

The Standard Bearer

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God's Remembrance of His Church

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands;
thy walls are continually before me.

Isaiah 49:16

The church of Christ! There is no cause on the face of the earth that is a more sure cause than the church of Christ. The kingdoms of this world may grow until presently they present a united front of almost unbelievable power. The church at the same time will seemingly dwindle down to almost nothing, so that Jesus Himself asks, "when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?" (Luke 18:8). Yet, as Daniel saw in the dream that God gave Nebuchadnezzar, the stone cut out of the mountain without hands—which is the church of Christ—grinds the kingdoms of the world to powder and becomes a large mountain that fills the earth.

In the text above, our attention is called to the certainty of the church's triumph. It is a passage that shows us that the church will attain to all its glory and

beauty because God never forgets her, but remembers her in the Son of His love, Christ Jesus our Lord.

God is speaking here to Zion, which in verse 14 is complaining that God has forsaken and forgotten her. "But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me." Zion is another name for God's church. It was upon Mount Zion, one of the four hills upon which Jerusalem was built, that David placed his throne. Often Jerusalem was called Zion. The whole city was known by the one famous hill where the king's palace stood. Thus we read in Psalm 87:2, 3, 5, "The LORD loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. Glorious things are spoken of thee, O city of God. And of Zion it shall be said, This and that man was born in her: and the highest himself shall establish her." Zion is that city of God. This text speaks of the gates of Zion, referring to the gates of the city and not simply to the hill on which part of that city was built. The idea is not simply that men were born in the king's palace, but that they were born in the city of Jerusalem. And Jerusalem is often pictured in Scripture as the church of God, including all the New

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Testament saints among the Gentiles. The members of that church are at the same time the citizens of the kingdom of God. We are not to make a distinction between Jew and Gentile, as though the believing Jews are the kingdom and the believing Gentiles are the church. In Revelation 3:12 Jesus Himself is addressing a Gentile church, the church at Philadelphia, and He declares to these Gentiles, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out; and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name."

The Gentile believer has a part in the kingdom, for Jerusalem is the capital city of the kingdom. And the Gentile believer becomes a pillar in the temple, which was the center of the whole Theocracy in the Old Testament times. Therefore also there is the statement in Psalm 87 that God loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. That it is called the city of God means that God loves all His elect people, Jew and Gentile alike, and dwells in them in love.

God is speaking here of the whole church. That God has engraved Zion on the palms of His hands means that He has His whole church, all the believers, from Adam to the last one that is born and reborn before the return of Christ, engraved in the palms of His hands. He has Zion engraved in the palms of both hands. It is not so that He has the church on one hand and the kingdom on the other. All His redeemed, elect people are engraved in the palms of His hands as one grand and glorious city. For He speaks of her walls being continually before Him. It is the New Jerusalem, which shall come forth in the day of Christ, and in which all the elect children of God, all believers from Adam onward, Jew and Gentile, shall live with God in everlasting blessedness, that He has engraved in the palms of His hands. It is important to note that God does not have engraved in the palms of His hands Zion as she pined away in the

Babylonian captivity. Nor does He have in the palms of His hands Zion as she was in the glorious days of King Solomon, when gold and silver were in great abundance, and there was peace and prosperity on every side. But He has before Him the plan of the New Jerusalem, that glorious city, where all God's counsel shall be fulfilled and all His covenant promises realized.

Isaiah spoke prophetically of a day when Zion would be in Babylon. The walls of Jerusalem would be a heap of ruins, the city itself a rubble heap. And yet, note, that in the palms of His hands are Zion's walls. It is then, indeed, Jerusalem or Zion as she shall be in the day of Christ that God has there in the palms of His hands. It is the glorious city of Revelation 21 and 22, with streets of gold, and gates of pearl, adorned with precious stones, wherein is no sorrow or sighing, night or death, and where all the saints live in everlasting glory and fellowship with God.

Just how does God 'remember' His church? It is not that when His church gets into trouble He then recalls that He promised to deliver her from it and purify her in Christ. This is how *we* remember. We store knowledge away in our minds, and at any given moment, either at will or because of suggestion, the facts of our knowledge come one at a time before our consciousness.

We remember in the sense of recalling.

God, on the other hand, has all things continuously before His mind. He retains them consciously before His mind. We retain and then recall. God simply retains and never pushes to the back of His mind for recall for future reference. So we are to understand the statement that Zion's walls are continually before Him. Not for one slight

moment does God lose sight of the New Jerusalem that He plans and promises to realize.

That is presented here in a figure: Zion is engraved on the palms of His hands. What is engraved is there to stay. It is cut into the granite and remains as long as the granite remains. Raised letters on a building or tombstone will wear off by wind, sand, and ice. But

*Not for one slight moment
does God lose sight
of the New Jerusalem
that He plans
and promises to realize.*

what is cut into the rock, engraved into it, remains clear and distinct as long as that rock remains. The “rock” into which Zion is engraved is the palms of the hands of the eternal God. Nothing can wear them down and nothing can erase the plan of the New Jerusalem from these hands. These hands are the eternal and almighty hands wherewith God works all His good pleasure. They contain the future Zion in all her glory. He has her in His mind and in His heart. He loves her and He knows her as His beloved city. Engraved, they are, in the palms of the hands wherewith He works every moment and touches everything in all His wide creation.

The meaning, then, is plain. Always, and through all things, with these hands God is shaping and molding, bending and forming His church and making her like unto the glorious pattern that is in His hands. As the potter molds the clay, as the sculptor chisels the marble, so God molds and chisels the church until He has polished and refined her to be exactly as He from eternity planned that she should be.

As generally for the church as a whole, so also it applies to each and every member specifically. Quite impossible, it is, to make a perfect church without giving care and attention to each and every member thereof. The builder who is careless with one brick will find that his building is not perfect. One piece of wood in that building that is not cut to the exact size, planed down and sanded, will affect the other pieces of wood to which it is attached.

Therefore, when God has Zion engraved upon the palms of His hands as the church that will issue forth in the day of Christ, He has the detail of each and every member of that church there as well. He, not we, determines the size of that church. He, not we, determines the place of each member in that church, even as He, and not we, determined the number and place of each and every member in our bodies. And the church is the

body of Christ, according to Scripture. Therefore we may each of us find comfort in this statement of God through Isaiah that we are there engraved in the palms of His hands. We may rest assured that the God who loves and remembers His church loves and remembers each member of that church as well. The God who shapes and molds, forms and fashions, polishes and refines the mass till He has that church according to the pattern in His hands, deals with every individual member of the church in that same way, in order that the whole may be as He planned it.

How does God do this? We may often suffer many grievous pains and misery. The fire that is needed to bend our stiff necks and to burn away the dross may be very hot. The rod of men wherewith He may chastise us may

hurt severely. It is, in fact, *designed* to hurt us. But the motive is His love, and its goal is the everlasting glory that He has before Him in those hands. As He works, He has before Him His hands—that is, the palms of these hands, rather than the upper and outer parts of His hands. It is the part of the hand that touches the material that He is molding and shaping. It is not the clenched fist, the upper, outer part of the hand that strikes the blow of hate and seeks to destroy. It is the inner part of the hand, which lovingly strokes and mercifully yet unyieldingly bends us, breaks and softens our proud hearts, and makes us spiritually like unto the Son of His love, the King of His church.

In this is the church’s sure triumph. We need never fear. How can God’s church ever fail? With the clenched fist He will drive off the enemy. His hand will be a wall of protection for the church upon which He is working. No one shall pluck it out of His hands.

All is well, for God remembers His church. We shall be exactly as He designed us. His church shall come through all the trials and tribulations of this present life as glorious as the plan that He has made for her from eternity. Remember that, in your sorrows and tears, in your bereavements and losses. Remember that God

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remembers and has His church consciously before Him unceasingly. As Paul puts it, "If God be for us, who can be against us?" Who can lift a finger against us when the almighty God is for us? All creatures receive their life and strength from God. He causes every beat of their hearts. Who then can hurt His church? Who can keep Him from realizing all His promises to His church and from bringing forth at the end of time that glorious New Jerusalem that He now has engraved in the palms of His hands?

His people, Zion whom He chose from eternity, He remembers in love. Zion He remembers to bless and prepare for everlasting glory. Zion He remembers in His Son, for all of the New Jerusalem revolves around His Son. He is the walls of that city. It is the city of righteousness. He is the King of that city, and it is


through His righteousness that we have a name and a place in that city. He and that city are inseparable.

As Jehovah works with His hands, He sees that whole city in Christ. And for Christ's sake, to whom He has given all the citizens of that kingdom, He remembers that city only in love. What security! The psalmist in Psalm 48:2a, 12-14 saw it with his eye of faith when he wrote,

"Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion.

"Walk about Zion, and go round about her: Tell the towers thereof.

