

The Standard Bearer

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Receiving God's Creatures with Thanksgiving

“For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

I Timothy 4:4, 5

The relatively new Christians at Ephesus, where Timothy was serving as pastor, faced various errors. The devil is always attacking and seeking to divide! And he likes to make sinful extremes very appealing and seem so right. He has special delight in disturbing those who are young in the faith—such as were the saints at Ephesus. But thanks be to God for using these efforts of the devil as His way of bringing His children to greater spiritual maturity.

Some of the relatively young Christians at Ephesus yielded to Satan's deceptions and concluded that it was good (and even necessary) to renounce all earthly things for the sake of their pursuit of the heavenly. They believed that holiness is found in abstaining from certain things that they judged to be evil in themselves. The examples given by Paul are: marriage and certain foods. Some today might add: certain clothes, alcohol,

the use of Facebook, and such like. The list of things judged improper for a Christian was short for some. For others it was a very long list!

Paul knew the people well. He had ministered there at Ephesus for a few years. And he was well aware of Satan's efforts to bring confusion and division wherever the Christian faith is found. Notice that he informs Timothy not to be surprised at these attacks, for God's Spirit, through preaching and inspired letters, had warned that in the latter times some would apostatize from the faith. Further, the Spirit identified the attackers as seducing spirits and devils (4:1).

Then, by the inspiration of the same Spirit, the apostle advises his spiritual son Timothy how to instruct the saints with regard to these devilish attacks.



Paul's advice consists of two important points. First, “every creature of God is good.” This was God's judgment after He had created everything: “And God saw every thing that He had made, and behold, it was very good” (Gen. 1:31). The good God created all things, and His work was good. And when Paul now writes this to Timothy, it is clear that the entrance of sin into the world does not change this. God's creatures are still

Rev. VanOverloop is pastor of Grace Protestant Reformed Church in Standale, Michigan.

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Editorial Office

Prof. Russell J. Dykstra
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Wyoming, MI 49418
dykstra@prca.org

Business Office

Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: 616-457-5970
FAX: 616-457-5980
tim@rfpa.org

Church News Editor

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave
Hudsonville, MI 49426
benjwig@juno.com

New Zealand Office

Standard Bearer
c/o Mr. B. VanHerck
66 Fraser St
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

United Kingdom Office

c/o Mrs. Alison Graham
27 Woodside Road
Ballymena, BT42 4HX
Northern Ireland
alisongraham2006@
hotmail.co.uk

Rep. of Ireland Office

c/o Mr. Samuel Watterson
11, The Laurels
Briarfield, Castletroy
Co. Limerick, Ireland

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good. The fall into sin did not essentially change the creatures.

Therefore, every creature is good. Paul uses the present tense. It was the case at creation. It continued to be true in Paul's day. And it remains true in our day. The reason is that sin is not in things, but in the heart of man. Real defilement is not physical, but spiritual and moral. Jesus taught this when He said, "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man" (Mark 7:15). Jesus explained to His disciples, "out of the heart of men proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things come from within, and defile the man" (Mark 7:21-23).

It is because every creature is good that Paul speaks of thanksgiving!

The second part of Paul's advice is that the Spirit declares that every creature of God is fit for use by believers. They are to be received, not rejected (I Tim. 4:3), and to be enjoyed, for the living God "giveth us richly all things to enjoy" (I Tim. 6:17b). Sin is not in things, just as grace is not in things. Rain and sunshine in the right amounts, health and wealth, do not indicate, in themselves, divine love and favor. And sin and divine wrath are not in tornadoes, typhoons, cancer, or other things man judges to be bad. Good and evil are not in the creatures.

So we are taught by the Spirit to say, with important qualifications, that every creature is to be received. As any creature can be received to one's spiritual hurt, so any creature can be received to one's spiritual benefit and good. Again, good and evil are *not* in the creatures. In the new dispensation God has not forbidden the fruit of any tree, nor has He declared some creatures to be unclean. In fact, to show this to be the case, God even commanded Peter to eat what God had before said was unclean, declaring that God now had cleansed

it (cf. Acts 10:10-15). And Paul is "persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself" (Rom. 14:14). Further, Paul declares that "all things indeed are pure" (Rom. 14:20). Every creature is good, to be received and enjoyed!



The right manner to receive every creature is "with thanksgiving."

Paul had just told Timothy that the devil would use some professing Christians to seduce into apostasy (4:1). These people might be well-meaning and well-intentioned, but the Spirit nevertheless identifies such activity in very harsh terms: their activity is "seducing"; they spread a teaching which is "of devils"; and they speak "lies in hypocrisy." To teach and practice the conviction that certain creatures of God are inherently evil must be judged today with the same harshness. This form of legalism is very serious.

Paul wants Timothy and the Christians at Ephesus to know that such thinking is seductive. It seduces because it takes the mind away from true worship; from charity out of a pure heart and faith unfeigned (1:5); from godliness (1:7, 8; 3:15; 6:3); and from godly edifying, which is in faith (1:4, 19 with Rom. 14:15-19).

Paul instructs Timothy and the Ephesian Christians in the correct view. We are to see that God created each creature "to be received" as from God's hand, with the purpose of using it for

His glory. This makes all of God's creatures to be gifts from Him. And this makes the creatures subservient to man, to be used by man for God's glory.

The right way to receive God's creatures is with "thanksgiving," that is, in a conscious attitude of gratefulness. It acknowledges God to be the Giver of everything that comes our way. This makes us stewards of all that we are and of all that we have. *The gift of God is Christ Jesus, who "came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1:15; II Cor. 9:15).* The attitude of thanksgiving praises and extols God in all His glorious virtues, and leads us to use His gifts to His glory and praise (cf. 1:17 and 6:15, 16).

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A heart of thanksgiving is so crucial for godliness. It frees one from all bitterness. Bitterness is that inner sourness that is caused by an attitude of coveting and jealousy because we believe that we have not received what we think is owed to us. Thanksgiving enables one to have the great gain of godliness with contentment (6:6).




The ability to receive God's creatures with thanksgiving is achieved by sanctifying them "by the word of God and prayer."

God's creatures are to be "sanctified." The activity of just using them (over against abstaining from using them) is not sufficient. Use or non-use, in itself, is not enough. The use and the non-use must be to the glory of God. "He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks" (Rom. 14:6). "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31). This puts the use or non-use of everything into the realm of the spiritual. Strive to use every creature for Him, and not in a self-centered way. To do this we must learn how God would have us use the creatures He is pleased to give to us.

This is going to put us into the Word of God and on our knees in prayer. It is in God's Word that we learn God's purpose for His creatures. And it is in

God's Word that we learn how God would have His creatures to be used. Colossians 3:17 tells us how we are to sanctify God's creatures: "And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him." The Bible identifies us as redeemed kings of God's creation in the service of God. So use each creature of God in His service. Specifically, Scripture declares that marriage is God's institution, it is honorable (Gen. 2; Heb. 13:4), and it is a picture of the relationship God establishes with His elect. Scripture declares that meats are not to be rejected out of hand, as if there is holiness in not tasting (Col. 2:16-23), but they are to be used as gifts from God.

In addition to the Word of God, we are to use prayer to sanctify our use of God's creatures. Prayer is a coming to God in order to confer with Him. It is a walking close to God so that we can sense the righteousness that God requires of His redeemed children, which inner righteousness exceeds the external righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). It is a living awareness of God and of His fellowship with us whenever we use one of His creatures. And then prayer will be the way we express our need for God's help and blessing so that we can and do use His creatures correctly, namely, to His glory.

Let us use the occasion of a national Thanksgiving Day to be a God-given opportunity to use prayerfully God's creatures to His glory and for our enjoyment. May God bless! 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

Harold Camping, Yet Again (3)

At the conclusion of our last article we stated that Harold Camping's foolish date

Previous article in this series: November 1, 2011, p. 52.

setting was not the worst of his evils, serious though that was and is.

There are others even worse.

Before enumerating some of these evils, we would set forth what we consider to be the central evil of

which Harold Camping has become guilty, namely, the devilish mischief of working to sever believers from the church of the past, or, if you will, from the "Church of All Ages," with her rich heritage.

This is but another way of saying that Camping has become the tool of Satan to sever Christ's church from the work of the Holy Spirit as He worked in the church of the past.

Which is another way of saying, Harold Camping has in grievous pride fallen prey to setting himself up as a cult-style leader, producing yet another 'Christian' sect.

We would refrain from saying that this was Camping's intention at the beginning when he left the Christian Reformed Church in the late 1980s and set up his own radio ministry and quasi-church group. But this is what has developed. And it has done so exactly because Camping cut himself off from the church institute as that church goes back through the ages, and from the oversight of its Christ-ordained officebearers. Laying aside all writings and commentaries of by-gone theologians (and advising his listeners to do likewise) in order to study the Bible completely on his own, thus freeing himself (cutting himself adrift!) from all previous insights and explanations, Harold Camping fell snare to the Devil, and became, however unwittingly, another one of Satan's tools to lead many astray.

