serve the Lord not only for oneself but with all that belongs to oneself and with one's entire family. For that reason the children of believers are admonished by the apostles as *Christian children* in the Lord (Acts 26:22; Eph. 6:1; Col. 3:20; II Tim. 3:15; I John 2:13). Also the *little ones know the Lord* (Heb. 8:1; Rev. 11:18; 19:5), and have been given a place before his throne (Rev. 20:12). Scripture knows nothing of a neutral upbringing that seeks to have the children make a completely free and independent choice at a more advanced age. *The children of believers are not pagans* or children of the devil who still—as Roman Catholics and Lutherans hold—have to be exorcized at their baptism, but children of the covenant, for whom the promise is meant as much as for adults. They are included in the covenant and are holy, not by nature (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5; John 3:6; Eph. 2:3) but by virtue of the covenant (pp. 529-30).

That by the phrase "holy not by

nature" Bavinck is not rejecting the idea of infants having already a renewed heart, but is referring simply to a child's own nature inherited from Adam, is apparent from what immediately follows.

All this is the more compelling because grace—especially in the New Testament dispensation—is much more abundant than sin (Rom. 5:12-21). If the rejection of infant baptism proceeded solely from the fact that it is not explicitly enjoined in Scripture, it would have to be judged with indulgence. But as a rule it is completely bound up with other considerations and flows from a restriction of grace and from a failure to appreciate the catholicity of Christianity. For Anabaptism (unless it denies original sin and considers regeneration unnecessary in the case of children) poses a limit to grace in the child's age, in the child's not yet having attained the age of discretion, that is, in law and ordinances that have been established by God at the time of creation in nature. *Grace, however, knows no such boundaries* (p. 530).

And then follows a section in which Bavinck offers a significant commentary on a phrase found in our Form for Holy Baptism:

...and the Holy Spirit, who conceived Jesus in Mary's womb and was granted to Jeremiah and John from the very first moment of their existence (cf. also Ps. 22:9-10), has access to every heart and is not hindered in this by age or youth. Just as children are partakers of the condemnation in Adam without their knowledge, so they also

are again received unto grace in Christ. Though they cannot *actually* believe in Christ, *they can be regenerated and thereby also receive the capacity to believe.*

And keep in mind that Bavinck makes that last statement in the context of his contention that grace is much more abundant than sin and its consequences *especially in the New Testament age*, and that he makes this statement in the interests of arguing that we then ought to expect an even more abundant evidence of covenantal grace in covenantal lines in the New Testament than in the Old Testament age. If even in the Old Testament certain infants were specially designated as indwelt by the Spirit from the womb, how much more ought this not be so in the New Testament, when the Holy Spirit has been poured out in His fullness! Children indwelt by this Holy Spirit belonging not in the category of a few exceptions, but this, in the age of the Spirit, becoming the general rule.

That this is Bavinck's covenantal perspective is made crystal clear in his next section.

What justifies our dealing with our little ones as having spiritual life and hence able to respond spiritually to biblical instruction even though we know that not all of the children born to the church are elect?

Bavinck's answer:

We can no more judge the hearts of senior members of the church than we can the hearts of infants. The only possibility left for us

who are bound to externals is a *judgment of charity*. According to that judgment, we consider those who make profession of faith to be believers and give them access to the sacraments. By that same judgment we count *the children of believers as themselves believers* because they are included with their parents in the covenant of grace. The likelihood that the baptized are *true believers is even greater in the case of children* than adults.... For all these children [who die as little ones] there is in Scripture, to the extent that they are included in the covenant of grace, a promise from the Lord that they cannot consciously and voluntarily reject. If they die before the time they are able to do so, “godly parents ought not to doubt the election and salvation of their children.” *And even in the case of those children who come of age, we may and must*—according to the judgment of charity that must prevail in the church of Christ—*believe they are saved if the contrary is not patently evident*. For it is out of the children of believers that the church, the gathering of true Christ-believers, is continually being built (sect. 7, p. 531).

From the above quotations, what Bavinck’s covenantal view was is beyond dispute. It is not like that of old Archibald Alexander.

But it is basically the same as Hoeksema’s.

The question for Young and others of his persuasion is not whether they agree with Bavinck or think his perspective is scriptural. They are as free to criticize and take issue with his doctrine as with that of

Hoeksema. The issue is, was Bavinck or was he not of the conviction that the children of believers are to be addressed, viewed, and dealt with (nurtured) as spiritual seed, as having the Spirit of life from earliest years?

The highlighted phrases in the last above-quote make the answer clear.

According to Bavinck, in accordance with “the judgment of charity” our children are to be viewed not simply as *elect* (though as yet unbelieving), but as *saved* (which, for Bavinck, means as *believers*) until they began to reveal otherwise.

Hoeksema was certainly conversant with Bavinck, learned from him, and was in basic agreement with him all along his covenantal line.

It would seem to us, then, that the judgment of charity would require that however one is inclined to label Hoeksema and his covenant view, one ought to be honest enough to label the covenant view of the esteemed Bavinck likewise.

In bringing this critique to an end, we would make the following points.

We do not disagree with Dr. Young that subsequent to the time of that great man Dr. Kuyper a spiritual deadness of ‘knowledge without spirituality’ crept into and overwhelmed large sections of the Reformed church world. And without a doubt a number of Kuyper’s very influential, but unbiblical teachings, teachings taken to their logical conclusion, played a large part in this great ‘falling away.’

But to claim, as Dr. Young does, that a covenant view that addresses children of believers as having spiritual life rather than being spiritually

dead (as being carnal in every sense until later converted) is what served to bring about the death of ‘heartfelt piety’ in Reformed churches is, we are convinced, an unsustainable thesis.

What then fostered this undeniable spiritual withering? We are convinced, four factors.

First, the error of Kuyperian common grace, to which even Bavinck himself fell prey, sad to say. Here Dr. Young is right-on.

Second, there is that grievous error nurtured in the bosom of Kuyper’s presupposed regeneration doctrine, namely, the *dormant* regeneration idea. As if the seed of regeneration in an elect child can lie long-resistant to the means of grace and without fruit. The evil of this notion is that those baptized are permitted to live carnal lives for decades without discipline on the assumption that they could possibly be regenerated and Christ’s own. So, the church permits them to remain as ‘unresponsive’ members but with full privileges in the hope that in time the Word may take hold.

It became the justification for laxity in Christian discipline, bearing evil fruit.

Third, what has destroyed holiness in Protestantism, of both the Reformed and Presbyterian vintage, is not and never has been the baptism of infants by *believers*, that is, by the God-fearing. That would be like arguing that the reason for apostasy in the Old Testament was that the God-fearing circumcised their infants and taught them God’s law! Rather, what fostered growing

deadness was churches allowing the careless and unbelieving to baptize their infants. Like Rome of old, a willingness to baptize all and sundry without evident commitment to godliness.

And fourth, let us not forget the higher critical approach to Scripture that was allowed to infect both Reformed and Presbyterian seminar-

ies. That was never Kuyper's error or weakness.

But, even here we note, Kuyper's inflated view of common grace was used to justify this approach, bearing 'deadening' fruit, as it still is today.

And so we conclude where we began. Kuyper's *De Gemeene Gratie* is being translated and reprinted. While we welcome its publication, we

fear it will not serve the cause of God and truth in Protestantism, weakened as she already is these days.