"Mark ye well her bulwarks, consider her palaces; that ye may tell it to the generation following.

"For this God is our God for ever and ever: he will be our guide even unto death." 

EDITORIAL

PROF. RUSSELL DYKSTRA

A Significant Anniversary

Fifty years! We rejoice with our friends and fellow believers on the other side of the world, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church in Australia, as they commemorate fifty years since their churches were organized. Fifty years of contending for the faith; fifty years of preaching sovereign, irresistible, particular grace; fifty years of maintaining, by God's grace, the theology of the Reformation, especially that of John Calvin, as embodied in the Westminster standards.

How many readers remember the fifty-year anniversary of the Protestant Reformed Churches? The "old fashioned Field Day" at Douglas Walker Park in Byron

Center, MI, attended by over half the denomination? You will catch a glimpse of the excitement in this first paragraph of the editorial from the usually reserved Prof. Homer C. Hoeksema:

What was undoubtedly the climax of this year of celebration of our Fiftieth Anniversary as Protestant Reformed Churches took place in Grand Rapids on August 5, 6, and 7 in connection with our annual Young People's Convention. We celebrated. Oh, how we celebrated! (*Standard Bearer*, vol. 51, issue 20)

What was the thrill? The unity in the denomination—unity in the truth. Being surrounded by those of like faith with whom one could glad-

ly discuss the Reformed faith. Giving united, heartfelt thanksgiving to God for His covenant faithfulness (the theme of the celebration). In the words of Prof. Hoeksema, "in a very concrete fashion we experienced with a thrill of spiritual delight the firm bond of unity which joins our people and churches."

Prof. Hoeksema also described the value of the celebration:

And now, in a way, it is "back to normal." And yet we do not return the same. We return with renewed confidence and zeal and with renewed dedication, as well as with strengthened conviction that the cause of our Protestant Reformed Churches is the cause of the Lord our God.

Many more readers, I trust, will remember the thrill of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the denomination—the stirring speeches recording God’s faithfulness, the enthusiastic discussions of the work God was giving the PRC to do, and the singing—ah, the moving praises. When there is unity in the denomination, anniversaries encourage and strengthen, to be sure.

That reminds us why it is good, and of rich spiritual value, that a faithful Reformed or Presbyterian church pauses to commemorate a milestone as the EPC does this month. The theme of their celebration is “Fifty years under cover of God’s wings.” They do have much for which they will be giving thanks.

Thanks for the Providential Origins

The origins of the EPC clearly indicate the providential hand of God leading saints together to form a new church. The history of the EPC bears some resemblance to the Secession of 1834 in the Netherlands. In the 1950s members in various churches in Tasmania, dissatisfied with the spiritual condition of their respective congregations, began to come together in private meetings. These folks could see that the Bible was not being honored, and that fundamental Christian truths were not being maintained. But their backgrounds were far more diverse than that of the Secession members. The people in Tasmania were members of such diverse groups and churches as Baptist, Congregational, Anglican,

Presbyterian, Methodist, and even the Salvation Army and the Brethren. Many of these sincere believers called their respective churches to return to the basic Christian truths, but with little or no success. Some were driven out of their churches.

These likeminded believers became acquainted and began to enjoy informal fellowship together. They began forming evangelical fellowships.

The history of the EPC¹ describes the theological frame of mind of most in these fellowships.

Those who enjoyed this fellowship were Arminian inclined, believing in man’s ability and freewill.... They believed that man was not so bad; he only needed a bit of help from the Lord to find happiness in life, and to get to heaven.... Whether we were actually saved or not, ultimately depended upon man (5).

Although not Baptist in background, they were inclined to be Baptist in their view of the church—for them the church consisted of truly born again believers—with no appreciation for God’s covenant relationship with His people. In reality, they had no roots, and were tossed about by the varying winds of Finney-like “evangelists”—who passed through, leaving spiritual disaster in their wake.

¹ A Brief History of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia, published in 2001, is available online at the EPC website www.epc.org.au. Quotations are from this work.

Thanks for a Confession

But in the late 1950s, God brought into their hands the Westminster Confession of Faith. In addition, God providentially directed publishing ventures in England and America that produced books that gave instruction in the Reformed faith. Among the more helpful books were A. W. Pink’s *Sovereignty of God*, B.B. Warfield’s *The Plan of Salvation*, and M. Luther’s *The Bondage of the Will*.

The Confession and the literature transformed the group. Leaving behind their Arminianism, they became zealous for the doctrines of grace. They were persuaded of the truth of God’s sovereignty. “Many changed from an Arminian man-centered faith, to a reformed God-centered faith” (8).

Thanks for a Reformed Church

In 1960, a conference was called in Launceston with the intent of forming a church. These people began worshiping together. Initially, the majority wanted to organize a Reformed Baptist church. But through much study and discussion, the majority rejected the Baptist’s position. In the providence of God, the groups come under the influence of the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia (PCEA). This contact introduced them to the doctrine of the covenant, and set them firmly on the road of Presbyterianism. As is always the case, not all agreed with these stands, and these would leave.

The time came for organization. While they felt the closest to the

PCEA, they could not become a part of that denomination. The group looked to the Free Church of Scotland founded in 1843 as their model. They adopted the standards of the Free Church—in doctrine, worship, and church government. With the help of a Presbytery of the PCEA, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia was formed in 1961 with three ministers and three congregations (in Launceston, Penguin, and Winnaleah).

Thanks for the Doctrines of Sovereign, Particular Grace

However, God was not finished shaping the EPC. He did not intend that another Presbyterian church exist in Australia, separated from the rest mainly by being a bit more conservative. Rather, God intended that the EPC exist to sound forth the clear message of sovereign, particular grace, the particular love of God for the elect alone, and the unconditional covenant.

Some Dutch ministers introduced them to the churches and theology of the Netherlands. However, the group as a whole did not take to the notion of a grace for all that did not save (Abraham Kuyper). Nor were they attracted to the Liberated theology of a conditional covenant with all baptized children. God providentially kept them from major battles on these issues before they were ready. On the covenant, they would later come to see that their precious confession, the Westminster, would not allow such a conditional covenant.

It affirms that God's covenant is with the elect.

Early in their history, they were brought into a major controversy with the PCEA, with whom they had formed a seminary to train ministers. Professors from the PCEA were promoting the "well-meant offer" set forth in Murray and Stonehouse's *The Free Offer of the Gospel*. They were also teaching common grace.

The EPC took a strong stand against both of these errors. While insisting that the gospel is to be preached to all men, and all who hear are to be called to repentance and faith, they rejected the preaching of a God who loved all and wanted to save all, and a Savior who died for all. They rejected likewise a non-saving grace common to all men.

Their stand for the truth cost the EPC. The seminary was dismantled. For quite some time they struggled to train their men through ministers of their churches. An entire congregation left. Another endured a grievous schism.

But those who remained were united. And the sound from the pulpit was a clear message of sovereign grace. They were zealous to spread the truth and to defend it. God granted increase. They grew, eventually forming two presbyteries—one in Tasmania, and a second on the Australian mainland. Tiny in the eyes of the world, but a wonder of grace.

And still the Lord would test the EPC. In the 1980s one of the original ministers began blowing a new trumpet, one with an uncertain sound. He preached that while *God*

did not love all men, *Jesus*, according to His human nature, did. Jesus kept the law, and thus loved His neighbor, also His reprobate neighbor.

Once again, the tiny denomination was convulsed by controversy. Once again, the issue was whether the love of God (Jesus) was universal in some sense, or particular, and only for the elect. A bitter two-year battle ensued, and schism. The EPC was decimated. She lost ministers, members, property, and in the fallout, a school. But she was united again in her conviction of sovereign particular grace.

Thanks for the Schools

Along the way, the EPC, in spite of her (small) size has had two schools, though only one exists currently. The Launceston EPC members established the Presbyterian Covenant School in 1981 and it continued for about 12 years. The congregation of Winnaleah established Herrick Presbyterian Covenant School in 1991, and it continues yet today.

Under cover of God's wings

So the EPC will come together (*came* together, by the time you read this—April 22-24) to thank God, to recall His faithful care, and to seek His blessing for the future. A tiny denomination, destitute of strength in themselves. But this has ever been the case, in all times and in all circumstances. The church on earth is always but a "little flock." And yet, the Lord Himself promised, "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Small though she is, the EPC has a powerful word, the preaching of the saving cross, which preaching is the power of God unto salvation. They can be confident as they look to the future, confident that Christ sits upon the throne, sending forth the white horse of the gospel, conquering and to conquer.

So long as the EPC, by God's grace, continues to preach that truth, and so long as she is faithful to God's covenant, instructing her children in the same truths, she can be confident that God will use her and bless her efforts to proclaim the gospel.