Harold Camping is a case study for what no student of the Scriptures must ever do, no matter how grieved he may be with apostasy that he sees in so many of the churches of our day. Believers must not allow themselves to be tempted to live apart from Christ's church institute and on their own in an autonomous, independent way. If

they do, the fate that has snared Harold Camping will become their own. They will be susceptible exactly to what the apostle Paul warns about in Ephesians 4, namely, being "...carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive" (v. 14).

That said, we point out that almost all of Harold Camping's errors feed into the evil(s) we have

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described above, beginning with the error of his astonishing denial of the perspicuity of the Scriptures.

This is no little evil.

We call it an "astonishing denial" because one would think that a Bible teacher who instructs his students to study the Bible directly, leaving aside the explanations of all other men (that is, other than Harold Camping!), would maintain that they can do this on the basis of the perspicuity of Scripture, namely its clarity in itself and its being understandable to the common, unordained reader. After all, all believers have the Holy

Spirit, who comes to enable them to read and understand.

But not so. Camping is adamant. "Unfortunately, the concept of the perspicuity of Scripture, which is very commonly taught in our day, is completely contrary to the Bible" (*Wheat and Tares*, p. 59).

This is completely contrary, of course, to the position of the Reformers and the teaching of the confessions (cf. Belgic Confession, Art. 5).

But such plays directly into Camping's hands and the dependence of others upon Camping's own privately-arrived-at interpretations of various texts. In the end, not all believers are able to discern the mysteries concealed in the Bible; in fact, most cannot. That discernment is given only to a select few. And Harold Camping has concluded that he is numbered amongst those select few, led as he is by the Holy Spirit to decipher Scripture by means of allegory (one man determining that some biblical thing mysteriously symbolizes some other spiritual reality) and mathematical calculations (understanding the numerical value of certain words that then illuminate other prophetic words), to unlock biblical secrets to the New Testament church.

Which means what?

That the 'select few' to whom the deep truths of Scripture that Christ's church needs so badly in these last days ends up being just a 'select one.' Camping alone is able to unravel the mysteries hidden in Scripture that believers need to know if they are to live in accordance with the will of God.

Into such a position Camping has placed himself by denying the perspicuity of Scripture. There is none who can challenge his fanciful discoveries. After all, many things in Scripture are obscure to all, that is, to all other than himself.

Will twenty-first century Christendom know “what the Spirit saith to the churches”? Then it behooves them all to listen to Harold Camping, who alone is able to unravel the mysteries hidden in the prophets and apostles until this present time.

Do not talk to me about how humble and meek this self-promoting Bible teacher is!



The other great evil we must touch upon, which without question is the chief evil of all, is Camping’s teaching that the end of the twentieth century brought an end to the church age.

Camping set forth this supposedly biblically-based discovery in a book entitled *The End of the Church Age...and After* (Family Stations, Inc., 2002). In it he calls believers to withdraw from the church institute, gather in small house groups, study the Bible on their own, and, most importantly of all, divest themselves of all preachers and officebearers, none of whom could be trusted anymore, all of whom have become apostate and are the Devil’s tools to lead believers astray when it comes to biblical teachings.

Sad to say, many across the States and elsewhere did just that, and by

the thousands. Our own former congregation in New Jersey was hurt by this ‘prophetic announcement.’ New attendees who were being instructed with a view to joining the congregation suddenly stopped attending.

Why?

They were faithful listeners to Harold Camping. They heard him declare that the church age had come to an end, Christ’s return in judgment was near at hand, and those who did not “flee [from Jerusalem’s temple] into the mountains”

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(which Camping declared meant fleeing from the church institute—cf. Matt. 24:15) would be destroyed when Christ’s judgments fell upon the church institute, now apostate in all her forms and under Satan’s rule.

Camping’s basic line of reasoning is that New Testament church history almost exactly parallels Old Testament church history. As God judged and destroyed both Israel

and Judah for their apostasy, and especially for the sin of setting up high places of idolatry and then not casting them down (cf. I Kings 13:32, I Kings 22:43), so Christ has determined to destroy the apostate church of the New Testament in both its Roman Catholic and Protestant forms for this sin.

Rome has its idols and “high places,” namely, images of saints that it has worshiped together with a host of man-made traditions. For this she came under divine judgment in the sixteenth century. At the time of the Reformation, believers were commanded to leave Rome, fleeing for their spiritual lives.

So, according to Camping, it has come to pass with contemporary Protestantism.

It too has become guilty of idolatry as well as having its “high places.”

Orthodox Protestantism itself in time became guilty of paying too much homage to certain highly regarded theologians. Ever hear of Calvin and Calvinism? Christians calling themselves after the name of a mere man!

What is that but idolatry!

And some would even go so far as to prefer the words (biblical explanations) of Calvin over against those of Harold Camping! Can you imagine!

Harold Camping cannot.

Of course, if you were to prefer the words of Camping on various texts to those of all others, Calvin included, the charge of idolatry would suddenly evaporate. Now one has suddenly become biblical and is thinking for himself.

What it comes down to is this, as far as Camping and his followers are concerned, God's Word and Camping's interpretation of it are basically one and the same thing!

But even more serious is the charge that Camping brings against Protestantism concerning "high places," namely, identifying those "high places" with the great Christian confessions and creeds.

It is here that the evil into which Harold Camping has fallen comes to full expression.

Over time, Camping, who once was a Reformed man claiming to be committed to the confessions, convinced himself that it is exactly subscription to the great Christian confessions that has brought Protestantism into spiritual bondage, rendering her thoroughly apostate, ready for judgment.

Due to her high esteem for the confessions, Protestantism's sin against God is parallel to that of Old Testament Judah with her high places.

To prove his case, Camping turns to II Corinthians 10:5. In this passage the apostle Paul describes the task of the gospel to be that of "... casting down imaginations, and every high thing [!] that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God."

In one of the most absurd and fanciful bits of exegesis ever concocted, Camping declares that the historic Christian creeds are to be numbered amongst these "high things" condemned by II Corinthians 10, which "high things" are parallel to the Old Testament "high places" (it all hinges on the similarity of the word "high"), and so fall

under the interdict of the apostle and the disapproval of God.

After Camping left the Christian Reformed Church in 1988 and began to develop his own peculiar views, he came under criticism for teaching things contrary to the Reformed creeds. And thus Camping's counter charge that Protestantism has long been guilty of elevating the words of mere men (the confessions) to the level of God's Word. It suddenly occurred to Camping, as his teachings began to deviate from those of the confessions, that Orthodox Protestantism for centuries had gone in the direction of setting up "high places" that "exalted [themselves] against the knowledge of God [that is, as found only in the Bible]"!

Mind you, the historic Christian creeds, the work of God-fearing, Bible-believing men, led by the Spirit of truth Himself, written to refute devilish heresies that perverted God's Word, are identified by Camping as altars constructed to idols, implying that in them are doctrines that are the work of the Devil himself.

In our judgment this comes perilously close to the sin against the Holy Spirit. It is no small matter to call that which is the product of the Holy Spirit Himself, as He led Christ's church into a defense of biblical truth over against the devil's lies, itself to be the work of the devil and a form of idolatry.

It will not do for Camping's loyal followers to protest that Camping is not calling the *creeds* themselves idols and the work of the devil, but only the improper elevating of them to the status of God's Word to be idolatry.

The simple fact is that when the apostle in II Corinthians 10 speaks of "imaginations" and "high things," he is not speaking of things that are themselves good, and that, like Moses' serpent of brass, were later abused and improperly exalted, but the apostle is referring to ideas and teachings that are *themselves* evil, man-centered, devil conceived, and contrary to the Word of God (as the altars in the high places themselves were!).


For Camping to put the great historic confessions of the church into such a category, and to do so because they can be used to expose any number of his teachings as a departure from the historic Christian faith, is to do despite to the work of the Spirit Himself, say what his defenders will.

Again I say, do not talk to me about how humble this self-promoting Bible teacher is. Harold Camping has much to be accountable for.

To bring such allegations against the great creeds of the Christian faith and to sever oneself from Christ's church past and present is serious enough.

But Harold Camping's evil is compounded. He has not only severed himself from Christ's church, he has also called and persuaded thousands of others to do likewise.

He has much for which to answer.

Because this matter of membership in the church institute is one of the great issues facing Christ's church in these last days, we intend to devote one more article to Camping and this issue. 

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (15)

The Reformed (Amillennial) Critique of Postmillennialism

In light of these basic elements of postmillennial eschatology, Reformed amillennialism renders its critique of postmillennialism. The critique applies to both the Puritan and the Christian Reconstruction forms of postmillennialism.

This critique does not merely fault postmillennialism for a few, minor mistakes. Rather, it judges postmillennialism to be grievous error concerning the important biblical doctrine of the last things. The practical consequences of the error both for the church and for the Christian are injurious.