And, while we as Protestant Reformed can be thankful Hoeksema and Ophoff adopted Bavinck's covenant view as their own, we can also be glad they with one accord rejected Bavinck's common grace view root and branch. ☞

## LETTERS

### On the Dialogical Principle

Thank you, Rev. Griess, for reminding us of the biblical warrant for the "Dialogical Principle" in the January 15, 2012 issue. As with any principle, its value is realized in its application. If we leave it as an abstract concept and don't dust it off, we deprive the church of its benefits—pure and acceptable worship of our God. Unless the connection is made between theory and implementation, many will nod in agreement and then contradict in practice. Some brothers argue that defining application can unduly constrain "Christian liberty" and risk being proscriptive. Indeed the ultimate responsibility is with the Consistory to supervise the liturgy, but this should never be understood as license to suspend the "Dialogical Principle" or the "Regulative Principle" in the worship service.

There are many possible examples. I suggest a few here, but I am certain that the list is not exhaustive.

1. The insertion of "special music," such as choirs and solo musical performances. Can this be rationalized with the dialogical principle? Aren't these a "third party" injected into the dialogue? They are separated physically and acting independently of both the congregation and the preacher. Are they singing to God on behalf of the congregation or from God to the congregation? Neither option is defensible, not to mention that the temple curtain was torn in two, illustrating the direct access between God and His people. There has been an argument made that the superior quality of music justifies this third party. In response, we can

counter that it is the expression of love and praise from His bride, the body of Christ, that He seeks during worship. Indeed, if God wants better quality music, He has legions of angels at His disposal.

2. The "guest speaker" who is given a place in the worship service to advocate for his cause. No matter how edifying the cause, it is clearly a third party intruding on the dialogue. In any throne room, while the King is in dialogue with his subjects, such an interruption would never be tolerated. It is a hijacking of a captive audience who gathered to worship their Lord and Saviour!

3. The "exclusion of a subset" of the congregation from the sanctuary. One such group is children that are extracted from the covenant body for a separate worship/education activity. This creates a situation where one party of the "Dialogical Principle" is not fully represented; it is incomplete. God is looking out over the sanctuary seeking *all* His children, to converse with them. These missing souls are part of the bride's body, yet they are missing in action.

It would be very interesting if you would produce an article that illustrates how the "Dialogical Principle" can be used to guard against these types of threats to our liturgy. While these threats may not have gained much traction or in-roads today into conservative Reformed congregations, they exist in the general Christian community that we can observe through friends, television, and movies. We need to inoculate ourselves in advance.

Guy Heerema,  
Calgary CANADA ☞

## A Modern-Day Jezebel

And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass; I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works; and the last to be more than the first. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols.

Revelation 2:18-20

What follows is an article by Virginia Miller Lettinga appearing in the January 20, 2012 edition of the *Banner*, the official magazine of the Christian Reformed Church. The title of the article is: “Parenting: Mom We’re Living Together.”

*She stirred her coffee nervously and announced in a low voice, “My mother has moved in with a friend she met in her retirement community. I like him. Really. I think he’s good for her. But they’ll screw up their finances if they get married, so they didn’t really consider it. I don’t know what to say to my kids.”*

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*“I miss church,” said the young woman who dropped into the university chaplaincy where I work. “I miss the singing. God matters to me. I want to hear someone explain the Bible to me. But I’m living with my boyfriend. He’s not a Christian, but he wants me to be happy and encourages me to go to church and even offered to go with me. I don’t want to go because I’m afraid they’d only condemn us.”*

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*“Dear Mom,” wrote a university student, “I wanted to let you know that John and I are planning to move in together next semester. I know this will be disappointing to you, and want to reassure you that I value the principles you gave me, but we have been*

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*dating for a long time and we really love and respect each other. Sharing a single apartment would also save a lot of money. I still expect us to get married sometime, and I hope this makes sense to you. We’re not turning our backs on God, but we think this will be best for us.”*

Perhaps you know of a situation like one of these. Cohabiting—living together as a sexual couple without being married—has become common in North America. Recent census data in the U.S. and Canada shows that the number of unmarried couples living together has exponentially increased in the last 20 years. And if George Barna’s research is to be believed, there is little difference between the attitudes and behavior of young adults raised in the church and their unchurched peers (to view this research, visit [tinyurl.com/BarnaStudy](http://tinyurl.com/BarnaStudy)). Moreover, Barna names “church experiences related to sexuality” as one of the top six reasons young Christians leave the church.

This should concern us. The gap between what has become cultural practice and what is taught in churches has become so vast that people don’t expect relevant advice for their sexual lives from their church and can’t imagine finding grace from the church in the midst of their choices. Even though families increasingly muddle through in a loving way in spite of disappointment—utterly casting off a daughter or son over “shacking up” with someone is largely the drama of a previous generation—few can imagine finding a church that could also lovingly muddle through.

We dream of faithful, loving, and committed partnerships—marriage—for our daughters and sons. For our friends. For ourselves. We recognize God’s blessing in and for such relationships. To an older generation of Christians, cohabitation appears as a challenge to this dream, a distorted second-best. But when I said that to a cluster of students—Christians and nonbelievers—at my university, they were all surprised.

“My parents really don’t want me to think of getting married until I’ve graduated and found a job,” explained a Christian student. “And that’s probably going to be years away. It would be weird to wait until I was 30 to have sex. But I guess I’m not likely to actually live with someone until we’re married.”

“I think my parents would be upset if I *didn’t* live with my boyfriend before we got married!” stated a non-Christian, somewhat bewildered by my assertion.

“They’d think we’re just crazily throwing a party and weren’t taking the relationship and our commitments seriously.”

While Christians participate in our culture’s enthusiasm for living as we wish when it comes to money, fashion, career choices, cars, and entertainment, surely it should be no surprise that young people assume sex is part of the smorgasbord of things that they can grab as they desire. Hedging sexuality with rules—going this far is OK; that touch is too much; looking at pornography is bad but Victoria Secret’s “angels” are OK—only creates a new kind of legalism. We need to grab hold of the idea of offering up our bodies as living sacrifices in a fresh way. But cohabiting couples should not necessarily be the first people to face this challenge.

So how should we respond?

1. *Remember the law of Christ—the rule of love.* That rule is more important than drawing a line in the sand. Unmarried couples live together for varied reasons: seniors in a retirement community, new Christians who are in an established relationship with an unbelieving partner,<sup>1</sup> a pair of recent university grads who plan to get married eventually. To respond lovingly, you need to know a person’s story. Galatians 6:2 calls for gentleness and patience as our response and goes on to talk about restoration, not condemnation, for Christians.
2. *Be forthright as well as gentle.* Explain your concerns. God does want his people to live within married covenants rather than merely cohabit. You can respectfully refuse to let your 20-something son share the guest room with his partner when they visit, but you should do your best to gently explain your thinking and make their visit possible.
3. *Advocate for faithfulness and commitment—*within cohabitation if that is the starting point. Support loving, exclusive sexual partnership—even if it lacks the legal status of marriage. This does not mean you consider marriage insignificant; it does mean you are willing to love people as they are.
4. *Hold off on your judgment.* What would your judgment accomplish? Ask questions: Why are you

<sup>1</sup> Lettinga either is ignorant of or ignores what God says about believers marrying unbelievers in I Corinthians 7:39 and other passages. Space does not permit further discussion on this point. Suffice it to say that parents must teach their children not to marry or date unbelievers. If a child does begin a relationship with an unbeliever there is no room for “muddling through in love.” The word of God to that child is, break up now!

living together without getting married? What can I do to support you and love you without giving you the impression that I think this is right? In a youth culture in which hook-ups are unremarkable, cohabitation is a kind of commitment toward faithfulness, sexual exclusivity, and responsible shared life.