Our Joy and Thanks


We thank God for the EPC. What a privilege it is for us to know them. Recently I read Calvin's first lecture on Ezekiel, where Calvin

explained a particular blessing that God can give to faithful preachers. His exposition helps to explain much of the PRC's appreciation for the EPC. Calvin described the difficult labors of Jeremiah, faithfully preaching the Word of God to an apostatizing church centered in Jerusalem. Year after year, his message fell on deaf ears. Then God called Ezekiel to preach to the captives in Babylon. He preached the same message. With all the opposition Jeremiah faced from false prophets, now he had this tremendous encouragement—far away, the Spirit of God was speaking the same message through Ezekiel that he (Jeremiah) had been speaking for thirty-five years.

An analogy can be made to our situation. The message of the PRC, the unconditional covenant, the

rejection of common grace and the well-meant gospel offer in favor of sovereign, particular, efficacious grace—it pretty much falls on deaf ears. It is rejected by nearly the entire Reformed and Presbyterian church world. "You are the only ones who believe that," we are informed.

Then we hear of a denomination on the other side of the world that is faithful to the doctrines of grace; rejects the well-meant gospel offer and common grace on the basis of their confessions; and affirms the unconditional covenant with the elect alone, as set forth in their confessions.

And we are mightily encouraged. We thank God for bringing us together. We pray God's continued blessing upon the EPC, and upon our relationship. 

LETTERS

Exhortations to Pray

Greetings from Northern Ireland. It's always good to receive the *Standard Bearer* fortnight by fortnight. It makes priority and blessed reading on Sunday afternoons!


I very much appreciated Rev. Rodney Miersma's article, in the March 15th issue, entitled "The Work of the Lord." He quite rightly states that this Psalm is a prayer of Moses that in effect is saying "Thy Kingdom come." It is a prayer that all we Reformed people need to echo because, to quote him, "All our churches...Sabbaths, and feasts mean nothing unless the Lord bless it..."

As Reformed people in true churches we may wrongly assume God will bless all we do, and then become slack in prayer or even forget it altogether. The grace of God will be manifest as we use the means. We are strong on preaching. May we be strong in praying!

Personally we are exhorted to acknowledge Him in

all our ways (Prov. 3:5, 6). The Lord's Prayer gives us an all-encompassing model. Scripture is replete with prayer and exhortations to pray, especially in Paul's epistles. We must pray for ministers and officebearers (Eph. 6:18, 19); for more ministers and missionaries (Matt. 9:38); for our families and fellow saints (Phil. 1:9-11); for our witness (Acts 4:29, I Thess. 1:8); for the Jews (Rom. 10:1); for the unreached peoples (Rom. 15:20; Matt. 24:14); for the persecuted (I Cor. 12:26 and Heb. 13:3); and for leaders and governments (I Tim. 2:1). Truly there is much to pray about. No wonder the apostles made it, along with study of Scripture and preaching, their priority.

Let us all make it ours and expand the scope of our prayers to include all of these things. The information is out there!

(Dr.) Julian Kennedy
Ballymena, NI 


Eyes

Of the five senses, the eye is the most significant in Scripture. The Old Testament word eye (*ayin*) is the 16th letter of the Hebrew alphabet, originally a circle symbolizing the eye. It can refer to eye-like objects, such as pools of color (Ezek. 1:4); springs or fountains (Prov. 8:28); facets of a jewel (Zech. 3:9); broad daylight (II Sam. 12:11); or surface of the earth (Exod. 10:5). And eye in Old Testament and New Testament (*ophthalmos*) refers both to the bodily organ itself and, by figure of speech, to seeing and many related actions, such as knowing, perceiving, and judging. But the main significance of eye is as a metaphor for faith. Faith comes by hearing, but seeing is believing. By faith Abraham rejoiced to see Jesus' day (John 8:56). Paul was sent to open the eyes of the Gentiles and turn them from darkness to light that they may receive forgiveness (Acts 26:18). In the gospel, Jesus is set forth before our eyes (Gal. 3:1). And the gospel call is, "Look unto me and be saved" (Is. 45:22).

The eye is an apt metaphor for faith because both are faculties that permit communion between dissimilar realities by receiving knowledge through light. The light of the body is the eye (Matt. 6:22). The eye is the interface of the soul by which information received from the physical realm by light waves is communicated to the soul for processing. To see is to know or perceive (Is. 41:20). And to have faith is to have the eyes of understanding enlightened (Eph. 1:18) or see things unseen (II Cor. 4:18). Whereas without faith, the understanding is darkened, so that seeing one sees not or perceives (Matt. 13:13; Eph. 4:18). "In the eye" refers to judgments based on seeing (Jer. 7:11). Something can be good or right in the eyes (approved or pleasing), bad or evil in the eyes (sinful or wicked), smoke in the eyes (annoying), despised, abhorred, or glorious in the eyes (Gen. 16:4; Exod. 5:21; Is. 49:5). One can find grace in the eyes (favor or blessing). And to be the apple (pupil) of the eye is to be considered vulnerable but precious. Like faith, the eye is also capable of depth perception (Heb. 11:3) and two-way communication whereby qualities, emotions, and desires of the soul are revealed. Eyes reflect life, death

(Ps. 13:3), riches, poverty (Ps. 73:7), generosity, stinginess (Prov. 22:9; 23:6), greed, contentment (Eccl. 4:8), aimlessness, purpose (Ps. 17:11), arrogance, humility (Prov. 6:17; Job 22:29), mockery, pity (Prov. 30:17; Ezek. 16:5), grief, joy (Ps. 88:9). And with dove's eyes, the beloved communicates her love (Song 1:15).

Ironic, it is, that the eyes God uses as a metaphor to save us, also get us into so much trouble. Tempted by the prospect of eyes being opened, and seeing the tree was pleasant to the eyes, Eve fell (Gen. 3:5-8). If the eye is evil, the whole body is full of darkness (Matt. 6:23). The eye can offend, bring to hell, be wanton, hasty to be rich, and not be satisfied (Is. 3:16; Prov. 28:22; Eccl. 1:8). The hypocrite sees the mote in a brother's eye but no beam in his own (Matt. 7:3). While the lawless soul does that which is right in his own eyes (Prov. 12:15).

As with faith, God is sovereign in the matter of eyes. The Lord made the seeing eye (Prov. 20:12). Eyes can see well, or be blemished, dim, weak, weary, darkened, and wasted (Lev. 21:20; Deut. 28:65; Gen. 48:10; Is. 38:14). The Lord can shut eyes and open them (Is. 6:10; Ps. 119:18), deliver eyes from tears, turn them from beholding vanity, and enlighten them (Ps. 116:8; 19:8; Eph. 1:17). And He that formed the eye, shall He not see? (Ps. 94:9). The eyes of the Lord are in every place, observing good and evil (Prov. 15:3). They behold and try the children of men (Ps. 11:4). His eyes are upon the sinful to destroy them (Amos 9:8), and before His eyes the fool cannot stand (Ps. 5:5). But His eyes run through the whole earth to defend the righteous (Zech. 4:10). His eyes are set upon them for good and never withdrawn (Job 36:7; Jer. 24:6; Ps. 33:18). He sees our substance in the womb, keeps us as the apple of His eye, and our death is precious in His eyes (Ps. 139:16; 116:15; 17:8). Therefore His salvation is marvelous in our eyes (Ps. 118:23). With eager eyes we look unto the Lord (Ps. 133:2). Although in the eyes of men we are reduced to nothing (B.C., Art. 27), eye hath not seen the things that God has prepared for them that love Him (I Cor. 2:9). When the Lord shall return, we shall be changed in the twinkling of an eye (I Cor. 15:52), shall see Him eye to eye (Is. 52:8), and He shall wipe all tears from our eyes (Rev. 21:4). 

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Discerning the Good in the Activity of Life

(Ecclesiastes 2 - Part 2)

We saw last time that Solomon directs our attention to the passing joys of this life that come to us through our labor and industry. These joys are our part or portion in this life. They are not the end of our life, nor are we to find our treasure in them. Having described all his labor and the joy of his heart in it, he then turns to its transitory character and its vanity.

He puts this rejoicing in perspective. "Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun." That same labor of his hands is vanity. It is transitory. It is not an end in itself. It does not endure or abide.

Further, all our labor is with worry and care. The building of houses, the planting of gardens and vineyards, and the increase of possessions all come with care and toil. Gold and silver do not endure. The entertainment of singers and music, and he has in view a lawful use of these things, is momentary. They are vanity. These good gifts of God and fruit of the labor of our hands have a place in our life. But they are all fleeting, momentary. The joy they afford is a passing one.

Now he points us to several reasons for this. He does so in the light of the antithetical distinction between wisdom, which is from God, and madness and folly, which lie in sin (Eccl. 2:12). There is in all our labor no true profit, no genuine advancement, even though it be wrought in wisdom. That which is done "hath already been done" (Eccl. 2:12). All the labor of man and his achievements still bring forth no new thing. The crooked is still crooked. Death and the curse touch everything.

