

The Standard Bearer

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Daily Loaded with the Lord's Benefits

Blessed be the LORD, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation.

Psalm 68:19

Psalm 98 is a Psalm of David. It was written in celebration of a great victory over Israel's enemies. In this Psalm David called upon Israel to rejoice before the Lord and sing praises to Him.

In keeping with all this, David emphasized three things in the verse we use for this meditation. He described the Lord as the God of Israel's salvation. He pointed out that the Lord daily loads His people with benefits. And he called the Lord blessed, that is, worthy of all praise and honor.

The Lord is also the God of our salvation. Daily He loads us also with benefits. And so He is blessed, worthy of all praise and honor. That praise we must render to Him from thankful hearts.



Daily the Lord loaded Israel with benefits.

Rev. Slopsema is pastor of First Protestant Reformed Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

These benefits were, first of all, material abundance. The reign of David was a time of prosperity for Israel. It had not always been that way. The 400-year period of the judges prior to this had been a time of want and scarcity, as the surrounding nations troubled Israel constantly. But now was a time of victory and prosperity. Canaan had once more become the land of milk and honey for Israel. This abundance was part of the benefits of which David spoke. Daily the Lord loaded Israel with these benefits.

The benefits that the Lord loaded upon Israel were, however, primarily spiritual in nature.

We must bear in mind that in the Old Testament God dealt with His people in pictures. The earthly Canaan was a picture of a heavenly Canaan. The material prosperity of Canaan was a picture of the spiritual prosperity of the heavenly Canaan, a prosperity that Israel began to enjoy even in the earthly Canaan. This greater spiritual prosperity consisted in all the blessings of salvation. It included the forgiveness of sins, deliverance from the power of sin, and the power to live a new life in sweet fellowship and communion with God.

Daily the Lord loaded Israel with these benefits.

This was in keeping with the name and description

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David gave to God. He is the LORD, that is, Jehovah. This is God's covenant name, emphasizing that He graciously established and maintained His covenant with Israel. He is also called the God of Israel's salvation. As their covenant God, Jehovah brought a great salvation to Israel.

It was as their covenant God, the God of their salvation, that the Lord daily loaded Israel with benefits and blessings, both material and spiritual.

And the Lord does the same to us.

We also belong to the covenant of God. We belong to God's covenant because we, by God's sovereign grace, belong to Jesus Christ. God's covenant is with Abraham and his seed (Gen. 17:7). And "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

As our covenant God, the Lord has provided for us in Jesus Christ a great salvation. In the context of that salvation the Lord daily loads us with benefits. Also with us these benefits are primarily spiritual in nature. Daily the Lord forgives our sins in Jesus Christ. Daily He leads us to live a new life in the service of His name and provides for us the joy of His covenant fellowship and friendship.

But the Lord also loads us daily with material abundance. Although the church has not always enjoyed material abundance, most who read this do enjoy this abundance. We must remember, of course, that material abundance no longer has the significance it did in the Old Testament. It no longer serves as a picture and token of spiritual blessings. Nevertheless, the material is necessary for our covenant life with God on the earth. To serve the Lord in His covenant, we need food and drink, clothing and shelter. And the Lord, as the God of our salvation, has loaded us with material things.



The source of all the benefits that Israel enjoyed was the great victory that the Lord gave to Israel.

As we indicated earlier, this Psalm was written on the occasion of a great victory that the Lord had given to Israel over one of her enemies, the identity of which we are not told.

Through this victory the Lord had shown Himself again as the God of Israel's salvation. The surrounding nations repeatedly sought to destroy Israel and rob her

of her land. And they were motivated by more than the natural hatred of nation for nation, and greed for more land, that often led one nation to battle with another. Israel was the people of the one true and living God, whom the nations hated. In their attacks on Israel, the heathen nations sought to destroy the people of God and the covenant of God. Behind this was Satan, the arch enemy of God. At stake in these battles, therefore, was the very covenant of God and Israel's life with God. But the Lord had once again led Israel to a great victory. Through this great victory the Lord, as the God of salvation, once more saved Israel.

Out of that victory, and others like it, came the many benefits of which David spoke in this Psalm.