5. *Drop the old arguments and scare tactics* against cohabitation. They’ve lost credibility. Cohabitation may once have made long-term marital success less likely (a claim you can find on many Christian websites), but that is not based on reliable data. It is the casualness of the relationships rather than cohabitation itself that predicts future trouble.

6. *Avoid biblical proof texts* about the “abomination of fornication.” In both the Old and New Testaments, God affirms marriage as a picture of his relationship with his people, and so it is right to honor marriage and to aim for it. But consider Jesus’ response when the woman who was caught in adultery was brought to him (John 8:11).

7. *Challenge people to delve into Scripture* and to grow in God. Other parts of our lives fall into order when first things really are first. A friend in a large student church in Oxford, England, caught our attention when she said, “We used to have a sermon on sexual morality each term. Then we noticed that hearing a clear sermon on sexual morality was less successful in teaching sexual purity than getting the students to dig into the Bible themselves. A year of consciously trying to apply Scripture reshaped people’s lives—including their sexual lives—in ways the old sermons never did.” God himself became the center and everything else fell into place.

Jesus sharply admonished the church of Thyatira for allowing the woman Jezebel to remain a member of the church (Rev. 2:20). Jesus required the church to discipline this Jezebel and, if necessary, to cast her out. Three sins characterized this Jezebel. First, she “callesth herself a prophetess.” Lettinga, too, is guilty of this. A note included with her article in the *Banner* says she once claimed to share with her husband “the position of Christian Reformed campus minister.” Lettinga calls herself a minister, but God does not. As far as God is concerned, women can only wickedly *pretend* to be ministers but they cannot in *fact* be ministers (I Cor. 14:34; I Tim. 2:11). Second, this Jezebel lived in fornication. There is no reason to believe that Lettinga lives

in fornication. However, Lettinga is guilty of the third and distinguishing sin of the Jezebel mentioned in Revelation 2:20—she teaches and seduces God’s “servants to commit fornication.” Lettinga teaches that the evil fornication of cohabitation should be tolerated by the church. Lettinga is a modern-day Jezebel.

Lettinga’s call to place God at “the center” rings hollow. In her entire article she puts people before God. God’s Word has something to say about fornication, but Mrs. Lettinga says those passages are not to be used. She knows that God calls cohabitation an “abomination of fornication,” but she advises that it is best to avoid calling it that. Refusing to call cohabitation sin, Lettinga puts lipstick on it, describing it as “a kind of commitment toward faithfulness, sexual exclusivity, and responsible shared life.”

By her twisting of the teachings of the Bible to accommodate them to the philosophies of men, Lettinga reveals what she thinks of God and of His Word and truth. She appeals to John 8:11 as if Jesus shares her views that people living in adultery should not be told they are living in sin but should only be encouraged to see that marriage is a better option than cohabitation. But Jesus did not encourage the woman living in adultery to get married. He told her to “go and sin no more.” Jesus called for her to repent and leave her sin behind. Lettinga’s teaching is contrary to Jesus’ teaching. She teaches that cohabiters should not be judged as sinners who need to turn from their sins, but that they should be viewed *positively* as people who are seeking to live in a committed relationship but need to be encouraged that it would be better for them to marry.

Mrs. Lettinga promotes the false idea that God loves sinners “as they are” and therefore Christians should also love sinners “as they are.” If she meant by this only that God loves sinners, then perhaps we could accept the statement that God loves sinners “as they are.” But Mrs. Lettinga’s teaching is that God loves sinners “as they are” and *does not demand change*. Even if they do not change, God will still go on loving them, and Christians should love them too. But this is not the teaching of Scripture. God loves sinners with a powerful love that changes them. In His love God renews His people in the image of Jesus Christ. In His love God calls sinners to repent and leave sin behind. Mrs. Let-

tinga disapproves of the previous generation’s “drama” of “casting off a daughter or son over ‘shacking up.’” But the truth is that the previous generation’s actions reflected the love of God. Sin was called sin. Sinners were called to repent. The truth was spoken in love for God and the sinner.

Mrs. Lettinga’s teaching must be seen for what it is, a call to love sin and sinners more than God. Mrs. Lettinga may claim to encourage people to marry and be sexually pure. But what she is really teaching is, and this is what especially the young people will hear in her teachings, “go ahead and have sex outside of marriage. God still loves you and we do too.”

This loving tolerance of sin supposedly makes this generation more loving than the previous generation in Lettinga’s opinion. But this generation is foolish. A sin tolerated is a sin that spreads. Unbiblical divorce has been tolerated in the church, and such divorces have multiplied. Every form of fornication will spread throughout the church if the idea that sex outside of marriage is legitimate takes root.

Lettinga subtly indicates she would view homosexuals the same way she views those who cohabit. She speaks of a son bringing his “partner” home. The “old generation” didn’t use the word partner. Sons had girlfriends and daughters had boyfriends. “Partner” is this generation’s politically correct word that puts homosexuality on equal footing with relationships between men and women. Lettinga’s teaching would fill the church with cohabiters, homosexuals, and fornicators of every stripe.

Lettinga herself would probably “draw a line in the sand” when it comes to other forms of fornication. She likely would not argue, for example, that pedophiles should be treated with the same “we love you as you are” attitude that she promotes for cohabiters. But what is to stop the next generation from determining that Lettinga’s line in the sand is unloving, and that the church needs to accept pedophiles? Let me be clear. I am not saying that Lettinga argues for loving pedophiles “as they are” or that the next generation will take this position. The point is that failure to draw a line in the sand where Scripture draws it opens up the possibility that the line can be moved to wherever each generation wants to put it.

To modern-day churches that tolerate fornication and teachers who promote it, Jesus speaks the very same word He spoke to the church of Thyatira: “I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel.” Jesus’ disapproval here is not directed at those who commit fornication. His disapproval is not directed at those who agree with and teach doctrines promoting fornication. Jesus’ disapproval is directed to those who know the doctrines of Jezebel are wrong but did nothing to discipline the woman and protect the church from her evil teachings. To every church that suffers those who teach tolerance for cohabitation, homosexuality, unbiblical divorce, or any other form of fornication, Jesus says, “I have a few things against thee.”

Jesus does not share Thyatira’s tolerance of Jezebel and her disciples. He says, “Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works” (Rev. 2:22-23).

The church that truly loves Jesus Christ will take this word to heart and call those who promote fornication in the church to repent. If the modern-day Jezebels “repent not” the faithful church must cast them out. This is the only way to put God at the center and to please Jesus Christ. 

## Chapter Four

### Postmillennialism (17)

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

**T**o the postmillennial hope of the perfecting of the victory of the Messianic kingdom within history, with the exception (as of the present) of the destruction of death, Reformed amillennialism objects that Scripture and the Reformed confessions promise the perfecting of the victory of the Messianic kingdom, and the perfecting of the kingdom itself, at the second coming of Christ.

#### The Goal of History

The full victory of the kingdom of Christ does not occur within history, as part of the historical process,

but is rather the goal of history—history’s end. History reaches this goal, under the sovereign direction of King Jesus, when the world’s last day is concluded by the day of Christ (II Thess. 2:2). On that day, and not before, by wonderful deeds of Jesus Christ Himself at His coming His kingdom will triumph perfectly.

On that day, Christ will deliver His beleaguered church from their enemies, destroying the hordes of Gog and Magog whom Satan will raise against the church when the thousand years expire and consuming the antichrist in a dramatic, personal encounter (Rev. 20:9, 10; II Thess. 2:8). Christ will raise all the elect citizens of His kingdom from the dead, or change those still living, into sinless, immortal life (I Thess. 4:16, 17; I Cor. 15:51, 52). He will publicly justify and then graciously reward these citizens in the final judgment.