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A child of God lives in the world and is part of its organic life. He labors and builds as does the fool of this world about him. The foolish man also builds houses and plants gardens, gathers treasures to himself. Outwardly, in the things of this life, both are subject to the same principle of vanity. Both the wise and the foolish pass through this life and from it. Neither are remembered. There is, however, a profound spiritual difference between wisdom and folly, as between light and darkness, but it is not manifested in the organic life of the world. The wise man has his eyes in his head, sees where he is going, and forms a sound evaluation of things, while the fool of this world is blind and walks in darkness.

Even wisdom in the fear of God, which is better, is still touched by death. "Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool" (Eccl. 2:13-16).

We must keep in mind that, in speaking in this way, the viewpoint of the preacher is that of one who is addressing children of God. The contrast is not between intellectual wisdom, worldly wisdom, or common sense over against earthly stupidity and foolishness. Spiritual wisdom, as a gift of God's grace, in its proper fruit, gives to a child of God also a measure of practical wisdom that the wise fool of this world does not possess. The unbelieving fool is in bondage to the lusts of the flesh and all covetousness. The wisdom that is from God is from above and sanctifies in grace.

But this also creates a trial for a child of God, a grief

that is not only practical but also spiritual. He explains this: "Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity" (Eccl. 2:17-19).

We too leave this life and all our labors under the sun. They belong to this life and this world from the viewpoint under consideration. Others will eventually rule over them. This is not a denial of the reward of grace that God will give us, or of the truth that from that viewpoint our labor and toil are not in vain in the Lord (I Cor. 15:58, 59). The preacher, in fact, concludes the whole book with the truth that God will bring every work into judgment (Eccl. 12:14), because there is a reward, though it be not of this world. What is on the foreground is the reality that our labors, from the viewpoint of this world, pass into other hands, and we have no more say in them. Will the works of our hands be sustained and built up, or foolishly destroyed?

He says, "Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil" (Eccl. 2:20, 21). To another man is given that which was once our portion, our labor and toil. The preacher not only shows us this fact but the spiritual burden this reality of life caused him. He uses strong language, that he hated all his labor under the sun, that he despaired or grieved over it.

He looks at all the labor, the toil and sorrow, that accompanied all that effort. He calls to mind, too, the sleepless nights he endured, and yet he must leave it all to another. "For what hath man of all his labour, and of

the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity" (Eccl. 2:22, 23).

Man is inclined to a restless activity that will not let him sleep. There is no peace to the wicked. Yet the trial of heart of which he speaks is not one that besets the wicked only. This same reality besets the child of God in his weakness. The difference is that a child of God has a comfort that is not found in the works of his hands and not dependent upon them.

In speaking in this manner he is not rejecting God's sovereign wisdom and counsel in the ordering of our portion in this life and what becomes of the work of our hands. That he also will discuss. Rather he sets before us here the very real struggle and distress that the reality of life in its present vanity causes us. He does so not, as the preacher, to lead us to despair but rather

to put the vanity of this life and its labor and toil into perspective. He draws out an important conclusion, which rests upon the fact that all of these things are under the hand of God.

In reviewing his works and pondering them and setting before us the struggle of life, the preacher leads us to a spiritual conclusion, that we may discern what is the good in the activity of life. It is simply stated, "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and

that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24). The transitory works of our hands, the joy of labor and activity and the fruit of it in food and drink are our portion from the hand of God as it pertains to this present life. They are our daily bread. The present enjoyment of them with contentment is the good gift of God. It is something learned by wisdom in the school of grace. This is the place of our present enjoyment. And Solomon is very conscious that God had given him this blessing also richly, "For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I?" (Eccl. 2:25).

*...a child of God
has a comfort
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and not dependent
upon them.*


What the text says is important for us to apprehend. "There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God" (Eccl. 2:24). This is the good of the present joys in the labor of our hands and the profit of them. It is God's gift. It is a gift of grace.

And God gives it only to His children!

"For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit" (Eccl. 2:26).

The enjoyment of the present gifts of life in contentment is given of God to the man "good in his sight." To his children God gives "wisdom, and knowledge, and joy." He does not give these gifts to the wicked. The one good in his sight is one who stands righteous according to God's verdict before God's judgment seat. His sins are covered and he has peace with God. He stands in the righteousness and goodness which is in Christ. The child of this world stands in his sin before God's judgment seat. The sinner in the text is one whom God sees as a sinner, who stands before him in his guilt and transgression as the object of God's judgment in His wrath.

We must not be misled by appearances. The world's rejoicing is that of one who has no rest. It is of one who seeks the joys of this life as an end in themselves, and they are bondage to his soul. The labor of his hands works judgment in his life. "But to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up." His laughter is the braying of one whose soul is empty of true joy. For joy can be found in God alone. The man without God truly has none. As will be seen in more detail, the book of Ecclesiastes does not teach a common grace or goodness of God to all men, but rather repudiates such an idea. In the things of this life, God's grace and goodness are particular, they are for the one "good in his sight."

Not only does the wicked man have no true joy, but all his labor and industry, his heaping and gathering, serve not himself, but are made to serve the children of God. God gives travail to the sinner to heap up, "that he may give to him that is good before God." The toils of the wicked are made in God's wisdom to serve the needs of God's people. The spiritual antithesis that the preacher finds here is an absolute one between the child of God and the child of this world, between one who is good in God's sight and one who stands a sinner. Not in common grace, but in judgment and wrath, the ungodly receive their portion in this life. 

SEMINARY NEWS

News from the Seminary:

Thursday, March 30, 2011

It is time again for a report of our work here on "Seminary Hill." We recently passed the mid-point of second semester; next week is Spring Break; after that there are only five more weeks of class until exams.

Exams for the *returning* students, that is. Not for graduating students.

The rule in the Theological School Constitu-

tion states that the final examination of *graduating* students will be oral. At synod. In public. No one is more conscious of that than our three senior seminarians. Since they have returned from their internships in January, they have been keenly anticipating the three days of public exams at synod. The written exams for the other students run from May 16-24.

Synodical exams for the seniors will be, God willing, in Grandville PRC, on June 15 and 16, with their public sermons on June 14. There are a few written exams for the seniors—in translation from the original languages and exegesis of both Old and New Testament passages. But these written examinations are approved by delegates of synod rather than the seminary professors.

The fourth-year seminarians reported very positively on their six-month internships. In October I reported in this column that seminarian Nathan Decker was interning in Grandville PRC under Rev. Koole's supervision, seminarian Brian Huizinga in Southeast PRC (Grand Rapids) under Rev. W. Langerak, and seminarian Jonathan Mahtani in First PRC (Grand Rapids) under Rev. Slopsema. Recommendation from the faculty for examination at synod depends on a successful internship, and we are happy to report that all three students did well—by their own report and that of their mentors.

Between semesters the seminary schedules a focused, eight-day course on a particular topic of special interest. The professors teach this course in rotation. This past January, for all of the students and some interested visitors, Prof. Gritters gave instruction on Heidelberg Catechism preaching. The professors are thankful to convey to the next generation of preachers not only the Church Order's requirement to preach the Catechism, but especially a genuine love for this honored tradition. And love it we do: Prof. Cammenga currently preaches the Heidelberg for Hope PRC (Grand Rapids) in their vacancy; Prof. Dykstra for Trinity PRC (Hudsonville); and the undersigned recently finished about 18 months supplying the pulpit for First PRC (Holland), until the Lord provided for them a pastor. Preaching the Catechism is not merely academic here. May it never become so.

But back to the students. With time swiftly passing, the semester draws to a close, synod looms, and before we realize it, the three seniors will, if the Lord permits, be declared eligible for a call in the churches. We thank God for His work in these brothers and soon commend them to the churches.

Mr. Vernon Ibe, student from the Berean PRC in the

Philippines, has been assigned a six-month internship in Grace PRC (Grand Rapids) under the supervision of Rev. R. VanOverloop. This will bring Mr. Ibe to January of 2012, and next year at this time he hopes to face his final examinations before he returns to the saints in his country.

The other four students will occupy themselves this summer in various ways. Some find employment in the library here; others in the work of their hands; and one may assist on a mission field for a time for further training in the unique work of a missionary. Please pray for all of our students that the Lord qualifies them so that the churches may have "able and faithful" ministers of the gospel.

But I urge the churches to pray for more men whom God calls to these studies. Our Lord instructed us to pray for laborers for the harvest. Encourage your pastor to include this petition in his public prayers regularly. Perhaps the Lord will answer those prayers by raising up a young man from your congregation. We are encouraged by the news that five young men have expressed desire to take pre-seminary (college-level) Greek here next fall! If these classes go well, these men would be on track to apply formally for admission to the seminary in two more years. May the Lord give us many more!