In verse 18 of this Psalm, David spoke of the ascension of the Lord on high, His leading captivity captive, and the gifts the Lord received for men. Notice, He had led captivity captive, that is, had taken captive a multitude of enemies. He had received gifts for men. This refers to the spoils of war that David, as a type of Christ, distributed to the people of Israel.

All this prompts David to speak of the benefits that the Lord loaded upon Israel.

What great benefits the Lord loaded upon Israel daily. And they all came out of the great victories God gave to Israel as the God of her salvation over her enemies.

The benefits we enjoy today as the church find their source in a much greater victory than this. The victory that occasioned the writing of this Psalm was a mere type, or picture, of a greater victory of the Lord through Jesus Christ on the cross.

Let us consider this greater victory of the cross. Throughout history the devil has sought to destroy the covenant of God with His people and the new life they have in Him. He will do that by turning them against their God and bringing them under the bondage of sin. In fact, he succeeded in this at the very beginning of history by leading our first parents into sin. This was a terrible violation of the covenant that made the life of the covenant impossible. And so God sent His Son to the cross to atone for sin. At the cross Jesus endured the full punishment of sin for all that the Father had given Him. He also walked in perfect obedience for them. This perfect sacrifice means complete victory for the church and the covenant. Christ's atoning death rescues

God's covenant from the destruction of sin and ensures the salvation of the church. It also dooms the devil and the powers of darkness to destruction in hell.

Of this great victory in Christ, the many victories of God over Israel's enemies in the Old Testament were only types and pictures. On the basis of His great victory at the cross, Christ also ascended into heaven. And, even as David distributed to the people of Israel the spoils of war after his victories over the enemies of Israel, so also the Lord distributes the spoils of war to His church through the power of Christ's ascension. Christ is seated at the right hand of God in heaven. As the exalted Victor He daily loads the church with the benefits of His victory—blessings of salvation, both spiritual and material.



In response to all this David exclaims, "Blessed be the LORD, who daily loadeth us with benefits."

The phrase "to bless" is used in Scripture most often to describe one greater bestowing good gifts on one lesser. These good gifts are the source of life and happiness and are called blessings.

Here, however, David called the people to bless the Lord. "Blessed be the LORD." He meant that the Lord was the one who ought to be blessed by Israel. His many benefits ought to be acknowledged. Expressions of thanks ought to be given. He ought to be praised.

This is what we should do in response to the many benefits the Lord has loaded upon us.

Many of our readers will celebrate a national day of thanksgiving soon. Historically Thanksgiving Day is connected to the fall harvest and the material abundance we receive from the land.

Certainly the Lord has loaded us with these things.

We ought to acknowledge this as well as thank and praise Him for them.

But let us not forget the greater benefits we have from God through Christ, namely, the spiritual blessing and riches of salvation in Jesus Christ. We must above all acknowledge these spiritual benefits, giving thanks and praise to the Lord for them. 

A (Sharp) Pastoral Warning to Students in Christian Colleges (3)

Dear Reformed Christian Young People (and their parents),

How should a student respond when his religion professor asks the students to reflect on this statement: "Martin Luther King Jr. (and

other civil rights advocates), influential economists, and Nobel Peace prize winners, can do as much to advance God's kingdom as the Calvins and Luthers can." Or if the professor praises preachers who resign from the ministry to run for political office because they can more effectively promote God's kingdom as civil rulers? Or maybe the professor of "Social and Po-

litical Philosophy" suggests that the church *institute's* main calling is to send out her members ("the church as *organism*") to redeem culture, Christianize the community, and thus promote God's kingdom. How should one respond?

How will you defend the view that the *church* is God's kingdom?

What I have been describing in

Previous article in this series: November 1, 2010, p. 52.

these editorials is a “new Calvinism.” How will you respond when the new Calvinists say: “Let this mind be in you: the kingdom is broader than the church. For within the larger circle of the *kingdom* is a smaller circle called *church*. The church exists for the *establishment* of that greater reality: the kingdom. The church is but a *sign* of the kingdom. God’s great work is not the church, but the kingdom.”

A massive shift in emphasis has taken place in Christian colleges in the past 75 years. Affections are turning from church to kingdom. Energies are devoted to kingdom. Are we perhaps missing something when we do not follow the lead of so many Reformed Christians today, and instead emphasize church and claim that we seek the kingdom by seeking the welfare of God’s church?