The right Reformed critique of postmillennialism will certainly not recognize postmillennialism as a legitimate eschatological option in Reformed churches, as is the popular notion in Reformed circles today. If amillennialism is the truth concerning the last days (and it is, as has been demonstrated earlier in this series), postmillennialism is a lie. Its message of a coming “golden age” in history, prior to the return of Christ, is false. Because postmillennialism makes the “golden age” of the millennium, rather than the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the body, the blessed hope of the church, postmillennialism is guilty of nothing less than the subversion of the church’s hope.

But it is by hope—the expectation of the resurrection of our body—that we are saved (Rom. 8:24).

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

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It is by hope—the longing for the bodily coming of Christ—that we are motivated to live a holy life in the world (I John 3:3). It is hope—the anticipation of being glorified together with Christ at His coming—that enables us to endure the sufferings of this present age (Rom. 8:17).

Touch the hope of the church and Christian, as postmillennialism certainly does, and you touch our patience in suffering, our struggle to live godly and purely in a wicked world, and our salvation.

The Victory of the Messianic Kingdom

The basic criticism of postmillennialism by Reformed amillennialism is that postmillennialism misconstrues the victory of the Messianic kingdom in the present age—the age of the gospel, the time between the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost and the second coming of Christ.

The victory of the New Testament Messianic kingdom is a fundamental tenet of postmillennialism, if it is not *the* fundamental tenet. The postmillennial theologians insist that the issue between themselves and amillennialism is simply whether the kingdom of Jesus Christ will be victorious in history. They rail against amillennialism as defeatist and pessimistic.

The postmillennial error concerning the victory of the Messianic kingdom is twofold.

Earthly Victory

First, postmillennialism conceives the victory of Christ’s kingdom in this age as carnal. The victory

will consist of superior numbers: the number of the converted must exceed the number of the ungodly. It will consist of earthly power: the saints will possess and exercise political authority and physical might over the nations. The victory will consist of earthly peace: no wars between nations, and no civil unrest within a nation. It will consist of earthly prosperity: crime, poverty, sickness, and death will be severely curtailed; all humans will enjoy physical health, material riches and comforts, security of home and property, and long life.

Postmillennialism's shorthand for this carnal victory of the kingdom of Christ is "the Christianizing of society and of the world." "Christianizing" means that the word of God—gospel and law—will so influence and even dominate all aspects of the life and culture of nations that they conform, at least outwardly, to the will of Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture. Governments order national life according to the will of Christ; all the schools teach and discipline according to the will of Christ; the will of Christ regulates the media; if, during the millennium, there is still need for courts of law, the system of justice functions according to the Bible's teachings of righteousness.

Postmillennialism does not deny that the power of this fleshly victory of Christ's kingdom is the Holy Spirit working by the gospel. Indeed, postmillennialism in the Reformed tradition insists on this spiritual power, although the understanding of the spiritual power is not always sound. The Puritans and their disciples emphasize revivals. Christian Reconstruction stresses the civil laws of the Old Testament. But the victory is, and must be, earthly in nature. If the kingdom of Christ does not take this earthly form, it is not victorious in history, but defeated. Apart from this carnal triumph, King Jesus is a failure.

On this conception of the victory of the Messianic kingdom, hitherto the kingdom of Jesus Christ has been soundly defeated. It will be victorious yet in the future, according to postmillennialism. The "golden age" lies before us. But the past two thousand years have been a dismal history of defeat. The beginning of the twenty-first century is disastrous for Christ's kingdom.

Never in new covenant history has the kingdom of Christ converted a majority of the human race. Never

has it "Christianized" any nation, much less the world of nations. Always, heresies and schisms have troubled it. Always, the ungodly have persecuted its citizens, if not by torture and killing, then by mockery and reproach. With the rare exception, the rulers of nations have been, and are today, ungodly men and women. Not the Spirit of Christ, but the spirit of the age, which is the spirit of antichrist, has dominated the way of life of the nations. The culture of all earthly societies in which the saints find themselves, whether the Philippines, Northern Ireland, or North America, consists of "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life" (I John 2:16).

Spiritual Victory

According to Scripture and the Reformed faith, however, Christ's kingdom has always been, and is today, victorious in the world. From Pentecost to the present, the Messianic kingdom has conquered. For the victory of the Messianic kingdom is spiritual. Just as the weapons of the warfare of the kingdom—the preaching of the gospel of the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ—are not carnal, but spiritual (II Cor. 10:4), so also is the victory of the kingdom spiritual.

The victory of the kingdom of Christ consists of the translating of the elect citizens out of the kingdom of darkness in all nations into the kingdom of God's dear Son (Col. 1:13). It consists of Christ's rule in these citizens by His "Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to [Him]" (Heid. Cat., Q&A 123). It consists of the confession by the citizens that Jesus Christ is Lord (I Cor. 12:3).

The victorious coming of the kingdom is Christ's gathering, preservation, and increase of His church throughout New Testament history (Heid. Cat., Q&A 123).

The power of the victorious kingdom of Christ is the Holy Spirit working through the gospel of the cross of Christ (Zech. 4:6; Heid. Cat., LD 31).

The peace of this victorious kingdom is reconciliation with God by the pardon of sins and friendly relations with God and His people in the way of a holy life (Rom. 5:1; James 4:4, 8).

The prosperity of the victorious Messianic kingdom is spiritual health, the treasures of salvation laid up for

the citizens in heaven, and eternal life (Matt. 6:19-21).

Such is the victory of King Jesus and His kingdom throughout New Testament history that all things, including wars, natural calamities, and even the opposition to His kingdom, serve the interests and advance of His kingdom. When the risen and exalted Lamb opens the first of the seals of the book of the counsel of God concerning the titanic struggle of the kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the beast in New Testament history, the white horse runs. “He that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer” (Rev. 6:1, 2). The white horse with its rider is the preaching of the gospel of the kingdom of Christ, by which the kingdom is established and extended; by which the citizens of the kingdom are gathered and preserved (and restored when they fall); and by which the kingdom of the beast is withstood.

The white horse runs, invincibly, and, therefore, the kingdom of Christ comes victoriously. About this, there is no question.

To the running of the white horse, establishing the kingdom of Christ in the world, everything else in the counsel of God is subservient. First out of the counsel into New Testament history is the running of the white horse. The victory of the gospel and its kingdom in history is absolute.

That this victory of the kingdom of Christ in history is not earthly, however, the entire book of Revelation is the plainest proof, as the church has always understood. Other horses run with the white horse—the red horse of war; the black horse of economic disparity—great wealth and desperate poverty—with the inevitable social struggle between the haves and the have-nots; and the pale green horse of sickness and death (Rev. 6:3-8).

The book of Revelation forewarns the citizens of the kingdom of Christ that Christ establishes and extends His kingdom in a wicked world upon which the judgments of God are always falling.

Especially does Revelation impress upon believers and their children the truth that the kingdom of Christ is always opposed by the kingdom of the beast (Rev. 11:7; 12:12-17; 13; 16; 20:1-10). Throughout

New Testament history, the citizens of the kingdom of Christ are “slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they [hold]” (Rev. 6:9-11). Rather than history’s concluding with a thousand years of the earthly dominion of the church, as postmillennialism dreams, towards the very end, shortly before the second coming of Christ, the beastly, antichristian kingdom will overcome the two witnesses to the truth of God in Jesus Christ and kill them (Rev. 11:7). Revelation 20:7-9 represents this brief, merely earthly “overcoming” of the kingdom of Christ by the kingdom of Satan as the battle of Gog and Magog against the true church.

Everywhere, the New Testament Scriptures confirm the testimony of Revelation that the victory of the kingdom of Christ and its citizens is not carnal, but spiritual. Those men and women to whom the Father is pleased to give the kingdom are always a “little flock,” not the vast majority of the human race (Luke 12:32).

In the world, the disciples of Christ will always have tribulation, which does not, however, disturb, much less destroy, their peace and joy. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world” (John 16:35).

Even though the believers and their children—the citizens of the Messianic kingdom—are always killed for the sake of Christ, they are “more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:36, 37). They are conquerors, indeed, more than conquerors, not *in spite of* tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword, not *after* these severe afflictions, because the members of the church finally outnumber their adversaries and dominate them for a thousand years, but “*in all these things*” (Rom. 8:37).

Postmillennialism cannot understand, and refuses to receive, this plain, prominent, powerful testimony of Scripture to the victory of the Messianic kingdom in an ungodly, antichristian, hostile, persecuting, and seemingly triumphant world.

Because the biblical victory of the Messianic kingdom is spiritual.

Whereas for postmillennialism the victory is carnal.