Yesterday we welcomed 17 Juniors from Covenant Christian High School's Church History class. Mr. Scott VanUffelen (and other teachers) take groups of students to visit seminary once or twice per year. Yesterday the students received a brief introduction to the seminary, a tour of the building and grounds, and an opportunity to sit in one class from each of the professors. Will the Lord use this to plant the seed of desire for the gospel ministry in one of these young men?

Please pray for us, as we daily pray for you and love you, the people of God.

Prof. Barrett Gritters,
Rector 

Revelation (2)

The God-Breathed Writings

The almighty Creator has spoken to us, and we have in Scripture a perfect record of what He has said. God began revealing Himself to His people already in the Garden of Eden. But later, beginning with Moses, God began His work of guiding holy men to write down the word that He had revealed. The Spirit of God guided these men as they wrote, so that they made no mistakes as they recorded for us what God had spoken.

The Scriptures that God has given us are infallibly inspired, and thus are inerrant. They are accurate in all respects in every passage, including those that speak to us about such things as a six-literal-day creation, the forming of the woman out of the rib of the man, and a worldwide flood that covered the tops of the highest mountains. What Scripture says on every subject is true. It really is our one “infallible rule,” as we confess in Article 7 of the Belgic Confession.

To know and understand this is of great importance. To believe the word of God, we must know with certainty what that word of God is. We must hear and believe the Scriptures when they tell us they are God-breathed. Only in this way can we confess what the Truth really is.

Scripture: God-Breathed

That the Scriptures are inspired means that they were breathed out by God. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God...” (II Tim. 3:16). The phrase

“given by inspiration of God” is actually a translation of one Greek word—a word that means literally “God-breathed.” Thus the Scriptures themselves tell us that they have come forth to us out of the very mouth of God.

Anyone who truly believes this will confess that the Scriptures are infallible. To be infallible is to be without error and incapable of erring. God, of course, cannot err. So if we believe the Scriptures when they tell us they are God-breathed, then we will confess from the heart that the Scriptures contain no errors.

We know that the Scriptures were written by men, and that men of themselves are likely to make mistakes. But we also know that these specific men were guided by God’s infallible Spirit, so that what they wrote was precisely the word that God had revealed. If that was not the case, these writings could not be called “God-breathed.”

Note that in this passage it is the writings themselves that are said to be God-breathed. Many would have us believe that although God spoke His word infallibly, the writers sometimes made mistakes when they wrote down what this word was. But to say this is to deny what II Timothy 3:16 specifically states. The passage says more than that the words that God spoke were God-breathed. It says that the *record* we have of what God has revealed is God-breathed. God guided the writers of the Scriptures, so that what they put down was precisely what He had said.

The Scriptures: The Spirit’s Words

Another important passage on inspiration speaks of how these inspired writings came into existence.

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Previous article in this series: April 1, 2011, p. 306.

The first passage quoted above speaks of the inspired *writings*, but does not mention the inspired *writers*. This second passage speaks about the writers, and explains how it was possible for sinful men to write the Scriptures without error: “For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man; but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost...” (II Pet. 1:21). The writers could and did write without error because they were “moved by the Holy Ghost.”

That they were moved by the Spirit means that the Spirit directed them. The term translated “moved” means literally “carried” or “borne.” So God in this passage is assuring us that the writers of Scripture were borne along by His Spirit, who guided and directed them, so that they faithfully recorded what He had revealed.

The Scriptures, therefore, are the words of the Spirit. There are many passages in which they are referred to as such. Sometimes the Scriptures are said to be a record of what someone said “by the Holy Ghost”: “For David himself said by the Holy Ghost, The LORD said to my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool” (Mark 12:36). In other passages, the Scriptures are said to be the words that the Spirit spoke by means of a man: “Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, *which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake* before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus” (Acts 1:16). “And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, *Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet* unto our fathers” (Acts 28:25). And in other places, the Scriptures are simply said to be the words of the Holy Ghost. The human writer is not even mentioned. Hebrews 3:7: “Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice...)”

These passages serve to explain what it means that the writers of the Scriptures were “borne along” by the Spirit. It means the Spirit directed them, so that what they wrote was the word of the Spirit. And if the Scriptures are the word not of men, but of the Spirit, then it must be the case that they contain no errors.

The Words of the Inspired Writer

But, someone may say, the Scriptures are also said to be the writers’ words. Sometimes, as in Hebrews 3:7, what is recorded in Scripture is said to be what the Spirit said. But there are also other passages where the words found in Scripture are said to be those of the speaker who spoke them, or of the writer who wrote them.

Take, for example, the following passage: “The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the LORD came...” (Jer. 1:1-2). Here the book of Jeremiah is referred to as the words of Jeremiah. And yet what he wrote is also said to be “the word of the LORD.”

Similarly, the New Testament sometimes refers to passages found in the Old Testament as the words of the one who spoke them: “And David himself saith in the book of Psalms, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand...” (Luke 20:42). So Psalm 110 is a record of the words of David, and yet it is also the word of God. How are we to understand this?

The answer is that what we have in the Scriptures are the words that the Spirit spoke in and through the writers. The writers willingly spoke and wrote that which they personally believed to be the word of God. Just as each person speaks or writes a bit differently, so these men spoke and wrote down the word of God in a way that was unique to them. But—and this is the key point—the Spirit was working within each of the writers, so that even though he was writing down God’s word in his own unique way, the Spirit was directing him, so that what was put down was precisely the word that God had revealed.

Inspiration: Not Merely Dictation

When we say that the Scriptures are inerrant, many accuse us of having a mechanical view of inspiration. They say we are viewing the writers to be merely taking down dictation, and recording what God has said in the same way that it was common for secretaries of the past to take down a letter dictated to them by their boss.

It should be quite obvious that the inspired writ-

ers were not merely taking down a dictated letter. If a man puts down in writing a letter that is dictated to him, the content of the letter will tell us nothing about the man who wrote it down. Yet it should be evident to all that that is not the way it is with the Scriptures. We certainly can tell something about Jeremiah, David, Paul, etc. from the books of the Bible that they wrote. As has been sufficiently shown already, the Scriptures themselves refer to the Psalms written by David as the words of David, and the prophecies of Jeremiah as the words of Jeremiah. Such is not the case when one is merely taking down dictation. A dictated letter is not referred to as the words of the one who took down the dictation. Inspiration and dictation are not the same.

So what is it that makes inspiration different? For one thing, a person taking down dictation might make a mistake. He may mishear something, or he may forget what was said. This could happen in dictation. But it never happened in inspiration. The Spirit guided the writers, so that they knew what was said, remembered what was said, and recorded what was said without a single error.

But that is not the only way in which inspiration differs from dictation. In inspiration we have the word of God as it was revealed to a prophet, was eaten by that prophet, and then came forth from that prophet in a unique way.

Throughout Jeremiah's life, the Spirit prepared him for the work that God had chosen him to perform. God formed him into a unique human being, who would speak God's word in a way that would manifest some of the characteristics of his unique personality. Yet while he was speaking and writing God's word, the Spirit was guiding him, so that what came forth from him was completely the word of God.

The Word Not of Men, but of God

Scripture declares itself to be not the word of men, but the word of God: "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God..." (I Thess. 2:13a). So the words of Jeremiah recorded in Scripture are the


word of God, and not of men. It was not the word of Jeremiah. The things he wrote down did not arise out of his own head. God alone was the source of the word that he wrote.

This same idea is taught in the verse just prior to the one that speaks of the writers of the Scriptures being borne along by the Spirit. There we read that: "...no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation" (II Pet. 1:20). This passage has often been explained wrongly. It is not making a statement about who it is that is able to interpret the Scriptures. Rather, it is speaking of the origin of the Scriptures.

The word here translated "is" means literally "comes to be" or "becomes," and the phrase "of any private interpretation" is a translation of two words that together here mean "from one's own interpretation." So, putting it together, we have: "No prophecy of the Scripture comes from one's own interpretation." The Spirit here is telling us that the prophecies found in Scripture did not originate from the prophet's own explanation of things. Rather, they came from the Spirit, who carried along the writers while they were engaged in the activity of writing God's word.

The Central Importance of This Truth

Understanding that the Scriptures are God-breathed is of great importance. Genuine faith is a certain knowledge, whereby we hold for truth all that God has revealed. If there were errors in the Bible, we would be unable to know for sure whether any given passage really was the word of God. But our Father in heaven assures us that the Scriptures that He has given to us are infallibly inspired by His Spirit. He wants us to know and to have no doubt about what He has said.

Therefore we must not be deceived by those who would persuade us and our children that the Bible contains errors. Our God really has spoken to us, and has made sure that we know what He has revealed. He has preserved for us a record of it. We have this record today in the God-breathed Scriptures. 