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The reward will be the inheriting of the kingdom—the everlasting Messianic reign over all the renewed creation of heaven and earth (Matt. 25:31-40, 46b).

By this same public, final judgment, He will condemn and shame all the enemies of Himself, His kingdom, and the citizens of His kingdom, banishing them from the new heaven and new earth into outer darkness (Matt. 25:31-33, 41-46; Matt. 8:12).

Righteousness will dwell in the new world, only righteousness (II Pet. 3:13). There will be no unrighteousness whatever, not in word or deed and not in thought or desire. There will be no sin. The citizens of the kingdom will have been sanctified perfectly. The unrighteous will have been cast out into the God-forsaken place where there is only the suffering of the punishment of sin—the unmitigated wrath of God.

In the day of His coming, Christ will renew the creation, so that it will be the realm of His reign as Messiah, under the triune God (Rom. 8:19-22). On the basis of His redemptive death on behalf of the creation, as well as of elect humanity, Christ will deliver the creation from the curse and its effects. In the new world, there will be “no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away” (Rev. 21:4). Deliverance will extend to the animal world. Then, wolves and lambs will feed together, and lions will eat straw like the bullock (Is. 65:25), as before that dreadful day in which, because of man’s transgression, the curse of God fell upon the creation.

All of these wonderful things will happen at the coming of Christ—the second, bodily, public, visible coming of Christ—as all the passages referred to in support of these future events clearly teach.

And all these wonderful events will constitute the complete victory of Christ’s kingdom.

Christ’s kingdom will triumph perfectly on the day of His coming, and triumph in such a way that it will endure, triumphantly, forever.

### **Messiah Forever**

The teaching that the Messianic kingdom ends with the close of history is a serious mistake. This teaching is important to postmillennialism because it demands that the Messianic kingdom come perfectly and reign

visibly and gloriously in the world within history. The mistaken teaching is due, mainly, to a misunderstanding of I Corinthians 15:24-28.

Then cometh the end, when he [Christ] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet.

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.

And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

The meaning of the passage is not that Jesus Christ returns on the clouds, with the angels, in order to abdicate His office as Messianic king and, thus, radically to transform His kingdom from the Messianic kingdom into a kingdom of God apart from, and independent of, the Messiah. The meaning is not that Jesus the Christ throws down His Messianic crown before the triune God, so that henceforth He wears only the crown of the Godhead with the Father and the Spirit. This is a common explanation of I Corinthians 15:24-28, especially by postmillennialists.

To propose the end of the Messianic kingdom is to propose an intolerable change of Jesus Christ Himself. If the kingdom is no longer the Messianic kingdom, Jesus Christ is no longer the Messianic king. And if He is no longer the Messianic king, He is no longer the Messiah, or Christ. This would be to annul, or revoke, or undo, the incarnation. The thought is horrid.

It is also unbiblical.

Christ is an “eternal King,” as the Reformed faith confesses in Article 27 of the Belgic Confession. This is not the kingship of the second person of the Trinity, but the kingship over the church of “Jesus Christ,” the one who washed the members of the church by His blood and who sanctifies and seals them by the Holy Ghost.

In Revelation 5, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, who is also the Lamb, in the midst of the throne of God in heaven—kingship!—whose is blessing, honor, glory, and power “for ever and ever,” is not the second person of the Trin-

ity. He is *distinguished from* the triune God: “Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto him that sitteth upon the throne, *and unto the Lamb*” (Rev. 5:13). He is the exalted Messiah, the second person of the Trinity *in human nature*. And He—the Messiah—reigns—*as Messiah*—“for ever and ever” (Rev. 5:13). It would be exceedingly strange that a king would reign without a kingdom.

When Revelation 22:3 promises that “the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in [the new creation]” forever, the royal Lamb is not the second person of the Trinity, but the Messiah—the crucified and risen Jesus.

That Christ must reign “till he hath put all enemies under his feet” (I Cor. 15:25) does not imply that when He has conquered the last enemy—death—He will reign no longer. Rather, the meaning is that destroying all His enemies is the goal of His reign. This goal He will certainly accomplish. When He accomplishes this goal, Christ will deliver up the kingdom to God in the sense that He will present the kingdom to the triune God as the perfected kingdom in which God is all in all (I Cor. 15:24, 28). The great servant of God will report, and demonstrate, that He has completed His mission. Having overcome, indeed swallowed up in victory, the last enemy of the Messianic kingdom, which has always been the kingdom of God, the Prince will bow the knee to His Father, on whose behalf He has battled hard to attain this perfect victory, and solemnly declare that the kingdom is God’s. Christ will dedicate the perfected kingdom to God.

On that momentous occasion, Jesus will not cease being the Messianic king and, therefore, the Messiah. The passage itself makes this plain. Verse 28 states that “then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him.” There will be an everlasting subjection of “the Son” to the triune God. To this everlastingly subjected Son, all things—the kingdom of God in all the new creation—are everlastingly subjected. The Son is obviously Jesus the Messiah, for the second person of the Trinity, being Himself God, cannot be subject to God. Everlastingly, Jesus the Messiah will reign over the kingdom of God, under God and for God. Accordingly, the kingdom of God in the new creation will forever be the Messianic kingdom, governed by the man who was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the virgin Mary.

Jesus is an everlasting king. This was the Davidic promise. “He [the coming Messiah] shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom

for ever” (II Sam. 7:13). This promise God will keep in the everlasting kingship of David’s great son, Jesus. “The Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end” (Luke 1:32, 33). II Peter 1:11 affirms the “everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

The perfecting of the victory of the Messianic kingdom and, by it, the perfection of the kingdom, which the Bible promises and foretells as the goal of history, at the coming of Christ, postmillennialism foolishly finds *within* history, during the millennium, prior to the coming of Christ.

### Kingdom Glory for Some or for All?

It is unavoidable, therefore, that postmillennialists hope for the millennium with the hope that the Bible fixes on the second coming of Christ. Carried away by the glories of the “golden age” of the millennium, as he fancies it, Wilhelmus à Brakel exclaims, “Oh! What a glorious time that shall be!” He cries out, longingly, “Who shall then be alive?”<sup>1</sup>

Brakel’s question points out yet another grave error of postmillennialism. Most of the saints will miss out on the victory of the kingdom of Christ, its glories, and its bliss. Abraham will miss out. David will miss out. Isaiah will miss out. Paul will miss out. Luther will miss out. Calvin will miss out. My parents will miss out. Old as I am, with no earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ in sight at the beginning of the twenty-first century, I will miss out.

All the postmillennialists themselves who have already died will miss out: Brakel, Edwards, Warfield, and the others.

Only those elect humans who are alive at the time that Christ’s kingdom conquers, as postmillennialism counts conquest, will enjoy the “golden age” of the kingdom of Christ.

What a disappointment to the majority of the citizens of the kingdom of Jesus Christ, that is, the members of the church. They lived the kingdom life, fought the kingdom battles, suffered the kingdom reproach and persecution—some unto death—all, in the hope of the kingdom bliss and glory. And they all miss out!

What a sorry discrimination among the citizens by the king himself! Messianic struggle and suffering for all; the

<sup>1</sup> Wilhelmus à Brakel, *Redelijke Godsdienst*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Donner, 1893), 125. The translation of the Dutch is mine.

supreme Messianic blessedness and glory for some only. In the words of Romans 8:17, according to postmillennialism's doctrine of the perfecting of the victory of the Messianic kingdom, all suffer with Christ, but only some will be glorified together with Him.