Prayer

Not everyone can pray. Nor is every prayer heard (Is. 1:15). Prayer is a distinctly holy and covenantal activity. Prayer is that act of faith whereby a child of God communicates with his covenant Lord, worships Him, petitions Him for what he needs, and thanks Him for what he receives. Prayer and thanksgiving are friends. One cannot pray without thanks, for God gives His grace and Holy Spirit to those only who are continually thankful for them (L.D. 45). Nor can one give thanks without prayer, for it is the chief part of thankfulness. But prayer is not chiefly giving thanks. It also consists of cries and groaning (Ps. 5:2; 38:9), supplication and intercession (Ps. 6:9; Jer. 27:18), confession and praise (Ps. 5:7; Dan. 9:4).


As an act of loving faith, prayer is addressed only to the one true God revealed in Scripture (Q&A 117). And He does not hear prayers to saints, other gods, or creatures. He that comes to God must believe that He is (Heb. 11:6), that He is great (II Sam. 7:22), is creator of heaven and earth (Is. 37:16), is God alone, and that He keeps covenant and mercy with His servants (I Kings 8:23). Significantly, therefore, most prayers in the Old Testament use His outstanding covenantal name. They are not addressed simply to God, but Jehovah, Jehovah-God, Jehovah of Israel, or Jehovah of hosts. And Jesus taught us to address this merciful, covenant-keeping God as Father (Matt. 6:9).

Prayer must be humble. God does not hear the hypocrite or pretentious (Luke 18:14; Matt. 6:6). He does not heed vanity or regard iniquity (Job 35:13; Ps. 66:18). To pray rightly, we must thoroughly know our need and misery, so that we humble ourselves before His divine majesty (Q&A 117). But this does not preclude confidence, for we must be fully persuaded that He will certainly hear us, although we are unworthy of it (Jer. 29:12), and that He does not hear us for our long prayers or repetitions (Matt. 6:7), but for Christ's sake grants what we ask in Jesus' name (John 16:26).

Petitions are an important part of prayer. He that comes to God must believe He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him (Heb. 11:6), or as Jesus put it, that

we will receive whatsoever we shall ask believing (Matt. 21:22). Believing, we must ask only for things He has commanded in His word (Q&A 117). He does not hear petitions for things contrary to His will or everything we desire. He requires that we ask for things *necessary* for body and soul (Q&A 118). And so Scripture records many such petitions, prayers for good (Jer. 14:11), peace (Jer. 29:7), deliverance from judgment (Num. 21:7), that our faith fail not (Luke 22:32), for God to hear us (I Kings 8:29), to look on our affliction (I Sam. 1:11), to spare us sickness or death (II Kings 4:34; 20:5), to deliver us from enemies (Neh. 4:9), and to lead us in the ways of righteousness (Ps. 5:8).

Being a distinctly covenantal activity, prayer is concerned with the needs of the entire family of God. Jesus taught us not simply to pray for ourselves personally, but to pray give *us* our daily bread, forgive *us* our debts, and deliver *us* from evil (Matt. 6:11-13). We must pray for the sins of the church (II Chron. 30:18), the pardon of foolish friends (Job 42:10), preachers for the whole harvest (Matt. 9:38), and that the kingdom and covenant be established forever to God's glory (II Sam. 7:26). And yet, even while asking God to observe the wickedness of our enemies (II Kings 19:16), we must also pray for them who despitefully use and persecute us (Matt. 5:44).

Prayer is necessary for a Christian (L.D. 45). It is necessary because God requires it as an expression of thanksgiving and fellowship, and because only He can provide what is necessary for body and soul. Everyone that is godly prays (Ps. 32:6). It is an activity of covenant children (I Sam. 3:10), mothers (I Sam. 1:10), fathers (Gen. 20:17), widows (Luke 2:36), and servants (Gen. 24:12). Ancient leaders, esteemed patriarchs, busy priests, faithful prophets, and mighty kings all prayed. Even the Son of God found it necessary to go often to some solitary place to pray (Matt. 14:23). How much more, then, we, who are weak and sinful! And so we must pray in the morning and when God may be found (Ps. 5:3; 32:6), pray that we enter not into temptation or faint not (Mark 13:33; Luke 18:1), pray without ceasing (I Thess. 5:17), and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to stand before Him (Luke 21:36). Let us, then, pray. 

Rev. Langerak is pastor of Southeast Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Scripture: Not the Rule for Doctrine and Life in the Protestant Church in the Netherlands (PKN)

An August 5, 2011 British Broadcast Company (BBC) article entitled “Dutch rethink Christianity for a doubtful world” reports the shameful apostasy of “the mainstream Protestant Church in the Netherlands.”¹

A merger with two other denominations took place in 2003, but the PKN is basically the old state church in the Netherlands. It is a denomination with a long history of apostasy. By 1834 it so manifested the marks of a false church (particularly by placing the faithful Reformed preacher Hendrik De Cock under discipline and deposing him unjustly from the ministry) that many left the denomination in a reformation movement known as the *Afscheiding*. In 1886 another group, known as the *Doleantie*, led by Abraham Kuyper, also left the denomination, because it had become corrupt in doctrine as well as in church government. Given its history, the PKN’s continuing downward spiral is not surprising. Not content with destroying her, the church’s archenemy, Satan, wants nothing more than to transform her into his own synagogue devoted to him in the service of iniquity. Recent events in the PKN demonstrate that Satan’s sinister transforming work in that denomination has advanced to the end stages.

The BBC article begins with an account of a so-called minister, Klaas Hendrikse, who does not believe in life after death. Hendrikse is quoted as saying, “Personally I have no talent for believing in life after death.... No, for me our life, our task, is before death.” Flagrant departure from the truth! But there is more. Hendrikse also “describes the Bible’s account of Jesus’s

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-14417362> (viewed September 12, 2011).

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

life as a mythological story about a man who may never have existed.” What about God? Well, Hendrikse wrote a book called “Believing in the *Non-Existent* God” (emphasis added). Unbelievable! An atheist serving as a pastor in a Protestant church! As in the days of Hophni and Phinehas, a son of Belial (Satan) claiming to be an official representative of God.

Hendrikse euphemistically says he has “no talent” for believing in biblical doctrines. The reality is that God has not given him faith to believe the Scriptures; he is an admitted unbeliever and has no business holding the office of minister in a Reformed church. As an unbeliever he despises God and His truths. What is hard to understand is why he would even want to be a minister. Why did he enter the ministry if he did not believe in the historical existence of Jesus Christ or in the eternal existence of God? If he did believe in the existence of Jesus or God when he entered the ministry, why does he stay in the ministry now that he no longer believes? Were it possible to lose my faith, the day I no longer believed in the existence of Jesus or of God is the day I would take up accounting, farming, or any other line of work outside the work of the ministry. An unbelieving accountant or farmer is as wicked as an unbelieving minister of course, but one would think a man who openly denies the existence of God would understand that the ministry is not the job for him. Maybe like Hophni and Phinehas he is in it for the salary and the benefits (what I Tim. 3:3 calls “filthy lucre”).

A wicked case. But not unique. Sadly, there are many others like Hendrikse in the PKN.

The BBC article reports that a “study by the Free University of Amsterdam found that one-in-six clergy in the PKN and six other smaller denominations was either agnostic or atheist.” One Hophni and one Phinehas wreaked havoc on the worship of God for Satan in Samuel’s day. Today thousands of Hophnis

and Phinehas are serving Satan's cause in the PKN.

The result is predictable. The result is that wickedness abounds in the PKN. The BBC article reports on a church in Amsterdam that uses "speed-dating" to attract people. The description is appalling. "As skimpily dressed girls began to appear in red-lit windows in the streets outside, visitors to the church moved from table to table to discuss love with a succession of strangers."

The article speaks of a young people's movement called Stroom West that is led by avowed unbelievers (they would not call themselves unbelievers of course, but that is what they are). This movement "focuses on people's personal search for God, not the church's traditional black-and-white answers." One of the leaders of Stroom West explains that the movement is not interested in teaching about heaven the same way the church did "2,000 years ago," or about the divinity of Jesus. Instead of confessing faith in the divinity of Jesus Christ or confessing the hope for eternal life in heaven, the young people who are part of Stroom West "write on plates the names of those things that prevent the earth from being heaven—cancer, war, hunger—and destroy them symbolically." Not satisfied with bringing *themselves* to "swift destruction" (II Peter 2:1), the unbelieving pastors target the church's *children*.

But the church, particularly the PKN, is content to leave the unbelieving pastors alone. Hendrikse's views were examined in an official "church meeting." The church did not rule that his views were heretical or call Hendrikse to repentance.

Why would a church not remove an openly unbelieving pastor from office?


The BBC article explains why.

The fundamental reason the PKN tolerates rank unbelief on the part of pastors (and its membership) is that it no longer uses the Bible as the standard for church government. Reformed churches recognize that Jesus Christ rules His church. Jesus Christ rules His church by His Word and Spirit. When a denomination uses the Bible as the standard for church government, for doctrine and life, it is submitting to the rule of King Jesus. But where the Bible is ignored and supplanted by some other standard, Jesus Christ is no longer ruling in that church. In the PKN Christ's Word is not the rule for doctrine. In the PKN Christ does not rule.