The Fruit of the Spirit: Temperance

The last aspect of the fruit of the Spirit is the virtue of temperance. Temperance is more commonly known as “self-control” or “self-discipline.” Another word similar to temperance is “modesty.”

This virtue is not mentioned often in the Bible, in comparison to some of the other aspects of the fruit of the Spirit that we have considered. It is mentioned seven times in the New Testament. Included among the seven references is its use in Acts 24:25, where it refers to how a governor should rule well and live in view of the coming day of the Lord in His judgment. In I Corinthians 7:9, the apostle Paul mentions temperance in connection with the single life, sex, and marriage. Paul wrote, “But if they cannot contain (i.e., be temperate), let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.” In Titus 1:8, temperance is listed as one of the qualifications for the office of elder. Another example of the use of temperance in the New Testament is II Peter 1:5-6. There Peter admonishes: “add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness.” Our knowledge of the Lord and His truth must be coupled closely with virtue on the one side and temperance on the other.

Finally, in I Corinthians 9:24-27 Paul wrote about the importance of temperance in his own life and work as an apostle. He wrote, “And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.” If temperance is vital for the success of a worldly athlete for the prize of an Olympic gold medal, should it not be regarded by us as more than vital for the prize for which we press forward by faith? That it ought to

be highly valued by the believer is emphasized by Paul when he writes in I Corinthians 9:27, “But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.”

The temperance that the apostle Paul needed in his own life and apostolic labors is illustrated in I Corinthians 9:26 by two familiar examples. The Olympic marathon runner or sprinter competed in his races with the desire to win the prize of the winner’s wreath. However, to obtain that championship prize, the marathon runner or sprinter had to train extensively and prepare both his body and mind to race for victory. In like manner, after training himself vigorously and extensively both mentally and physically for the grueling matches, the boxer competes in the ring with explosive intensity, meticulously honed reflexes, and a deliberate strategy in order to obtain the championship belt. Both types of athletes do everything necessary, governing all aspects of their life, mind, and body meticulously, in order to obtain the sole objective of the gold medal or championship belt.

Similarly, the apostle explained that it was necessary for him to be so governed in all areas of his life that he could be effective in his work for the welfare of the church. All distractions and hindrances had to be rejected and resolutely avoided. He was required to keep even his body under control so that the church would be faithfully served. Without temperance, the apostle would have been at best like a shadow-boxer, one beating on thin air or beating on the wrong opponent; or like a marathon runner who runs in the wrong direction or runs off course onto an illegal shortcut, because of which he is disqualified. Without temperance, Paul would have been an unfaithful preacher, and the welfare of the church put in jeopardy.

In light of the apostle’s instruction, we may understand that temperance for the officebearer and the believer alike is that spiritual ability to bring himself

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Previous article in this series: March 1, 2011, p. 247.

under control for a godly and faithful life unto the Lord. Temperance is the inner strength to be a master over oneself and to be ruled with a Christ-centered purpose in life. One who is temperate does not let himself become a slave to whim, uncontrolled passions, the deceitfulness of riches, carnal lusts, or other evils, such as peer-pressure. One who is temperate puts himself under such control, that whatever good and profitable thing he must desire to do, that is the godly thing that he pursues by faith.

Temperance is the ability to govern oneself completely in all circumstances of life. Temperance is the virtue that applies to times of ease and times of crisis; times of wealth and times of poverty; times of health and times of sickness; and times when one is full of ambitious energy and times when at the end of the day one is thoroughly drained. Temperance in those situations is to have spiritual control over ourselves so that we continue in the life of godliness, love, and thankfulness to our heavenly Father.

This virtue applies to so many things in our lives, including even our use of time. Are you temperate or disciplined with your use of the gift of time? Do you make time for significant prayer each day with God? Do you make time for Scripture?

Temperance applies to our daily bread. Are we temperate with our food: eating in moderation?

Are we, in our warfare against this present Sodom-like world, abstaining from using the gift of sex in the single life, and faithfully using the gift of sex in the marriage bond, in obedience to God's seventh commandment and His ordinance of the one-flesh union of marriage?

In that regard, are we temperate even in what we allow our eyes to see? (Ps. 101:3)

According to II Peter 1:6, true temperance is joined closely to virtue, faith, and knowledge. True temperance arises out of a regenerated heart of faith, aims for the eternal and spiritual value of God's glory, and is full of the knowledge of God, Christ, particular redemption, the commandments of the Lord, and a life motivated by thanksgiving to God. True temperance aims at the prize of covenant fellowship with the Father in heavenly glory in the way of faithful and thankful service to Him.

For that prize and for our salvation and redemption, Christ was temperate. In opposition to Christ's resolute discipline to fulfill all righteousness for us in love to

God, Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness to turn the nearby stones into bread. Though He had been without food for 40 days, Christ kept His body in subjection and did not permit his aching stomach to determine how He would respond to Satan. In His defense against and victory over the Devil, Christ declared authoritatively from Scripture that "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). Throughout His ministry, Christ had perfect self-discipline and self-control. When rejected by the people of Nazareth at the cliff's edge and turning towards the unbelieving multitude to walk through the midst of them, Jesus did not call down fire from heaven to burn them all up. Instead, He bore the reproach and rejection of wicked men as part of the accursed way that He was required to walk for our full redemption.

Because of Christ's redemption, the temperance of Christ is given to us as a sovereignly-worked gift of the Spirit of our Lord. Of course, true temperance is not naturally present in us. Daily our sins in many ways show that we do not govern ourselves very well in the service of the Lord. By nature we are intemperate and prone to excess in self in many ways. Hence, true temperance is a miraculous work of God's grace in and through us.

Bringing ourselves under the regulation of Christ and His Word makes us realize that the words "self-government," "self-control," or "self-discipline" might be misleading. He who is truly temperate does not wish to be governed by his "self." The Spirit of Christ teaches us to be willing and ready to live in submission unto Him. Although temperance is the ability to govern all of our bodily and spiritual members in a harmonious choir of thanksgiving to God all the days of our lives, yet ultimately temperance is the spiritual ability to be governed willingly by Christ's Word and Spirit. Temperance delights to be bound by Christ's yoke, which is easy and light. Temperance delights to be a citizen of Christ's kingdom and under His government of grace. True temperance flourishes in the Christian's liberty of being bound entirely by the government of Christ.

As you can readily understand, this temperance does not mean an easy life. It was not so for Paul. Likewise, the temperate believer must live a life of self-denial

and must war daily against his own intemperate old nature. He must also expect to face persecution from the unbelieving world. For example, he will be mocked by worldly fellow workers as they head off to the night club or neighborhood pub after a long day of work, and he heads home to the needs of his wife and children. The temperate believer will be mocked by his worldly, fun-loving neighbors because he and his godly wife must closely regulate their use of money for the support of the church, the poor, his family, and the Christian school. The temperate Christian young woman and young man will be mocked when they in temperance reject the world's temptations to flaunt their sexuality by immodesty in dress and in dance with or in front of the opposite sex. In spite of the many difficulties that the spiritually temperate must face while living in a world intoxicated with carnal self-indulgence, if this virtue of temperance, along with the others of the fruit of the Spirit mentioned in Galatians 5:22-23, be in them, then they shall neither be unfruitful nor barren branches in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is for the temperate believer the encouraging

hope of a worthy crown of glory at life's end because of God's grace in Christ Jesus. Athletes today pursue corruptible crowns. Being corruptible, they and their earthly glory will all perish, either in this life already under God's curse, or most certainly in the great fire and destruction upon the earth and creation when our Lord in His final appearing shall make all things of the earthly creation new and heavenly. However, for the truly temperate in Christ there is that better crown, which does not fade in its glory and value. Having in spiritual modesty and discipline finished his course, fought the good fight, and reached the finish line of his work and life, the apostle could be confident that the Lord would give him in grace a beautiful crown (II Tim. 4:7-8). Ought not we in holy temperance to pursue the same crown from the Lord whom we love?

May the Spirit of our Lord by His almighty and sanctifying grace make us fruitful branches in Christ Jesus, so that we may bring forth the fruit of the Spirit abundantly and in all its spiritual sweetness to the glory of God triune and to the praise of His wondrous grace.



SPECIAL ARTICLE

REV. CHRIS CONNORS

Christ's Burden-Bearers (1)

Love for God's law as the rule of obedience and gratitude does not produce legalists. Nor does it produce a self-righteous spirit toward our fellow Christians who fall into sin. We know that all our attempts at law-keeping—our righteousnesses—are as filthy rags. We know that we are either justified by faith alone without the works of the law, or we stand utterly condemned! The whole book of Galatians drives that home to us. Being justified by faith alone, we have a new way of living!

In Galatians 6:1-5, the apostle Paul is applying justification by faith alone into the life of the church. Justifi-

cation by faith alone is more than a truth—it is a reality and a way of life. It underpins and animates everything about our Christian life. Paul is going to show us how it *responds* to a brother who is overtaken in a fault.