Yes, and what a wicked contradiction of the gracious promise of the gospel to every citizen of the kingdom of Christ without exception! We all shall "reign with him" (Rev. 20:6). Jesus, who is "prince of the kings of the earth," has made all His people "kings and priests" (Rev. 1:5, 6). To everyone who overcomes and keeps Christ's works, that is, to every elect, Christ "will...give power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron" (Rev.

2:26, 27). Christ promises to everyone who overcomes that he or she will sit with Christ in his throne (Rev. 3:21).

The Heidelberg Catechism, in one stroke, both demolishes the postmillennial doctrine that the perfecting of the victory of the Messianic kingdom is within history and exposes the postmillennial error that only a few Christians will share in the glorious reign of Christ over all the world. The Reformed creed puts in the mouth of every Christian the confession of his or her sure hope: "afterwards [that is, after 'this life' I will] reign with Him [Christ] over all creatures" (Q&A 32).

... to be continued. 

## The History of the Office of Elder (1)

# In the Nation of Israel

**I**n previous articles we have seen that the office of elder is the office of the rule of Christ in Christ's church. We turn our attention now to the history of the office of elder in Christ's church.

The church of Jesus Christ "hath been from the beginning of the world" (Belgic Confession, Art. 27). Pentecost was not the birthday of the church; rather, the Spirit's outpouring on Pentecost marked the church coming to maturity. Nor did the church begin at Sinai; there God formed Israel as His special nation, and designated her as the one in and through whom His church would be gathered. The church of Jesus Christ began at creation, and was more clearly manifested as the object of God's grace when Adam fell.

Accordingly, in tracing the history of the office of elder in Christ's church, we must begin in the Old Testament. Since the time of Adam, the patriarchs,

and national Israel, the office has changed in its form and scope. Nevertheless, the office of elder in the New Testament church has its origins in the office of elder in the Old Testament, both before Israel was a nation and during her existence as a nation.

### Rise and development of the office of elder

The first elder in the church of Christ served all alone, rather than in conjunction with a body of men. His office had no term limit to it—he served in it for life. Nor was his office called that of *elder* at the time he lived. Nevertheless, Adam was the first elder in the church of Christ. As the first historical type of Christ, Adam was king (as well as prophet and priest) in God's covenant. As king, he was elder.

The organized, public worship of believers began soon after Enos was born to Seth. We read in Genesis 4:26: "And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD." As men had called upon Jehovah's name privately or in their families to this point

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(Abel's sacrifice is an instance of this), Genesis 4:26c refers to the beginning of the organized, communal worship of Jehovah by believers.<sup>1</sup> We read of no elders that oversaw such worship, but no doubt the heads of families functioned in such a capacity.

The first mention of a body of elders among God's covenant people is in Exodus 3:16, 18. These verses record God speaking to Moses out of the burning bush, commanding Moses to go to Egypt, speak to Pharaoh, and work for Israel's deliverance. God told Moses to let the Israelites know that God called him to this work. But the Israelites are a multitude of people—how is Moses to tell them all? By telling the elders: "Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them..." (v. 16).

When this body of elders had developed, we do not know; but that such a body existed "indicates that in Israel authority lay with the elders—i.e. the heads of the families, clans, and tribes."<sup>2</sup> It is noteworthy that this body of elders existed before Israel was officially organized as a nation at Mount Sinai (Ex. 19:5ff.). The covenant people themselves recognized their need for elders and government. While every church institute (organized congregation) needs elders, so does a body of believers who have not officially organized. It is right both that our mission fellowships have steering committees of men from within the group to help direct the work of the mission, and that "Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be placed under the care of a neighboring consistory" (Art. 39, Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches).

From this time on, Scripture refers to the elders as a body of men, and indicates that this body does its work in close connection with the office of prophet in the

church, which office Moses held. For Moses gathered the elders to teach them God's will regarding the Passover (Ex. 12:21), to witness him smiting the rock to provide water (Ex. 17:5-6), and to eat with Jethro (Ex. 18:12); and Moses took seventy elders with himself, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu into the mountain, where "they saw the God of Israel...and did eat and drink" (Ex. 24:9-11). When Moses went to Dathan and Abiram to pronounce God's judgment on them, "the elders of Israel followed him" (Num. 16:25). This "close connection" between the offices involved Moses teaching the elders the will of God, so that the elders could enforce this will within the congregation, and involved the elders witnessing the evidences of Jehovah's power, and the authority He gave to Moses as His prophet.

Another development in the office that took place while Israel was in the wilderness was that these elders became, by God's direction, assistants to Moses. Two events underscored the need for Moses to have such assistants, and the fact that God appointed the elders of Israel as such. First, Jethro pronounced it not good that Moses judged the people alone, and he gave this advice: "Moreover thou shalt provide out of all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness, and place such over them, to be rulers of thousands, and rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens: And let them judge the people at all seasons: and it shall be, that every great matter they shall bring unto thee, but every small matter they shall judge: so shall it be easier for thyself, and they shall bear the burden with thee" (Ex. 18:21-22). Second, when Moses said to God that he was not able to bear the burden of the people alone, God told Moses to gather seventy elders of Israel to the tabernacle, and He gave this promise: "And I will come down and talk with thee there: and I will take of the spirit which is upon thee, and will put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with thee, that thou bear it not thyself alone" (Num. 11:16-17).

Every Reformed pastor must view his elders as his assistants. The Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons says: "Thus we see that these sorts of ministers (ruling elders, DJK) are added to the others who preach the gospel, to aid and assist them...notwithstanding the offices always remained distinct one from

<sup>1</sup> Such is the common interpretation of Genesis 4:26c. Robert C. Harbach, for example, writes: "The idea is that from the earliest antiquity men regularly worshiped God in the communion of saints" (*Studies in the Book of Genesis* [Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 1986], p. 108). Also, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch write: "We have here an account of the commencement of that worship of God which consists in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, or in the acknowledgment and celebration of the mercy and help of Jehovah" (*Commentary on the Old Testament*, transl. James Martin [Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, May 1986 reprint], vol. 1, p. 120).

<sup>2</sup> W. H. Gispen, *Exodus*, transl. Ed van der Maas (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), p. 56.

the other.” And later: “...therefore it is also the duty of the elders...to be assistant with their good counsel and advice to the ministers of the Word...”<sup>3</sup> This assistance that the elders render the pastor is not that of doing whatever the pastor assigns them to do, as if the elders are his subordinates; rather, it is assistance both in providing personal counsel to the pastor, and in caring for the spiritual needs of the flock.

Once Israel was settled in the promised land, the primary development in the office of elder was that the office was found at every level of government. Every walled city had its elders who judged matters pertaining to that city and its suburbs; every tribe had its elders; and the nation as a whole had its elders. Cornelis Van Dam writes:

On a national level, elders functioned as “elders of Israel” (e.g., Lev. 9:1; Josh. 7:6; 1 Sam. 4:3), on a tribal level as elders of the tribes (Deut. 31:28) or of a particular tribe, such as “elders of Judah” (2 Sam. 19:11; 2 Kings 23:1), and more locally as elders of a clan, such as “elders of Gilead” (Judg. 11:5), or of a city, like “the elders of Jabesh” (1 Sam. 11:3), of Succoth (Judg. 8:14, 16), or Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:4).<sup>4</sup>

The elders were not always faithful in their work, nor were they always faithful in their personal lives. The inspired Asaph penned Psalm 82 to expose the wickedness of judges in Israel, and to remind them that God was their judge. By appointing judges in the fenced cities throughout Judah, and a “supreme court” in Jerusalem, King Jehoshaphat both saw that the office continued in the southern kingdom of Judah, and reformed it according to the pattern that Moses laid down (Ex. 18; Deut. 1). When the Jews returned from captivity, the office of elder was again manifest in the promised land. According to Ezra 5 and 6, the elders of the Jews led the way in the rebuilding of the temple.