Will you college students be ready to give a defense, an “answer,” as Peter puts it, to your professors?

In the last editorial I let the proponents of this view speak for themselves, to make clear that I was neither manufacturing nor exaggerating their view. This time I want to show its novelty, defend historically and confessionally the view I have proposed, and so lend assistance to those who would defend the old view.

The Appeal to History

First, the approach of a Reformed Christian is to appeal to Reformed *history*. Not first of all to Reformed writers—influential as they may be—but to Reformed confessions. Not even first of all to Scripture—a

text or many texts—but to the creeds, although we certainly recognize that Scripture is ultimate authority. I teach my students both in seminary and in catechism classes that one essential element of being Reformed is being “confessional,” which means both that we *believe* the creeds and that we *use* them in a certain way. That is, when grappling with controversial questions, first ask what the creeds say. “What did the church in the past believe? By the guidance of

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the Spirit of truth, how did they read Scripture?” I may differ with the creeds only with greatest hesitation. For myself as an officebearer, I have the *Formula of Subscription* clearly before me. Young people who have made confession of faith remember the vow they took regarding the “doctrines taught here in this Christian church.” Reformed believers are *creedal* Christians.

The Reformed creeds have something to say about the kingdom. No one may dismiss lightly the clear con-

fession that our Presbyterian brothers made, *creedally*, as I pointed out in the last editorial: “The visible church...is the kingdom.” Our *Three Forms of Unity* speak with the same voice.

In the Heidelberg Catechism, the petition on God’s *kingdom* (“Thy kingdom come”) is explained: “preserve and increase Thy *church*,” and it expands on that by asking, “Rule us so by Thy Word and Spirit, that we may submit ourselves more and more to Thee.” Lord’s Day 12 describes the work of “our eternal King” as governing us by His Word and Spirit, defending and preserving us in the enjoyment of His purchased salvation. Lord’s Day 31 identifies the “keys of the kingdom” as the *spiritual* instruments of preaching and Christian discipline. With what keys does one enter the kingdom? Preaching and discipline. With what keys is one expelled from the kingdom? Preaching and discipline. What *is* this kingdom? The *church*.

In Article 27, the Netherlands Confession of Faith connects the kingship of Christ to the church exclusively. In Article 36, it calls the civil magistrates to oppose the kingdom of the devil and promote the kingdom of Christ by countenancing the true *preaching* and protecting proper *worship*.

The Canons of Dort teach that to enter the kingdom one must be translated out of the kingdom of darkness and into the light of Jesus Christ, *spiritually* (III-IV:10).

This is the Reformed church’s confession of kingdom. One could wish that the confessions were more

explicit, perhaps polemical in this area. But they were not, because they were united in the doctrine of the church and kingdom.

The Appeal to Scripture

The Reformed fathers worded the confessions so, since they always understood that the New Testament *church* is the fulfillment of the Old Testament *kingdom*. For example, I Peter 2:9 teaches that the *church* is the new “*kingdom* of priests.” The confessions were written with an eye also on important passages like Ephesians 1:19-23. Paul teaches there that when God positioned the resurrected and glorious Christ at His right hand, far above all principalities and powers and dominions both in this world and that to come, and put all things under His feet, He made Christ to be head over all things *to the church*. To the church! That is, *all* this was done, *everything* put under Christ’s feet, for the advantage of His crowning work, the church. Not a kingdom outside of or independent of the church. But the church...which *is* God’s kingdom.

I know that college students will hear Jeremiah 29:7 used almost mantra-like for this new view. Without time and space to explain the passage, which has nothing to do with building God’s kingdom *in* Babylon and *with* Babylon, I only suggest that the student ask in what recent decade that passage was first used for such a purpose, and then engage in some research. Try to find any commentator more than 50 years ago who used it so. There is a reason. The passage has

been hijacked and commandeered for wrong purposes. (Write me for an explanation of that verse over against the modern misuses of it.)