A fellow *believer* has stumbled and fallen. How will we deal with him? Will we approach him in a 'spirit' of self-righteousness and pride? No, justification by faith alone will not allow that. A *believer* has been overtaken in a sin! That brother needs to be restored to Christ, in order to hear from Him the declaration of God's forgiveness in his consciousness. Christ has placed us with that brother, to help him—to bear his burden.

The Burdened Soul Discovered

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which

Rev. Connors is pastor in the Brisbane, Australia Evangelical Presbyterian Church.

are spiritual, restore such an one....” Only a saint who has fallen into sin can be *restored*. That restoration will always be through genuine conversion—repentance and faith that bring us on our knees to God for forgiveness and grace. That is part of our life—always. For we are all, at best, sinning saints. Justified believers are so very weak and imperfect. We are new creatures in Christ, yet we have but a small beginning of new obedience and so much remaining corruption. We can be, and often are, overtaken in a fault. That is the sort of people God justifies through faith alone! We ought never to forget that.

A *fault* is literally a *sin*. It is sin as a transgression and falling away from obedience to what we know God requires in His revealed will. We knew what was right, but we didn’t do it. The sorts of sins Paul has in mind are described in chapter 5:19-21. He calls them “works of the flesh.” Some are very black and disgusting—but justified Christians can fall into them. A brother or sister is overtaken in a fault.

What is it to be *overtaken*? As the latter part of the verse indicates, Paul is not referring to a premeditated and habitual walk in the flesh. Nor is he referring to one who has apostatized from the faith and given himself over to sin. Rather, a Christian has been overtaken by and has succumbed to temptation. Temptation has caught him unprepared and vulnerable; it has come upon him powerfully and he has been enticed, ensnared. The sad result is that he is now *in* this fault, and the consequences of it. And that brings a heavy *burden* upon him (v. 2).

The formerly hidden sin has been uncovered, or discovered. This too has overtaken such sinners. As the Spirit assures us: “Be sure your sins will find you out” (Num. 32:23). They stand now exposed, found out, discovered. It is known by others—by their Christian friends. They cannot but feel the shame of having let God, themselves, and everyone who is dear to them down. What a mess they have made! Their burden is greatly increased!

If their sin is such that it is a public scandal, they will need to submit to the appropriate censure of church discipline. That was the case with the saint in Corinth who was overtaken in incest, and had to be rebuked and disciplined before he would repent and return to

Christ for pardon. The person who is overtaken in a fault will therefore have to deal with the consequences of his sin—in whatever form it comes.

But there is a heavier burden yet. This burden is spiritual—it is within the soul. There are the spiritual consequences that bear down on their spirit. This is “*the burden*”—everything else, difficult as it is, is not to be compared. This burden is sorrow of heart over sin—it is the experience of brokenhearted ruination. It is the sense that life has been shattered—we have come apart at the seams. It seems that everything that is good and precious is irrevocably lost—I did it in my foolishness and it cannot be undone. This burden, when it comes fully upon us, can strike a wound deep inside us, somewhere deeper than the level of our conscious thoughts. A wound is struck in our heart of hearts from where everything that we feel and think arises. That wound weeps and grieves! It can hold us awake to weep in the night. It can generate night terrors that make us fear going to bed! It greets us in the morning when we awake, like a cloud of sadness we cannot shake. It can put us in, and hold us in, the place of mourning. While this burden lies heavy on the soul, there can be no peace or rest. “There is no soundness in my flesh because of thine anger; neither is there any rest in my bones because of my sin. For mine iniquities are gone over mine head: as an heavy burden they are too heavy for me” (Ps. 38:3-4).

How we should flee from sin! And how careful we should be with our brethren! There is a danger that the believer would be crushed (II Cor. 2:7). “So that contrariwise ye ought to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up by over much sorrow.”

What a blessed thing, to have healed helpers—Christians who have experienced something of this same burden and been delivered from it—to be our burden-bearers, friends who will come alongside and graciously *restore* us. That word *restore* means, “to put back together again.” That describes true spiritual healing. We need help to bring our burden to Jesus Christ, who will put our bones back into joint and cleanse and close up our wounds. He is the great physician of our souls. Christians who fall into sin say they feel like they have been hit by a train! Indeed, they have. We don’t need self-righteous people to come and beat us with the club

of the law. We need humble saints to gather us into our Saviour's grace. We need fellow Christians who understand and can *restore such as we*—put us back together again. We need people who can minister the Balm of Gilead—that healing power of Christ's righteousness!

The Burden-Bearer's Spiritual Preparation

"You who are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness...." Notice that Paul addresses himself to those "*who are spiritual*."

There is no hope of finding a burden-bearer in a fleshly church member (5:26). The flesh is quick to elevate itself at the expense of the erring brother. It secretly rejoices over his demise, and even in offering help will be destructive. When others are brought low, fleshly church members use the bowed spirit and broken heart as a step ladder. They stand above, they feel no pity. They come with truths, but they leave the definite impression that they are really saying: "You are caught out, you deserve whatever you get...and may you get all that you deserve!" There is no help to be found in such a person! God save us from such *friends*, for the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel.

The self-righteous church member is no burden-bearer either. The legalist deceives himself that he is something when he is *nothing* (v. 3). He imagines that because he has not been overtaken in this fault (God knows he has plenty of other faults that are tracking him down!), he is more acceptable to God. He is a practical heretic. He professes with his mouth to believe in justification by faith alone, but he denies it in his attitude and practice. He is therefore critical, harsh, and ready to heap more burdens upon the distressed soul. And while he is about his wickedness, he is feeling even better about himself—for it is a good work to rage against sin and condemn his brother—by his twisted standard! His *practical* heresy makes him useless—yes, worse than useless. When he lays his cold-as-death hand upon the burdened soul, he heaps burden upon burden. If you are such a person—if you have that spirit—please stay away! *Never* attempt to help a bur-

dened soul. You are not qualified to be a burden-bearer. You know nothing of the spirit of meekness.

Spurgeon judged that most people would rather be "blown up by a meek man, than praised by a harsh one." "There is," he says, "a way of doing things so that the person reproved feels positively grateful to you. One may kick a man downstairs in such a fashion that he will rather like it, while another may open a door in such an offensive way that you don't want to go through till he is out of the way."

Christ's burden-bearers must be *spiritual*. That is, they must be "walking in the Spirit" and manifesting "the fruits of the Spirit" in the way they relate to their brethren (Gal. 5: 22-23).

A burden-bearer will, most especially, manifest the *spirit of meekness!* That is the spirit of a justified sinner! He will be *considering himself lest he also be tempted*. When he says: "There go I, but for the grace of God," he means it from the depths of his heart! His experience in daily conversion convinces him. And his experimental acquaintance with the freeness of God's justifying grace drives it home to him in a way that he cannot forget or deny. He *confesses*, God justified an ungodly, wicked man when he justified *me!* He has learned meekness at the foot of the cross. Such a person recoils from a harsh, censorious attitude. He is compelled by the Spirit to deal graciously and gently with his brother—because he understands something of his need, from the inside out!

Beloved, that is the spirit we learn from Jesus. We not only come to Him for rest, but to learn of Him who is meek and lowly of heart. What we learn is reinforced anew every day on our knees before the throne of grace, where we look for help to our sympathetic high priest who is moved by the feeling of our infirmities, being tempted in all points like as we are, yet without sin. He came to us while we were yet in our sins, completely overtaken and swallowed up! He didn't turn away in disgust! No, He bore our griefs and carried our sorrows. He bore our sins away from us as far as the east

*We don't need
self-righteous people
to come and beat us
with the club of the law.
We need humble saints
to gather us into
our Saviour's grace.*

is from the west! Do you not say: "He is *my* Burden-Bearer!"

In all our faults and sins we are *nothing without the righteousness and intercession of Christ* to uphold us, bear away our burden of sin, and maintain us in the state of justification and acceptance with God. This is our most fundamental confession. Is it not!?

Therefore, we, in our attitude and conduct toward our brethren must reflect this truth. If we stand, we stand by the grace of God. If we are not swept away

into destruction by our sins, it is by the faithfulness and continual intercession of Jesus Christ. No other reason can be found!

If that reality lives in your heart, if it is the animating principle of your life, if it is the strength and comfort of your soul—then Christ has equipped you to be a burden-bearers! Thank God for you! How we need you in our midst!

... to be concluded. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of the Doon, IA PRC hosted a Seniors Game Night the evening of March 22 for all the members of their congregation 60 years old and older. All "senior" members were invited to join together for a night of fellowship, Psalter-singing, and games.

The Young People of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC hosted an ice cream social as a fund-raiser for this summer's young people's convention following their Prayer Day service, March 9.