<sup>3</sup> *The Confessions and the Church Order of the Protestant Reformed Churches* (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2005), pp. 290, 291.

<sup>4</sup> Cornelis Van Dam, *The Elder: Today’s Ministry Rooted in All of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishing, 2009), p. 32.

## Authority of the elders

The authority of Israel’s elders did not rest on their being chosen by the people.

We do not deny that the people indeed chose their elders. When Jethro advised Moses to appoint rulers of thousands, hundreds, fifties, and tens, Moses said to Israel: “Take you wise men, and understanding, and known among your tribes, and I will make them rulers over you” (Deut. 1:13). In other words, Moses appointed those whom Israel chose. By choosing their elders, the Israelites indicated they understood these men to have authority, and would be willingly subject to that authority. Believing members of congregations today indicate the same by choosing their elders.

However, the authority of the elders did not rest on their being chosen by the people. Israel was a monarchy, a theocracy—the nation of God, ruled by God; therefore, the authority of the elders was derived from God Himself.

Through Moses (Ex. 18:25; Deut. 1:15) and Jehoshaphat (II Chron. 19), God put these men in their office. Only God could equip these men with His Spirit—and He did, in giving the seventy elders of the spirit that was upon Moses (Num. 11:17, 25).

The elders’ authority was from God; it was the authority of Christ Himself. Through the godly, faithful elders, Christ ruled His people in Israel—just as He rules believers today through the elders of the church. For this reason, Jehoshaphat could say to the judges whom he set up in Judah, “Take heed what ye do: for ye judge not for man, but for the LORD, who is with you in the judgment” (II Chron. 19:6).

Because the authority of the elders was that of God and Christ, the elders were not a law unto themselves. They were themselves under authority.

They were under the authority of God through His prophets. Faithful prophets rebuked wicked elders—think of Asaph’s words in Psalm 82. Elders who appreciated godly prophets remained faithful to their tasks. Joshua 24:31 mentions that “Israel served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that overlived Joshua” (see also Judg. 2:7). Samuel’s visit to Bethlehem had the effect that “the elders of the town trembled at his coming, and said, Comest thou peaceably?” (I Sam. 16:4).

The elders were also under the authority of kings. Godly kings affected the elders for good. Solomon gathered the elders of Israel to bring the ark of Jehovah's covenant to Jerusalem (I Kings 8:1, 3); and no doubt, the elders who heard Jehoshaphat's charge (II Chron. 19:6ff.) took it seriously, at least at first.

At the same time, wicked kings and queens influenced the elders of the city to do wickedly. In the northern ten tribes of Israel, this was demonstrated by Jezebel's instruction to the elders and nobles of Samaria regarding Naboth (I Kings 21:8ff.). In the kingdom of Judah, the king Joash demonstrated this too. Faithful and godly during the days of Jehoiada the high priest, Joash turned to wickedness when Jehoiada died, and the princes of Judah came to him to persuade him to permit them to sin as they pleased (II Chron. 24:17ff.).

Likewise today, every individual elder is subject to the body as a whole; and the body of elders is subject to God's Word, and to Christ who is the King of the church. When elders bow before the Christ to whom they are subject, they often find that many of the members of the church are ready to bow before Him as well, and seek the true spiritual blessings that only He gives. But elders who despise Christ, and seek to govern the church according to their own desires, will find that there are also many in the church who willingly follow them to ruin.

### Qualifications of the elders

An organized and comprehensive list of qualifications for the office of elder, such as is found in I Timothy 3 or Titus 1, one does not find in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, the Israelites were not ignorant of God's will regarding what kind of men hold this office.

Jethro prescribed that Moses seek out "able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness" (Ex. 18:21). They were to be spiritually strong men ("able"), faithful men ("men of truth"), men who in hating covetousness both hated sin in all its forms and were not personally motivated by a desire for greed or personal glory.

Jehoshaphat charged the judges that they be God-fearing, and that they remember that Jehovah did not respect persons or take gifts (II Chron. 19:7). Once they are appointed to office, we do well to remind our elders what kind of men they must be.

The prophets were sent with a word of judgment not only on the wicked nation of Judah but also on her wicked princes—Jeremiah 1:18; Ezekiel 14:1ff. and 20:1ff.; Hosea 5:10; Micah 3:1; and Zephaniah 3:3 are just a few instances of this.

The point is that in the Old Testament, just as in the New, the chief qualification of the elders was that they were to be God-fearing, believing men.

Such men Israel was to look out from among her midst, when she chose her elders, just as the church of Jesus Christ is to do today. Through such men, God works graciously in His church, and causes His blessing to rest on the congregation.

### The work of the elders

Israel's elders administered and enforced God's law.

At times they did this by making decrees and prescribing penalties for violating these decrees. These decrees were intended to help the people obey God's law. For example, during the time of Ezra a proclamation was made that all the returned captives should gather in Jerusalem, and "that whosoever would not come within three days, according to the counsel of the princes and the elders, all his substance should be forfeited, and himself separated from the congregation of those that had been carried away" (Ezra 10:8).

Primarily, however, they administered and enforced God's law by judging those who transgressed. In his last speech to Israel, recorded in Deuteronomy, Moses gave detailed instruction regarding how the elders were to administer the law in the case of one who intentionally killed another and fled to the city of refuge (19:11-13); unsolved murders (21:1-9); stubborn and rebellious children who did not turn from their way although chastened by their parents (21:18-21); a husband who alleged that his wife was not a virgin at the time of their marriage (22:13-21); and the case of the man who refused to marry his brother's widow in order to raise up children for his brother (25:5-10; see also Ruth 4:1-12).

Still today, the work of elders is to administer the law of God, pronouncing upon penitent sinners the word of forgiveness and grace that God pronounces, and upon impenitent sinners the word of judgment that God Himself speaks. ∞

## God's Purpose with Adam (2)

## The Life Adam Had and Everlasting Life

**T**he life we believers now have in Christ is a life that is actually higher than that which Adam had before the fall. We have an everlasting, heavenly life. Such a life Adam outside of Christ never could have obtained. It could be enjoyed only in the last Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ.

**Everlasting life: A life that cannot be lost**

There was a difference between the life that Adam had and what the Bible refers to as “everlasting life.” The life that is everlasting cannot be lost. Adam’s life was not everlasting, and he knew it. God made him very much aware of that fact when He told him that he would certainly lose his life on the day he ate of the forbidden fruit. He had a perfect life, it is true, but it was a life that could be lost at any moment.

The phrase “everlasting life” is used in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to refer to the life that we believers will receive when Christ returns: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).

Yet we are also said to have the beginning of everlasting life even now. Having been regenerated by the Spirit of Christ, we already now have a spiritual life that cannot end. Jesus preached this more than once: “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life” (John 3:36a). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me hath everlasting life” (John 6:47).

Repeatedly our Lord has told us this, to assure us that already now there is a sense in which it is impos-

sible for us to die. Christ has actually said this to us in so many words: “And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die” (John 11:26a). “Verily, verily, I say unto you, If a man keep my saying, he shall never see death” (John 8:51).

The believer in Christ has a new living spirit, the life of which cannot end. So even now he has the beginning of everlasting life, while he waits for the Lord to return so that he can enjoy this everlasting life also in the body.

**Everlasting life: A heavenly life**

There is also another sense in which the life we have in Christ differs from that which Adam had before the fall. The Scriptures point us to this difference in the following text: “The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven” (I Cor. 15:47).