The Appeal to Heavyweights

If a student would appeal to the opinions of men, he may do that carefully, too, and start with the *pre*-Reformation heavyweight Augustine. Augustine is now being criticized by the new Calvinists because he “conflated the church with the city of God.” But Augustine was correct. A respected dictionary of the church affirms that “since the time of Augustine there has been a tendency to institutionalize the concept of the kingdom by identifying it with the church.” That tendency also was correct, but because it is not appreciated today, a Reformed scholar chides current missionaries not to “*continue* interpreting the kingdom in a totally spiritual or apolitical sense.” Why does he use the word “*continue*”? Because Christian missionaries always have interpreted the kingdom spiritually. Trace the historical line. The view I present is not novel. The kingdom-is-broader-than-the-church view is novel.

The Reformers are heavyweights too. Rather than quote them, it suffices only to note that Louis Berkhof said the Reformers “agreed in identifying it (the kingdom) with the invisible church, the community of the elect, or of the saints of God. For them it was first of all a religious concept, the reign of God in the hearts of believers.... They did not expect the external visible form of the Kingdom of God until the glorious appearance of Jesus Christ.” The Reformers! This was the view of the Dutch

heavyweight Gisbertus Voetius, the later Dutch missionary J.H. Bavinck, nephew of Herman, and many others between them. So it is not a surprise that this was the view carried forward into the PRC by Herman Hoeksema and the PRC’s later theologians.

Some of the new Calvinists concede that this is historic Christianity. Calvin Seminary’s mission’s professor, in a 1975 commemorative book, pointed out that the church’s view was subtly shifting from an interest in the community of the *church* to the community of the *city*. “Now, for many, the community of real importance, if you would judge by the weight of attention given to it, is the city.” The *new* Kingdom. Another acknowledged that it was Max Warren in 1948 who led the charge to “build consensus” for this “new direction” and “new understanding of the messianic kingdom,” which was simply following the Roman Catholic’s Vatican II concentration on “peace, fellowship, and justice.”

Historic, Reformed Christianity holds that the *church* is God’s kingdom.

If anyone has yet an interest to develop the doctrine of the kingdom, may God truly bless his efforts. But let him first ask whether he understands Reformed confessions and history. And then also ask whether his yen is from a lurking suspicion that maybe the kingdom is somehow broader than the church. In which case he should refrain.

Next time, God willing, I want to trace this new view to its fountain-

head, and expose the slim pillar—the single slim pillar—that is used to uphold this massive new enterprise of building God’s kingdom outside the church.

A parting word... for this time

When young Christians at Christian colleges define kingdom in terms of church, they will be labeled Anabaptists: guilty of world-flight, fearful of culture and politics, not interested in the important calling that believers have as citizens of the particular country and earthly culture in which they live.

Your lives must not justify such criticism.

Reformed believers must be con-

cerned for God’s *creation* because, understanding God the Father as Creator, Christians want to be the best of environmentalists (they just do not worship at the altar of the “Green God”). They should be interested in *politics*, because Christians are also citizens of the land and are interested in how it is governed (they just do not pin their hopes on government to establish God’s kingdom or dream that, “if only we could return to Abraham Kuyper’s Netherlands...”). They are open to discussions on *economics*, because they know the eighth commandment applies more broadly than to personal finance (they just do not suppose that a good economy benefits God’s

kingdom; in fact, if history and Scripture are to be reckoned with, a good economy may work against God’s kingdom). They delight in, at the very minimum believe it is valuable to study, *the arts*: music, literature, sculpture, and painting (although they value least if at all the art-form that so enamors the new Calvinists: dramatic acting). They read all kinds of *history*, not just church history, because they want to know how Sovereign Jehovah directed the worlds for the sake of His church-kingdom down through the ages.

And they will not forget to read the history of the Anabaptists, to avoid falling into a pretty deep ditch with them. ☺

LETTERS

Christian college minefield

I praise God for your article [October 1, 2010, p. 4] on the dangers which abound in Christian colleges! Thank you, brother, for your clear, insightful article.

Your article is “dead on” in its assessment of the minefield which exists in Christian colleges today. One rightly expects a hostile environment in a public college/university. The danger today, like hidden reefs below otherwise placid waters, is the rapid erosion of adherence to the sufficiency, perspicuity, and authority of Scripture. The plethora of non-24-hour views on the days of Creation is an example of enormous compromise, which portends of even further and inevitable erosion in doctrinal integrity. The issue is that parents ‘think’ they are sending their precious children to a ‘safe’ place spiritually, when such is not the case.