Man rules in the PKN. And that means Satan rules in the PKN. Hendrikse's beliefs were weighed against the beliefs of other men. The PKN judged that Hendrikse's "views were too widely shared among church thinkers for him to be singled out." Does Christ condone doubt about the existence of heaven and hell? The PKN said in effect, "Who cares what Christ says in the Bible. What is important is that there are other men in our denomination who agree with Hendrikse's views, and we will go by the authority of these other men." That is exactly how Satan wants the church to operate.

In some churches where the rule of the Bible is supplanted by man, men rule by majority. But the PKN seems to have developed beyond that. Members of the PKN who find that their views are not in accord with the majority seemingly need not fear they will be squashed by the majority. Agreement with the majority is not needed to have one's views validated. All that is needed is agreement with other "church thinkers." In other words the PKN practically allows each person to be a law unto himself. A member of Hendrikse's church is quoted as saying, "Here you can believe what you want to think for yourself, what you really feel and believe is true." Reminds one of Judges 21:25: "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes." Isn't what that church member said eerily similar to Judges 21:25? And he said it as if it were a good thing, that each person thinks or does what is right in his own eyes. The *devil* would agree.

What a sad history. In the 1800s the PKN drove faithful Reformed pastors out of its fellowship. Today it tolerates rank unbelief. The sole authority of Christ and His Word for faith and life has been rejected. When this happens, the church begins the slow but sure decent into apostasy. This is what Satan wants.

But Satan is not in control. Christ is. Churches are transformed into synagogues of Satan only when Christ in severe and just judgment for apostasy gives them over to Satan. This is a dreadful and serious warning against apostasy. But also a comforting sign for the faithful (II Thess. 2). Christ IS coming. 

The Creation and Fall of Man (4)

Man Created Good, Yet Able to Sin

Man by nature has an evil desire to blame God for his own wickedness. A married man, for example, who openly and unashamedly enjoys lusting after other women, might say to someone who objects, "I cannot deny the way the good Lord made me." Over against such vile statements we must confess that man was not a fornicator when God created him. Rather, God created man good.

Man was without sin at the beginning, yet it was possible for him to disobey God. At first he did not have an evil nature. Yet it was still possible for him to reject the word of God and to receive the judgment of death. For Christ this was and is not possible, but it was for Adam in that time period when he was without sin.

Man created good

God created man good, after His own image. We read that, at the end of the six days of creation, "God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Adam was created a good and righteous son, and he walked in complete obedience to his Father for awhile. Yet man failed to trust in God. Instead of listening to God, he listened to the devil, and received the just judgment of becoming like the devil to whom he had harkened.

Many, however, who profess to be Christians reject the biblical story concerning the creation and fall of man. Refusing to confess their original guilt, they insist that man has always committed evil deeds. Some, for example, say that man's wicked acts are to be explained by his having evolved from savage animals. Man, they say, has evolved into the kind of being he is today, without deserving an evil nature because of any sin that he has ever committed.

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

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This line of argumentation amounts to saying that God created man evil and perverse, and that therefore God Himself is really the ultimate author of man's sin. Such a teaching is clearly blasphemous. Yet from the very beginning, unbelieving man has desired to find some way to blame God for his own sin.


Over against such evil imaginations, we must proclaim the truth that Solomon confessed: "God hath made man upright; but they have sought out many inventions" (Eccl. 7:29a). Man really was upright at the beginning. But when he refused to listen to God, he fell from his excellency, so that he justly deserved to receive the evil nature he has today.

A good man that could sin and die

Although Adam was good and obedient for a while, it was possible for him to sin and then die. Even if he had lived in perfection for many years, it would have still been the case that he could have died at any time. To be sure, he would have continued to remain alive for as long as he remained obedient. But if he ever partook of the forbidden fruit, God would bring upon him the judgment of death. On the very day that he would eat of that fruit, he would die.

Such was the case with Adam on the day that God gave him the prohibition. And for as long as Adam remained obedient, things would have remained the same. He would continue to live during that time, yet he would know that at any moment he could die. All he would have to do would be to partake of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Before the fall, God did not promise Adam the immortality that we now have in Christ. Many have said that if Adam would have remained obedient for awhile, God would have eventually granted unto him a life that could not end. But to be unable to die, he would have to be unable to sin. Would that ever have been possible for man outside of Christ?

We will start by considering that question, Lord willing, next time. 

Jesus Our Savior

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 11

Question 29. Why is the Son of God called Jesus, that is, a Savior?

Answer. Because He saveth us, and delivereth us from our sins; and likewise, because we ought not to seek, neither can find salvation in any other.

Question 30. Do such then believe in Jesus the only Savior, who seek their salvation and welfare of saints, of themselves, or anywhere else?

Answer. They do not; for though they boast of Him in words, yet in deeds they deny Jesus the only deliverer and Savior; for one of these two things must be true, either that Jesus is not a complete Savior; or that they who by a true faith receive this Savior must find all things in Him necessary to their salvation.

If there is one thing that is plain from the Bible, it is this, that there is only one way of salvation for sinners. That way is through Jesus the Savior. Man is in a hopeless situation before a just God, who punishes sin with eternal death, and his only hope is that God provides the way of salvation. This is what God has done in sending His Son into the world.

The Name Jesus

In Matthew 1:21, concerning the child in Mary's womb, Joseph is told, "Thou shalt call his name, JESUS; for he shall save his people from their sins." This verse includes in it all the elements of the gospel of salvation through Jesus alone.

First, God provides the way of salvation. God has the right to name Mary's child, because He is the Father of that child. The child conceived in Mary's womb is God's creation and God's provision to man. What was impossible for man, God made possible in sending His Son into our flesh (Luke 1:37).

Second, in the name He gives this child, He shows that salvation is all His work. JESUS means literally, "Jehovah saves." Jesus, our Savior, is Jehovah Himself, the eternal and

unchanging I AM (John 8:58), conceived because of the faithfulness of Jehovah to His promises (Ex. 3:13-14).

Third, this name shows what kind of Savior Jesus is. Many, including the Jews in Jesus' day, look for a savior from political oppression, poverty, sickness, war, etc. But Jesus comes to save "his people from their sins." He does not come to deal with symptoms of sin, but with the cause of all man's woes, sin itself. He saves us from what sin deserves—eternal punishment in hell; from the effects of sin in our lives—guilt and misery; and from the power of sin over us—temptation. Not only does He save us from sin, but He brings us into a relationship of peace and friendship with God that will last to eternity in heaven (Rom. 5:1).

Fourth, this verse shows us that Jesus actually accomplishes what He came to do. It uses very definite language, He "shall" save His people. He did not come merely to make salvation a possibility for sinners, now leaving it to their choice as to whether they would be saved or not, but He came to secure salvation for them. In His death He actually paid for the sins of His sheep; He dealt a decisive blow to Satan, which broke his power forever; and He defeated the curse of death, liberating His people from the eternal punishment of hell and the curse of sin. There is power in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:7, 10, 12).

Fifth, this verse shows that Jesus' salvation was for

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

a definite group of people. It was not universal in its scope, but He came to save “His people” from their sins. These people are called elsewhere in Scripture the elect, His sheep, those given to Him of the Father, many, the true seed of Abraham, those who would believe, etc. He did not come to save all men (John 10:11, 26).

Sixth, this verse shows us how beautiful is the name “Jesus.” There is no other name like it, no other one in whom we can put our trust. Sin is horrible. Sin angers God. Sin brings man under the sense of God’s judgment. Sin brings shame and disgrace. Sin is destructive to human life. Sin has many awful consequences. Sin is so powerful and overwhelming. Sin brings death to people. Sin brings people to hell. Sin is inescapable for man. But Jesus comes to save His people from their sins.

The Only and Complete Savior

That Jesus is the only Savior means that no one else can do what He does as Savior. No sacrifices or religious service can save a person from the consequences of sin. No creature can make the payment that our sins deserve. No one can conquer the grave or overcome Satan but Him. As Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life: No man cometh to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

That Jesus is the complete Savior means that He is responsible for all of our salvation, every step along the way. From forgiveness, to new life, to faith, to repentance, to holy living, salvation is entirely His work.

He is the Savior *for* us, in the sacrifice He made on the cross as payment for our sins. This was entirely His work. He did not come into this world at our request, or as the result of human cooperation. He suffered alone on the cross, despised and forsaken of men, yes also of those for whom He died.

He is also Savior *in* us by His coming, in the Spirit, and taking up His abode in us. Because of the Spirit, who works the power of grace in us, we have new life, we see the kingdom of heaven, we understand eternal and spiritual realities, we desire to be right with God, and we put our faith in the sacrifice of Christ alone for salvation (John 3:3; I Cor. 2:14; Eph. 2:8; Acts 18:27).