Adam’s life was an earthly life. As long as he remained obedient, he would continue to have that life. Yet it would have always remained an earthly life. Adam was of the earth, and would always have remained earthy. Heavenly life could be enjoyed only in the Lord from heaven.

Adam had an earthly life and was king over the earthly creation. Our Lord Jesus Christ has a heavenly life and is King over all things not only on earth, but also in heaven. It is into this Lord from heaven that we have been engrafted, and it is His quickening Spirit that we now have in our hearts. Directed in love by our heavenly Husband, we live and shall reign with Christ over all things forever and ever.

Such a life is clearly greater than that which Adam had before the fall. How amazing it is that we really have such a life! What a joy to think of what our Lord in heaven has accomplished for us, and for all His covenant people! 

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

*Previous article in this series: February 15, 2012, p. 232.*

# God's Son and Our Lord

## Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 13

Question 33. Why is Christ called the only begotten Son of God, since we are also the children of God?

Answer. Because Christ alone is the eternal and natural Son of God; but we are children adopted of God, by grace, for His sake.

Question 34. Wherefore callest thou Him our Lord?

Answer. Because He hath redeemed us, both soul and body, from all our sins, not with gold or silver, but with His precious blood, and hath delivered us from all the power of the devil; and thus hath made us His own property.

This Lord's Day continues the treatment of the Savior's names. His personal name, Jesus, tells us why He came to earth—He came to save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). The name "Christ" is not really a name but, rather, a title that tells us he is appointed by God to be our Savior. The two names treated in this Lord's Day are "Only Begotten Son of God" and "our Lord." These two names tell us who Jesus is, first in relation to God, and then in relation to us.

### God's Unique Son

There is a connection and a similarity between Jesus as God's Son and our being children of God. In John 1:12 we read, "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God." All those who believe in Jesus are also God's children. This means that they bear a resemblance to Jesus, their older brother, and to God, their heavenly Father. In I John 3:2 we are told, "Now are we the sons of God" and "when he shall appear we shall be like him."

But there is a difference.

And that difference presents us with a question. How can Jesus be called God's "only begotten" Son, when God has many children? If he is truly the only Son of God, then there cannot be others, can there? And yet, there are many children of God, so many that their number is greater than the stars of heaven and the sand on the seashore.

The answer, from the Bible, is not so difficult. God has two kinds of children; Jesus is the natural and eternal Son of God, whereas believers are adopted children. Whatever the similarities between Jesus and believers, Jesus is uniquely the "natural" and "eternal" Son of God.

This means that Christ never became, or becomes, the Son of God, but that He was the Son of God from eternity. When He was born in Bethlehem, He did not become the Son of God. Rather, at that time the one who was always the Son of God, who dwelt eternally in the bosom of the Father (John 1:18) and whose goings forth are from everlasting (Micah 5:2), came to earth by making Himself Mary's son. At that time He began to be Mary's child, but eternally He was and is the Son of God. In contrast to this, we are temporal creatures who, at some point, begin to be children of God.

This also means that Jesus, as the natural and eternal Son of God, shares the Divine nature of God. Just as

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

every child that is born shares the being and nature of his father, so Christ has the same being as God. Again there is a difference. Christ is naturally God's Son, whereas we are adopted children. Everyone knows the difference between those two. Moses was the natural son of Amram and Jochebed, and he later became the adopted child of Pharaoh's daughter. Even though this adoption changed his relationship to the king of Egypt, and gave him the right to much wealth and many privileges, he never became an Egyptian but always remained an Israelite. So it is with Christ and us. His being is Divine, God of God (Col. 1:15-17), whereas we are adopted, and whatever privileges or rights that may give us, we will never ourselves become God.

When we think about Christ's uniqueness this way, it should create an attitude of worship in us. Hebrews 1:6 says that when God brings His first begotten into the world He says, "And let all the angels of God worship him." Because of who He is, the eternal Son of God, He is worthy.

This doctrine is important because our salvation depends on it. If Christ is simply a man, then the Eternal did not come into time and God did not come into the world, and then salvation would be impossible. Man cannot come to God, but God must come to man. The Savior of men must be God Himself, so that He can be suited to be our mediator (see Lord's Day 6).

### **Our Sovereign Lord**

Our Savior is also our Lord. This moves the focus from His relationship to God to His relationship to us. The name Lord refers to Him as our ruler and owner, or our sovereign.

Christ is the supreme Lord of the entire universe, both as its creator (John 1:1-2) and as a part of His exaltation (Eph. 1:20-23). But in the Apostles' Creed and the Catechism, believers confess that He is "our Lord" in a unique way. He has purchased us with His blood, and He rules over us by His grace.

In the original disobedience of Adam and Eve, man willfully placed himself under the power of the Devil, sin, death, and hell. In His death, Christ paid the ransom price for His people, freeing them from the slavery of sin and Satan, and making them His own property. Now He rules them, not with a rod of iron, but by His

grace, so that they find His yoke to be easy and His burden to be light (Matt. 11:30). In the day that He exercises the power of His grace in them, they become willing servants (Ps. 110:3).

When we confess that Jesus is Lord, we are saying that He has rights to us, and that we will be His servants in every aspect of our life. He owns me, body and soul. My hands, my head, and my heart are all His property. My time and talents are His. The early Christians who confessed that Jesus was Lord refused to bow to the god of their culture, Caesar. When we are confronted with the gods of our culture, we should ask ourselves the question, "But isn't Jesus Lord? Does this jeopardize my allegiance to Him?" Saying that Jesus is Lord means I will gladly do His will.

### **Amazing Grace**

In our confession of these two names of Jesus, we are also making a confession concerning the amazing, free, sovereign, unmerited grace of God.

We are the adopted children of God.

There is a legal aspect to adoption. The adopted child becomes a rightful heir, alongside the natural child, of all the blessings and privileges of the family. As God's adopted children, we receive the right to become heirs of all the blessings and riches of the family of God. We become joint-heirs with Christ (Rom. 8:17).

But adoption is more than legal. It is also relational. When God makes us His children, He brings us into the richness of His own family life. We know Him as "Our Father" who loves us, and who in His love provides for us (II Cor. 6:18). We know Jesus as our Older Brother, and we know the rest of God's people as our spiritual brothers and sisters in the household of God (Gal. 6:10). We are not like the homes of the world today, where people simply cohabit and bypass one another, but we share a rich life of unity through the Holy Spirit, the same Spirit that binds Father and Son together in the godhead.

When we look at our salvation as adoption, we see the amazing grace of God. The legal aspect of adoption takes us from rags to riches. It takes us from being destitute and empty, to being filled with all the blessings of heaven. The relational aspect also shows us the amazing grace of God. God has many children, but

when we describe them by their conduct and character, we see that they are very often disobedient, rebellious, self-willed, and stubborn children—runaways even. Yet, God claims them as His children.

Being children who are loved does not mean only provision, but also chastening. In this, too, we see the grace of our Father. This chastening is necessary for God's adopted children, exactly because they are naturally rebellious. When God chastens us, we should take this as a proof of our adoption. "If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons.... For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth" (Heb. 12:6-7).

When we confess that we are the children of God, we are not, first of all, saying something about ourselves. Rather we are confessing the graciousness of the Father in receiving us, and the wonder of redemption in Jesus Christ.

God's grace is also revealed in the name "Lord." Jesus is our Lord because He redeemed or bought us. From what? From bondage, not only the bondage of Satan, and not only from the death our sin deserves, but also from the bondage and power of our sinful selves. To what? To be His possession, that is, to belong to Him in life and death, to come under His love and care. With what? There is a price He paid. Not the price of money. Money talks, but not when you are talking to God. The price He paid was His own death, the price of His own precious blood.