The Young People's Society of First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a Second-Best Sale on March 25 and 26 in the lower level of their church. Sale items included gently used infant to adult clothing, as well as toys, sporting goods, etc.... In other words, something for everyone. Proceeds went towards the upcoming convention.

On Sunday evening, March 20, the young people of the Grandville, MI PRC hosted a singspiration at

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

their church. All the members of the nearby churches were invited and encouraged to join the Grandville congregation as they ended the Lord's Day singing praises to our God.

The Young People's Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited the young people of neighboring First PRC in Edmonton to join them for a Toonie Night at the CACH gym on April 1. A donation of a Toonie per person was requested to cover the cost of the evening. Snacks and drinks were provided. I should also add that my "go to" expert on all things Canadian informs me that a Toonie is a two-dollar coin.

On Friday evening, April 1, the young people of the Hull, IA PRC enjoyed a "Where's Waldo" activity in Sioux Falls, with a stop for pizza afterward.

Young Adults Activities

The Young Adult Society of the Loveland, CO PRC hosted their annual Young Adults Retreat on March 7-10 at the YMCA in Estes Park. Rev. S. Key and Rev. R. Kleyn were this year's featured speakers.

Each man spoke on the general theme "Communion of the Saints." Those who attended this year's retreat had opportunities to explore the mountainsides on snowshoes, play in a volleyball tournament, or just relax at the Y while enjoying good Christian fellowship with others from around the country. Loveland's consistory also oversaw a Prayer Day service at the YMCA as part of the Young Adult Retreat. Rev. Kleyn led that worship service.

Denomination Activities

The Men's Society of the Hull, IA PRC invited all the men from the area churches to a combined Men's Society meeting at Trinity Christian High School on March 24. Bible discussion, led by Rev. R. Miersma, was from II Corinthians 8:1. After-recess discussion was led by Rev. D. Overway on the topic, "Christian Liberty."

The Senior Singles Fellowship of the area churches in West Michigan enjoyed their first meeting of the year on March 31. After lunch at a Hudsonville, MI restaurant, they drove to the Fellowship Hall of the

Trinity PRC for a program given by the students of Genesis Preschool.

On April 6, Rev. K. Koole and Rev. A. Lanning were scheduled to depart on a trip to Singapore and then to Australia/Tasmania on behalf of our denomination's Contact Committee. Plans called for them to spend two Sundays in Singapore and one Sunday, April 24, in Launceston, Tasmania. The work in Singapore involved finalizing what is necessary for our churches and Covenant ERC to reestablish sister-church relations. Last year's synod authorized sending a committee to commemorate, with the EPCA, their 50th anniversary, as well as to discuss further our corresponding relationship. May the Lord be pleased to use their work to manifest the unity of the truth that He has given us with the Covenant Evangelical Reformed Church in Singapore and the Evangelical Presbyterian Churches of Australia. The men hoped to return home on April 27.

Mission Activities

The Consistory of the Berean

PRC in Manila, the Philippines, has decided that instead of working towards a sister-church relationship with our churches at the same time as working towards a federation with the First Reformed Church of Bulacan, the Consistory will focus its time and energy, for now, on the work of federation with FRCB. The Consistory believes that it would be wise that a future denomination of their church and the FRCB seek a sister-church relationship with our churches after federation has been completed, the Lord willing.

We can also report that messages of the Reformed Witness Hour are now being translated by Pastor John Flores of the FRCB. These translated messages are being used by the All of Grace PR Fellowship in Gabaldon on the Sundays when the Kleyns cannot be present. Translation began with the 2010 messages and the hope is to continue eventually into 2011. These translated messages are also posted on our missionaries' audio and literature page. Here's the link: prcphilippinesaudio.wordpress.com.


Congregation Activities

The men of the First PRC in Grand Rapids, MI enjoyed their second annual Men's Breakfast on March 19. Breakfast began at 7:30, with discussion beginning at 8, led by Mr. Darren Vink. The men of First, young and old, were invited to come and enjoy great fellowship in a relaxing atmosphere.

Rev. M. VanderWal bid farewell to the congregation of Hope PRC in Redlands, CA on April 3. Rev. VanderWal preached his farewell sermon from II Peter 3:14-18 under the theme, "Diligence in Preservation." After the service, Hope's congregation bid farewell with a program thanking the VanderWal family for their years of service on their behalf.

Minister Activities

The Edgerton, MN PRC has extended a call to Rev. D. Kuiper to serve as their next pastor.

Rev. A. Lanning received the call to serve as the next pastor of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ We rejoice with our parents,

RICHARD and BEV KUIPER,

who celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary on April 3, 2011. We pray for the Lord's continued blessing on them in the years to come. We thank our heavenly Father for the godly instruction, love and sacrifices they have made for us through the years. "But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Psalm 103:17).

* Jeff Kuiper

* Dan and Jori Kuiper
Micah and Miriam

* Brent Kuiper

* Jon Kuiper and Erinn Pastoor (fiancée)

* Katie Kuiper

* Annie Kuiper

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The members of the Men's Society of Hope PRC, Walker, Michigan extend sincere sympathy to members Dan DeMeester and Gary Nienhuis and also to Mrs. Marge Kamps in the death of fellow member, step-father and husband,

MARINUS KAMPS.

"For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

Harry Langerak, President
David Moelker, Sec'y.

Wyoming, Michigan

New Book

■ South Holland and Faith Protestant Reformed Evangelism committees have helped publish a NEW book/pamphlet called *The Work of the Holy Spirit*, written by David J. Engelsma and Herman Hanko. Please contact one of these churches for more info or to receive a copy.

Call to Synod!!

■ Synod 2010 appointed Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan the calling church for the 2011 Synod.

The consistory hereby notifies our churches that the 2011 Synod of the Protestant Reformed Churches in America will convene, the Lord willing, on Tuesday, June 14, 2011 at 8:30 A.M. in the Grandville Protestant Reformed Church, Grandville, Michigan.

The Pre-Synodical Service will be held on Monday evening, June 13, at 7:00 P.M. Rev. R. Van Overloop, president of the 2010 Synod, will preach the sermon. Synodical delegates are requested to meet with the consistory before the service.

Delegates in need of lodging should contact Mr. Dan Key, 3536 Greenfield Ln., Hamilton, MI 49419. Phone (269) 751-8074; email: dmkey@frontier.com.

Consistory of
Grandville Protestant Reformed Church
Dan Key, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hope PRC in Walker express their Christian sympathy to Deacon Michael Rau and his wife and children in the death of his mother-in-law,

MRS. RAMONA STREYLE.

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

Tom DeVries, Vice-President
Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With gratitude to our heavenly Father, we rejoice with our parents and grandparents,

BRIAN and LOIS DYKSTRA, as they celebrated 30 years of marriage on April 24, 2011. We thank our God who has richly blessed us with their covenant instruction, loving care, and godly example in marriage.

- * Rev. Nathan and Carrie Langerak
Sadie, Caleb, Ethan, Noah
- * Brian and Michelle Huizinga
Anna, Calvin, Jacob
- * Karl and Megan Dykstra
Bailey, Norah
- * Matthew and Stephanie Dykstra
Levi, Samuel
- * Taylor Dykstra
- * Macey Dykstra

Hudsonville, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of Hope PRC in Walker express their Christian sympathy to Elder Eugene Kamps and his wife and children in the death of his father,

MR. MARINUS KAMPS.

May they be comforted in the words of Jesus Christ, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die" (John 11:25, 26).

Tom DeVries, Vice-President
Joel Minderhoud, Clerk

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The members of the Men's Society of Hope PRC, Walker, Michigan extend heartfelt sympathy to member John Streyle in the death of his mother,

MRS. GUSTAVE STREYLE.

"As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness" (Psalm 17:15).

Harry Langerak, President
David Moelker, Sec'y.

Wedding Anniversary

■ With thanksgiving and gratitude to our heavenly Father, we rejoiced with our parents and grandparents,

RAY and TENA BRUINSMA,

as they commemorated 65 years of marriage on April 25, 2011. God has greatly blessed us with godly parents and grandparents, who have witnessed of their love for the Lord and their family in untold ways by example and deed. "And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee" (Genesis 17:7).

- * Raymond Bruinsma (in glory)
- * James and Kathy Bruinsma
- * James and Lois Rau
- * Jerry and Martha Bruinsma
- * Karen Bruinsma

7 grandchildren
20 great grandchildren

South Holland, Illinois

Reformed Witness Hour

May 2011

Date	Topic	Text
May 1	"Kept By God"	Philippians 1:6
May 8	"God's Will for Mothers"	Titus 2:4, 5
May 15	"Walking Worthy of Your Calling"	Ephesians 4:1-3
May 22	"Looking to the All-Sufficient God"	Psalms 73:23-26
May 29	"Our Ever-Living Intercessor"	Hebrews 7:25