He is also Savior *through* us. Every work that we

do that is pleasing to God, that is a demonstration of the fact that we are saved, is a fruit of His saving work. The salvation He has worked in us, He brings to light through what we do. He works both the willing and the doing (Phil. 2:13).

Jesus is the sovereign in our salvation. We owe all thanks to Him for what we have and for who we are. Without Him, we could do nothing (John 15:5).

Another Gospel

That Jesus is the only Savior has two important implications. The first is that this gospel needs to be preached very plainly and even boldly. It needs to be preached boldly because there is much opposition to this biblical truth, and it needs to be preached plainly because so many today have muddied the waters by making salvation a joint effort between Jesus and man, and that is not the gospel of the Scriptures.

What are we to think of those who trust—in whole or even in part—on something or someone other than Jesus for salvation? This is very common. In Jesus’ day men trusted themselves that they were righteous (Luke 18:9). People today do the same thing. They really believe that God will accept them, and that they will go to heaven, because they try to live a good life and because they have not committed any heinous crime. Or, today, people trust in others instead of, or in addition to, Jesus. Think of the thousands of people who trust in Mary or some other saint. And today this teaching is not only tolerated, but preached.

It is presented this way: “Yes, Jesus has done most of what you need for salvation. He has paid the price for the sins of all mankind. He has made salvation possible for you. But now you have to accept that. You have to make that salvation effectual to yourself by ratifying what Jesus has done. You have to do your part, on which the application of salvation hangs, by believing in Jesus. Jesus wants you to do this, but it’s up to you.”

What should we say about this? Well, there are two things to say.

First, anyone who teaches people to trust in something or someone other than Jesus is a false teacher. The one who preaches the gospel is a “steward of the mysteries of God” and must be “found faithful” (I Cor. 4:1-2). To preach that salvation depends on something

other than on Jesus alone is to pervert the gospel and to misdirect sinners. The preacher must point sinners to Jesus as the only and complete Savior, so that in repentance they let go of everything else, and trust in Jesus alone. To tell people to trust in something else is to give them a false hope. The minister who today preaches the gospel, as presented above, is preaching that Jesus is a partial savior—who wants you to do your part, and a weak savior—who wants to save you but cannot. That is not the Jesus of the Bible.

Second, anyone who trusts in something or someone other than Jesus is trusting in something that will not save him. A person who trusts himself or something else, as well as Jesus, does not really believe in Jesus. The Bible says that it is either one or the other—not both. Of salvation, the Bible says, “if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace” (Rom. 11:6). Grace cannot be mixed with human effort. The one excludes the other.

Trusting Jesus Alone

That Jesus is the only and complete Savior has a second implication, namely, that we must rely on Him only and completely for our all our salvation.

Very quickly we use this teaching to condemn others who have their theology wrong, but we are much more reluctant to see how this applies to ourselves. The truth about ourselves is that our faith is not perfect, and that often we trust in something other than Jesus, and so in practical ways deny this truth.

Salvation does not come by our being in a particular church, or by our having a certain man as our preacher. What we know, what we have done, or where we are at theologically cannot save us or unburden our conscience of sin. Our own will-power will not help us in breaking free from the power of sin. We need to be very careful in how we view our religious heritage, our knowledge, our spiritual achievements, and our resistance to temptation. If we are not grateful for grace alone, we will soon trust ourselves.

Trusting in Jesus only and completely means I will have a constant, personal humility, in which I recognize my total unworthiness and understand that my religious achievements are nothing to present to God for His accepting of me. I don't need me, I need Christ

alone! Paul says, “I count all things [my heritage, my religious achievements, my personal zeal] but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, ...and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, ...but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Phil. 3:8-9). A manifestation of true faith is not just the knowledge of sin, but it is the personal confession of one's own sin, and then a living humbly and gratefully for salvation from them.

This true faith, which trusts in Jesus alone, means also that I will be continually dependent on Jesus to save me. I need not only what He has done for me, but I need Him to continue working in me and through me. So I will pray, I will depend on the Word, I will seek the fellowship of other believers, I will use all the means Christ has given to continue working by His Spirit in me.

Trusting in Jesus I will also live out of Him, so that the holiness, power, and grace of His life shine through me. Because He is our Savior, we are saints. Because He is Christ, we are Christians. Because He is Lord, we are servants.

May God help us to trust in Him only and completely! ☺

Questions for Discussion

1. Prove from the Bible that there is only one way of salvation.
2. What does the name “Jesus” mean? In what ways does Matthew 1:21 help us understand this name?
3. What are some things that people will trust in, in addition to, or instead of, Jesus?
4. Why do people so easily trust in themselves or others rather than in God?
5. As Savior, what did Jesus do for us? Give some Scripture references to demonstrate your answer.
6. As Savior, what does Jesus do in us? Give some Scripture references to demonstrate your answer.
7. As Savior, what does Jesus do through us? Give some Scripture references to demonstrate your answer.
8. What can we say of those who teach people to trust in something or someone other than Jesus for salvation?
9. If you were born into a Christian home, were well instructed in biblical knowledge, and are now a member in a solid Reformed church, does this give you something to boast in as foundation for your salvation? (See Phil. 3:4-11). What advantage are these things? But, also, what is the only foundation for your salvation?
10. Do you trust in Jesus only and completely for salvation? How will this be evident in your heart and life?

A Goal in the Philippines: Self-Governing Churches

Mission work is done in foreign lands with the goal of gathering the elect of God out of the nations of the earth. This is accomplished through faithful preaching of the gospel. The Spirit of Christ works mightily through this to bring the elect to a saving faith in Jesus Christ.

But that in itself is not enough. In addition to the salvation of the elect, the goal of missions is also to gather God's people together into congregations, for outside the instituted church there is no salvation (Belgic Confession of Faith, Art. 28). Churches must be organized. Congregations must be established. And believers must become and remain faithful members of such churches. Only then will they (and their generations) be nourished in the Word, strengthened in the faith, and preserved unto life eternal.

However, there is also a closely related and no less important point, and that is that foreign mission work must be done with a view to establishing *indigenous* churches. It is not wise to do our work in such a way that the churches are dependent on the missionaries and/or the sending churches. We do not want churches that cannot exist without us, so that our presence needs to be permanent. From the very outset, we should strive to lay the groundwork for churches that can be independent and are able to stand alone. In a word, our goal is churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating.¹

¹ John L. Nevius, a Presbyterian missionary to China in the late 1800s, first set forth the idea of establishing churches that are self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating. His ideas were initially published in the "Chinese Recorder" in 1885, but soon thereafter in his book, *The Planting and Development of Missionary Churches*.

Rev. Kleyn is a missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America, stationed in Manila, the Philippines.

In this and a few following articles, we plan to take a closer look at those three terms. In doing so, we are not merely interested in what they mean from a theoretical point of view, but also as regards the actual practice of doing foreign missions. The question will be, What bearing does this have on our mission work? What should we do so that this goal might be attained?

We begin with "self-governing."



The basic idea of a self-governing church is that she is one in which the officebearers are local men. The ministers, elders, and deacons are not foreign missionaries or other men who may have moved to the field from the sending churches. Rather, the special offices are occupied by nationals. An indigenous church is one that has local men, chosen by local congregations, to be the local representatives of Christ in its midst.

This is the biblical pattern set forth in the mission work of the apostles. Officebearers were chosen and ordained in every church from among the members of that church (Acts 14:23; Titus 1:5). Even the qualifications for officebearers (I Tim. 3; Titus 1) clearly imply that this should be the case. For how can the congregation know if a man has these qualifications if he is not himself a member of that local church? In this way the autonomy of the local congregation and the office of believer in the church are both acknowledged and respected.

Having local men serve as officebearers and church leaders is necessary for the sake of the church members. Local men know the church members well. Local men are better able to communicate with their own people. Local men also have a better understanding of the life and needs of their fellow countrymen. All of this gives them the ability to bring the Word of God to the members of the church in a way that is most appropriate and thus, through God's Spirit, powerful in its effect.

The importance of having officebearers who are nationals is also seen when you consider the possibility that a missionary, in God's providence, may leave the field. For this reason, the missionary needs to be careful not to create an unhealthy dependence on himself. His goal is to prepare and direct congregations to be able to function and exist on their own. When the time is right, he should be able to step back from a church or denomination without his absence having a detrimental effect on their continued existence, and even growth.

If this, therefore, must be our goal, we need to be busy in our mission work preparing men to be officebearers in the church of Christ, as well as better equipping those who already serve as such. With gratitude to God, we acknowledge the many opportunities He gives us to do this in our Philippines' mission work.



One significant way in which we are able to prepare local men to be church leaders is through the work our Protestant Reformed seminary and professors are doing in training a man (Mr. Vernon Ibe) to be a minister of the gospel here. The Lord willing, he will graduate in 2012. What a blessed and added gift from God to have a Filipino pastor to teach and preach the historic Reformed faith to his fellow countrymen. We eagerly look forward to the day when this man is able, through the call of the church, to take up his work here.