Why did He do this? Because He counted the souls of His own, the souls of sinners, more precious than His own life. Don't you see His grace in this?

### Questions for Discussion

1. What are the two kinds of sonship? How do they differ? How are they similar?
2. What is unique about the Sonship of Jesus?
3. What does it mean that Jesus is the "only begotten" Son of God? Is this different than saying He is the "only" Son of God?
4. When did Jesus become the Son of God?
5. How are we the sons of God?
6. Whose children are we by nature? Can you find proof for this in the Bible?
7. Find Scripture passages that show that believers have the right to inherit God's blessings as His true sons.
8. Explain what is meant by the "bondage" of sin and Satan.
9. What does it mean, for your life, that Jesus is your Lord?
10. Show the grace of God in the name "Only Begotten Son of God."
11. Show the grace of God in the name "Lord."



## NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

## MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

### School Activities

The students of Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI invited parents, grandparents, friends, and supporters to their Science Night

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

Friday evening, February 17. This year's theme was, "Body of Evidence: Made in His Image," an evening of investigation into the science of the human body.

Psalm 139:14 says, "I will praise thee: for I am fearfully and wonderfully made." "Fearfully and Wonderfully Made" is a program at Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville,

MI, designed to teach children about various handicaps and how children with these disabilities cope with them. It also helps our children understand that they each have a purpose in the body of Christ. They don't have to be the best at everything to be crucial to the body; each child has his unique gifts. The goal is to help everyone

know and care for the person behind the disability, and to create a climate in which students feel at ease with one another's differences. Areas covered this year included blindness, hearing impairment, cognitive impairment, motor and orthopedic disabilities, learning disabilities, chronic conditions, serious illness, bullying, and autism. One of these areas is presented each year to students at their specific age-comprehension level. The program hoped to emphasize that although some children and adults may appear different, they are still basically the same as everyone else. The Fearfully and Wonderfully Made presentation, including a chapel service, was held on February 3 at Heritage.

We also include here that the students of Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI took up their annual Christmas collection back in December. This year's collection will be used toward the upcoming High School computer lab at the Loveland, CO PR Christian School. We thought this would be a good way to remind our readers that the construction of this school continues. If you are interested in the progress of the building, go to [LovelandPRC.org](http://LovelandPRC.org) to updates.

### Sister-Church Activities

With joy and thanksgiving to God, we share with you the news that the Council of the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, NI has approved baptism in the Limerick Reformed Fellowship in Limerick City, the Republic of Ireland (a mission field of Covenant). This

is a significant development for Covenant and Limerick and an evidence of God's covenant faithfulness and mercy wherein He promises to be our God and the God of our children after us (Gen. 17:7; Acts 2:39).

### Congregation Activities

On Saturday, February 17, Rev. R. Kleyn, pastor of the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA, spoke by invitation on "The Importance and Use of Confessions/Catechisms in the Life of the Church" at "Aspire 12," an annual conference hosted in Spokane by Faith Bible Church.

The Activity Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC invited their congregation to help choose Bible verses to apply to five walls in their church building. The committee was looking for suitable texts for their Nursery, their Library, the Council Room, their East entryway, and a back hallway. The Activity Committee planned on reviewing all the entries and choosing three verses for each wall. The three top choices for each wall will be placed in the April edition of Hudsonville's *Closer Look*, where the congregation will then vote for their top choice for each location.

The Fellowship Club of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI planned a church breakfast for Saturday, February 11. Donations were accepted to cover cost, and any donations given above their cost were given to the Young People's Society for convention expenses.

The members of the Heritage PRC in Sioux Falls, SD were invited to go snow-tubing at Great Bear on

February 7, and the Hudsonville, MI congregation was invited to have some fun on Saturday, February 11, sliding at Charlie's Dump—which isn't as bad as it sounds. Legend has it that this particular site, now a park with a nice hill, was the site of a former dump, and the unofficial name has sort of stuck over the years. There is no visible trash to avoid while going downhill.

Rev. D. Holstege, with his wife and family, planned to travel, D.V., to Singapore on February 29 and return on March 26. The Consistory of the First PRC in Holland, MI released Rev. Holstege to teach and preach for the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore at the request of our denomination's Contact Committee.

### Young People's Activities

The congregation of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada was asked by their Young People's Society to reserve Friday, February 10, for a special evening. That night the young people hosted a Black Tie Dinner at Central Alberta Christian High School.

The Young People of the Hull, IA PRC hosted a soup supper on Saturday evening, February 18, at the Hull Community Building. There was also a reminder for the congregation to check out the Service Table at the soup supper. The young people had available for purchase that night "service" certificates for varying services, such as babysitting, yard work, etc.

The young people of the Crete, IL PRC planned an ice-skating outing for Saturday, February 4. They

met at Crete PRC in the afternoon and went ice skating in downtown Chicago, with pizza afterwards.

The young people of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL organized a Young People's Game Night on Feb-

ruary 3 for their congregation. In addition to some friendly competition over board games, delicious ice cream sundaes and a blessed time of fellowship were also promised.

### Minister Activities

Rev. C. Spronk, pastor of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL, declined the call he was considering to become the next pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC. 

## ANNOUNCEMENTS

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Loveland PRC express their Christian sympathy to Kris and Jaime Campbell and family in the death of her mother,

**MRS. CYNTHIA HAWK,**

and to Doug Abel in the death of his father,

**MR. DONALD ABEL.**

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Pastor Steven Key, President  
Victor Solanyk, Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Doon PRC express their Christian sympathy to fellow members Rev. and Tricia Smit and their family in the passing away of their father, father-in-law, and grandfather,

**MR. DAVID DYKSTRA.**

"One thing have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to inquire in his temple" (Psalm 27:4).

Rev. David Overway, President  
Perry VanEgdom, Clerk

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Hope PRC Adult Fellowship Society of Redlands, CA expresses sincere Christian sympathy to Mr. Jon Volkoff in the passing of his dear mother,

**JEAN DOROTHY VOLKOFF.**

May the LORD give him peace and comfort in his loss. "The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous; but the LORD delivereth him out of them all" (Psalm 34:18, 19).

Ed Karsemeyer, Vice-president  
Trudi Hopkins, Secretary

### Notice

■ The *Standard Bearer* Index Volumes 1-87 is now available in a digital version. The cost is \$10 and it can be purchased at the RFPA website ([www.rfpa.org](http://www.rfpa.org)), by calling the RFPA office at 616-457-5970, or email [paula@rfpa.org](mailto:paula@rfpa.org). (The index will no longer be available as a hardcopy.)

### Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2012, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Don Doezema  
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW  
Grandville, MI 49418

### Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC would like to express their Christian sympathy to John and Cheryl Vlietstra and family in the death of Cheryl's grandfather,

**WILLIAM HOEKSTRA.**

May the family find comfort in the words found in Revelation 21:3-4: "And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain; for the former things are passed away."

Rev. Michael DeVries, President  
Tom Kiel, Clerk

### Teacher needed

■ Covenant Christian High School in Grand Rapids, MI is seeking applications to fill a full-time position in the Academic Support program for the 2012-13 school year. A teaching degree or experience in education and working with young people with learning difficulties is preferred. Please contact Mr. Rick Noorman (616-453-5048) at [ricknoorman@gmail.com](mailto:ricknoorman@gmail.com) or Mr. Tom Newhof (949-5857) at [tjnewhof@preinnewhof.com](mailto:tjnewhof@preinnewhof.com).