A second way is through the regular, weekly preaching of the Word of God. This, in fact, is the most important way to prepare church leaders. For the preaching of the truth (especially Heidelberg Catechism preaching) serves, under God's blessing, to equip men with a good, all-around knowledge of the Scriptures and the Reformed faith. Such a firm foundation in the truth is indispensable for officebearers.

The preaching also bears that same fruit in those who are still young. For Christ also uses the preached Word to prepare young men to be future, godly leaders in His church. We pray that this may be realized for the sake of the continued existence of solid Reformed churches in the Philippines.

A third (and more direct) way in which we prepare men to be faithful church leaders is through the further training of existing ministers, as well as those who aspire

to the gospel ministry. We are able to do this through regular meetings in which we lead the men who attend through a study of Reformed dogmatics. At this point, we have four men who regularly attend these meetings.

Our main purpose in doing this is to prepare the men for a future "classis" examination. The Lord has given us the opportunity to work toward the formation of a federation of churches here. This is an exciting prospect, and we currently labor with several consistories toward this good goal. Once this federation is in place, the Lord willing, we envision that the classis could examine these existing pastors so they could be declared ministers of the Word within the newly formed denomination.


In the eyes of men, this work would be considered insignificant and too small to count or matter. After all, what can a group of six men studying Reformed doctrine possibly accomplish? But in spite of what men might think, we despise not the day of small things. Although the men who participate in these classes already have a good grasp of Reformed doctrine, it is good that they can now study the truth from a distinctively Protestant Reformed perspective, and thus have their understanding of the truth sharpened. This is indeed a necessary requirement in order for them to be fellow pastors in a future denomination, the Lord willing.

A fourth way to equip men to be faithful officebearers is through specific instruction in Reformed church government. Officebearers need to be well versed in how to direct things in the church in a proper, biblical way, so that all things are done decently and in good order (I Cor. 14:40), and for the edification of the people of God (I Cor. 14:26).

One way in which we are able to provide this instruction is by means of a study of the Church Order of Dordt. Another way is through our involvement in, and even chairing of, consistory meetings. This is often where we concretely face questions regarding how properly to apply the principles and practices that are set forth in the Church Order. It is also the setting where we are able to devote a set amount of time to study the Church Order itself, as well as other related minor creeds (for example, Questions for Church Visitation, Formula of Subscription). We are grateful for the interest that the men have in doing things in a biblical

and orderly manner, and we are encouraged to see fruit upon this work.

May the Lord keep us faithful and diligent in this important work, and be pleased to use it to strengthen

and encourage the current officebearers, as well as to raise up other men who will be able faithfully to serve in Christ's church and kingdom here. The church needs such men. May God continue to supply them. 

○ COME LET US WORSHIP

REV. CORY GRIESS

The Covenantal Assembly (2)

○ come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving, and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms. For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land. ○ come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the Lord our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

Psalm 95:1-7a

Introduction

Last time we explained what it means that the official worship services of the church are a meeting of the covenantal assembly before the face of the living God, and proved those points from Scripture. We said that the assembly is not merely a collection of individuals, but an officially constituted expression of the body of Christ. In worship, that congregation comes to experience the covenant of grace in the highest way possible on earth. She comes to meet with God Himself. We also discussed how public corporate worship is the highest expression of the antithesis. The body is called out of the world, and called unto God in worship. This is part of what makes worship so pleasing to Him. Everything else is left behind, and we come to adore His matchless name alone as we meet with Him face to face.

In this article we discuss what *motivates* us to come

Rev. Griess is pastor of the Calvary Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, Iowa.

Previous article in this series: October 1, 2011, p. 17.

out of the world to meet with this God, and we find some implications from this first principle that apply to Reformed and biblical worship.

The Motivation for Being a Part of the Covenantal Assembly

The motivation for this worship comes from knowing how glorious this God is who comes to meet with us in the covenantal assembly. Psalm 95, which, as we said last time, has always been recognized in the church as a call to worship, also provides the motivation for coming to worship. Psalm 95 presents God as both creator and redeemer, and in the Psalm these two are our motivation for coming to meet with Him in worship.

First of all in Psalm 95 the motive is knowing God as our *creator*. Psalm 95:3: "○ come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the *LORD our maker*." What motivates us personally and collectively to come to meet with God is that this God *made* us. He has the right to call us to meet with Him since He is the one who has given us existence. But more than that, what a wonderful gift to meet in fellowship with the God who formed us and knows us.

This creator God is great and awesome, and His majesty draws me irresistibly into His presence. Psalm 95:3-5 carries on the thought, "For the *LORD is* a great God, and a great King above all gods. In his hand are the deep places of the earth: the strength of the hills is his also. The sea is his, and he made it: and his hands formed the dry land." This God is able! We don't worship a God we made up. We don't worship a puny God. No other supposed god is His rival. All the earth is His possession. He made it with His hands. Even the vast,

remote depths of the oceans and the impenetrable rock of the mountains are not foreign to Him. This God is able to take care of His people. He is able to fulfill the promises He made to His church.

This draws me to come and celebrate His majesty before Him. I come to His presence to adore Him for being a God who is able to accomplish His will—for being mighty, the ruler over all. I come to fellowship with such a God. He is Himself the motivation for my worship! Therefore in worship I take His attributes upon my lips in prayer and praise. I sing in response to hearing His mighty deeds. I ascribe glory to all that He is and does, for He is God.

Second, the motivation is that this mighty God who made us is also our shepherd, who cares for us and loves us and redeems us. Psalm 95:6-7: “O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. *For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.*” He is a shepherd who holds His sheep in His hand. He cares for us, is attentive to us, and as verse 1 tells us, He redeems us. Verse 1 calls this Shepherd God the “rock of our salvation.” When the psalmist uses that phrase, he has in the back of his mind the people of the Exodus at Rephidim, where God gave them water from the rock to save their life. The apostle Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 10:4 that we now drink spiritually from the rock who is Christ. God is a shepherd who has provided Christ to give us life-giving water, to save us from our sins, to shepherd us away from the death of sin and hell.

The psalmist defines our God to us as the motive for worship. There is no greater motive for being a part of the covenantal assembly than the person and character of the God with whom we meet. We have a Shepherd God who holds us in His hand, who has sent Christ for our salvation. In Christ God guides us and cares for us every step of our lives, so that there is no fear but only rest and peace and hope.

What confidence this brings to us as sheep! This is why I come to worship, to exalt Him for this! And to be convinced of this again—to regain this identity! For it is in worship that I am assured of this, and experience this. In this world we identify ourselves by various things. We are farmers; we are college students; we are engineers; we are blondes; we are brunettes;

etc. But here in the text we are defined at the most fundamental level. In worship we know we are sheep with a Shepherd for a God. Sheep in the hands of a Shepherd God. A shepherd gives what we need: protection, love, peace, and hope. Here, the picture of the covenantal assembly becomes even richer. Not only in this assembly does God meet with us face to face, but in our adoration of His name, He takes us up into His hands and He holds us. He tells us who He is, and tells us who we are.

“O come let us worship, because this is who God is and this is who you are,” says the Psalm. Come meet Him in the covenantal assembly and adore Him, sing and pray, and give yourself over to Him in love!

The Implications of the Covenantal Assembly

That worship is a covenantal assembly where we are scooped up into the hands of our mighty Shepherd God implies at least five other principles about worship.

First, our worship will be centered on the Word of God. For if we are to meet with God in this way it will be by His Word. It is His Word that brings us to Him. It is His Word that brings Him to us. God’s Word is living and active. His Word contains God Himself in Christ. And in that Word we have *the* Word made flesh (John 1:14). Its truth, its power, its emotion, bring us face to face with God in worship. Thus the service takes up at every point the Word of God. God’s Word is sung; God’s Word is read; God’s Word is proclaimed; God’s Word is prayed. God’s Word is the focus because in the Word we will have God with us.

Second, the implication is that the worship service will be simple. The goal of the covenantal assembly is for us to be taken mind and soul by the Word of God and therefore into God’s presence. All must shine a spotlight on God in His Word. Anything that distracts from Him must be removed, for distractions take us out of His presence.

This is what led the Reformers to have a simple order of worship, where the content, not the accoutrements, were the spiritual power. Thus, you will find the same in Reformed worship today. There is a simplicity and sobriety about it. The liturgy is simple. There are not paintings and drawings and statues on the wall. The

focus is not on the people and their individual gifts. The spotlight shines upon God with whom we meet.

Third, when we come to the worship service with such an understanding and believing heart, the worship service will be profoundly experiential. After all, we are meeting with God Himself. This is going to be an experience! What that experience is will be determined by the state of your soul before God. If you come with sin that you will not forsake, the experience will be that you will writhe as Jehovah breathes down your neck. But if you come by grace to let go of sin and hold on to the Lord, the experience will be one of comfort and pure adoration of Jehovah God.

Fourth, the worship service will be characterized by an attitude of joyful reverence. I put joy and reverence together in the same point because Psalm 95 puts them together. Psalm 95:1-2 calls us to bring a “joyful noise.” Psalm 95:6 calls us also to bow down in reverence. In true worship, there will be this combination of joy at the fact that this Mighty Shepherd is our God, and yet a profound reverence in light of the fact that we don’t deserve Him.

We are coming to meet with the God of heaven and earth. Someone once said that if we really had any idea of who it is we meet with in public corporate worship, we would come to church in shoulder pads and helmets, and tie ourselves to the seat. After all, we are coming into the presence of sheer holiness, and we are sinful creatures of the dust.

Knowing what worship is and knowing the God we worship will affect everything about worship. When a stranger comes into a service he ought to see that we have not come here for a show, but that we are gathered before the Holy God.


But it will also be joyful. The verbs of verse 1 are more intense than carries over into English. It is more like, “Let us give a ringing cry unto the LORD, and raise joyful shouts!” There ought to be a joy in coming to meet the God who has saved us. How can one not be joyful coming here to celebrate grace and the God who holds us in His hands? There ought to be ringing cries of thanksgiving and praise. If we put no effort to think about the words that we are singing or praying, then there will not be any true joy. But as we are taken up by and given over to, the truths and words we are hearing

and singing, there will be a profound joy experienced and manifested to others.

Fifth, since worship is an assembly called to come and adore God, God is the audience in worship. We come to meet with God face to face, and part of that meeting is God speaking to us. But in prayer and songs of praise, God is the audience, not us. Many view these aspects of worship as though we in the pew are the audience, and the worship team is putting on a show for us. But that misses the point. What is unique about this assembly is that when the songs are being played and sung the audience is not those who are sitting in the pews. *God* is the audience. Worship is not for me, first of all. I end up being blessed by it in the end, but it is not about me. Worship is for the adoration of our mighty Shepherd God.

Conclusion

Public corporate worship is the most important thing a Christian does. God loves the covenantal assembly. *Individual* praise of the glory of His grace is important. The regular praise of the glory of His grace by *families* at devotions is imperative. Yet, it is the worship of the covenantal assembly that God loves the most. Psalm 87:2 declares, “The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.” God loved the dwellings of Jacob where each family worshiped Him in their home. But what He loved more were the gates of Zion, the body gathered before His face.

And we ought to love those gates of Zion most as well. Is not our experience that of Luther? “At home in my house there is no warmth or vigor in me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart, and it breaks its way through.”¹ May the thought and experience of the covenantal assembly lead us to cry out with David in Psalm 84:1-2, “How amiable are thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.” For it is in the covenantal assembly that we meet Him face to face. 

¹ Martin Luther, cited in Robert Rayburn, *O Come Let Us Worship: Corporate Worship in the Evangelical Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 30.

Mission Activities

We include here a recent update sent to our churches from Rev. and Mrs. Kleyn in the Philippines. “Recently two typhoons hit northern Luzon (Manila is in central to south Luzon), causing much flooding and damage to crops. Typhoon Pedring (international name, Nesat) came on September 27 and Typhoon Quiel (international name, Nalgae) just a few days later on October 1. In Manila we received a lot of rain, but nothing like they had further north. On our drive to Gabaldon this past weekend (October 8), we saw much evidence of the damage done to trees, roads, homes, and crops. Many of the members of the All of Grace PR Fellowship in Gabaldon had two feet or more of water in their homes, but thankfully none lost their homes or their lives.”

We can also add here that if you are not receiving these regular blogs from Rev. and Sharon Kleyn about the work in the Philippines and would like to, you can access their blog “Kleyns in the Philippines” at Kleynsphilippines.blogspot.com/ search and sign up.

In other “news” from the Philippines, we also note that the Berean PRC in Manila marks its 5th anniversary as an instituted church on November 19, D.V. Part of their remembrance of God’s goodness and faithfulness to them will in-

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

clude a special merienda (snack) on November 20 between their worship services. We also extend to them our prayer of thanksgiving and our petition that our heavenly Father will provide all their needs in the days to come as He has done in the days past.

Congregation Activities

The congregation of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI got together on Tuesday evening, October 18, for a House-Warming Shower for their new pastor, Rev. Nathan Decker, his wife, Jessica, and their daughter, Kate.

The congregation of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI met together on Sunday evening, October 16, for a brief farewell program for Pastor-elect Jon Mahtani, his wife, Keri, and their children, Levi, Shane, and Mayla. Some of Georgetown’s high school girls sang a special number, and the elders spoke words of encouragement.

Georgetown’s congregation was also invited to join in fellowship together that same Sunday evening for a commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible. A supper was planned, and historical posters and a table of interesting historical memorabilia were also on display.

A conference celebrating the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible was held October 7 and 8 in the sanctuary of the Hull, IA PRC. The three speeches of the conference featured our seminaries’ three professors. Prof. Dykstra

spoke Friday evening, followed by Prof. R. Cammenga and Prof. B. Gritters on Saturday morning. These men looked at three aspects of the KJV: restoring the Bible to the believer; the history of the KJV; and the question of replacing the KJV with another translation. The audio of these three speeches is now available for free download at king-james400years.com. In addition, you will also find there an order form that can be used to order CD or DVD sets of the speeches.

Our seminary gives the second-year seminary students an assignment to observe and teach catechism in an area church for five weeks. With the approval of the consistory of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI, Seminarian Joshua Engelsma completed his assignment at Faith with the 4th-5th graders. Seminarian Engelsma observed the class for Lessons 1-3 and then taught Lessons 4 and 5 under the observation of Rev. A. Lanning, Faith’s pastor.

The Loveland, CO PRC had the opportunity on September 28 to hear one of their former pastors, Prof. D. Engelsma, speak on the subject, “Earthquakes, Tsunamis, and Other Human Suffering—Because Almighty God Exists and Is Both Almighty and Good.” Prof. Engelsma also preached for Loveland the following Sunday.

School Activities

The NWI PRS Ladies Circle invited supporters of their school to an afternoon of food and fellowship

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at the home of Rev. Allen and Crysta Brummel on Saturday, October 15. Grilled burgers and hot dogs were served, followed by fun games and activities including a coloring contest and candy hunt. A free-will offering was taken for the Northwest Iowa Christian School.

Hope PR Christian School in Walker, MI held their fall PTA meeting Thursday evening, October 20. Rev. G. Eriks spoke to the

parents and teachers on "Covenant Communication with Our Children."

The 2011 Fall Festival at Covenant Christian High School in Walker, MI was held on October 8. There were activities for the kids and a delicious pig roast dinner. The Fall Festival Market was open and featured baked goods, award winning Applebarn Apple Cider, pumpkins, mums, and much more. The

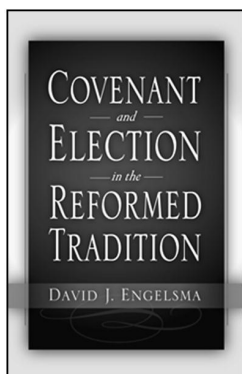
day featured good food, good fellowship, and an opportunity to look at the progress made on the building project.

Minister Activities

From a trio of the Revs. G. Eriks, N. Langerak, and A. Lanning, the Edgerton, MN PRC extended a call to Rev. A. Lanning to "come over and help."



ANNOUNCEMENTS



New Release! Now Available for Purchase!

Covenant and Election in the Reformed Tradition by David J. Engelsma is a fresh study of one of the most important truths in Scripture. Offering a positive and comprehensive exposition of the Biblical relation of covenant and election, Engelsma demonstrates the Reformed tradition of the relation in an explanation of the baptism form, a critique of various prominent Reformed theologians, and criticism of the heresy of the federal vision.

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Notice

■ *Standard Bearer* announcements should now be sent, with the \$10.00 fee, to: RFPA, Attn: SB Announcements, 1894 Georgetown Center Dr., Jenison, MI 49428 (e-mail: mail@rfpa.org).

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thankfulness to God, we rejoiced with our parents:

RICHARD and TENA POORTINGA

as they celebrated 60 years of marriage on November 7, 2011. We are thankful to God for the love they share, not only with each other but also to us, their children, grandchildren, and great grandchildren. They have been faithful, by the grace of God, in establishing a covenant home and providing a godly example to us in all circumstances of life. May the Lord continue to bless them throughout this life to the glory of His name. "I will make thy name to be remembered in all generations, therefore shall the people praise thee forever and ever" (Psalm 45:17).

- ❖ Robert Poortinga
- ❖ Randall and Debra Poortinga
- ❖ Pete and Julie Zandstra
- ❖ Ken and Cindy Poortinga

- ❖ Daryl and Sue Poortinga
24 grandchildren (1 deceased)
47 great grandchildren

Dyer, Indiana