After reading your article, I immediately (1) asked my wife to read this article, wholeheartedly agreeing with what you have said, and (2) e-mailed my comments to

the heads of The Master’s College and Seminary, where our son attended college and seminary. He got his solid grounding at wonderful schools.

You and I will likely have some differences theologically, inasmuch as I am essentially a Reformed Baptist. But I can assure you we stand together on the issues you identified in your superb article.

I recently visited both Greenville Seminary and Puritan Reformed Seminary and had great conversations with faculty and students at each school. These schools, like Master’s, are just a few of the remaining adherents to 24-hour days. I am sorely disappointed that my own denomination, the PCA, has in my view seriously compromised on the issue by taking a multiple-choice approach to the days of Creation.

Brother, you have hit the nail on the head. Thank you for this much needed article!

Randy Kirkland
Manchester, MO

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (10)

The Fundamental Elements of Postmillennial Eschatology

For a creedal, biblical critique of postmillennialism as it has appeared in the Reformed tradition, it is necessary that we recognize the fundamental elements of this doctrine of the last things.

An Earthly Victory within History

At the heart of postmillennialism is the conviction and desire that there will be an earthly realization of the victory promised by the gospel to the kingdom of Christ. The Messianic kingdom will enjoy an earthly triumph within history. There must be a “golden age” for the church before history ends with the coming of Christ. At the very least, Christians must someday outnumber non-Christians. The nations of the world must come under the influence of the gospel and law of God in such a way that they become “Christianized,” socially, culturally, and politically. The church must have earthly dominion.

Gary North wrote: “God’s plan for the ages does not include visible, external, historical defeat for His church at the hands of Satan’s forces. The death and resurrection of Christ guaranteed the visible, external, historical victory of the kingdom of God.”¹

¹ Gary North, *Dominion & Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), 248.

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Previous article in this series: September 15, 2010, p. 490.

Postmillennialist David Chilton regarded the earthly victory of the church as the main element of postmillennial eschatology and the central issue in the controversy over the truth of the last things.

The eschatological issue centers on one fundamental point: Will the gospel succeed in its mission, or not? Regardless of their numerous individual differences, the various defeatist schools of thought are solidly lined up together on one major point: *The gospel of Jesus Christ will fail*. Christianity will not be successful in its worldwide task. Christ’s Great Commission to disciple the nations will not be carried out. Satan and the forces of Antichrist will prevail in history, overcoming the Church and virtually wiping it out—until Christ returns at the last moment, like the cavalry in B-grade westerns, to rescue the ragged little band of survivors.²

North and Chilton are Christian Reconstructionists. But non-Reconstructionist postmillennialists agree that the gospel demands the earthly victory of the church within history. Presbyterian J. Marcellus Kik has written:

To think that the church must grow weaker and weaker and the kingdom of Satan stronger and stronger is to deny that Christ came to destroy the works of the devil; it is to dishonor Christ; it is to disbelieve His Word. We do not glorify God nor His prophetic word by being pessimists

² David Chilton, *Paradise Restored: A Biblical Theology of Dominion* (Tyler, Texas: Reconstruction Press, 1985), 10.

and defeatists. With sufficient faith in Christ we could crush Satan under our feet shortly.³

“Postmillennialism,” exclaimed Loraine Boettner, “does not despair of the power of the Gospel to convert the world, but holds rather that it cannot be defeated, that over the centuries it will win its way, and that eventually the goal will be achieved.”⁴ The goal Boettner had in view is the “Christianizing” of all the nations of the world by the dominant influence of the Christian religion for a thousand years.

K. H. Miskotte expressed this theme of postmillennialism this way: “History’s fulfillment must be *within* history, in order to reveal the glory of the Lord as widely as possible.”⁵

The charge of postmillennialists against amillennialism is that it is defeatist and pessimistic. Amillennialism’s doctrines of a great apostasy, of the increase of lawlessness, and of the rise of Antichrist in the last days are, in reality, a message of the defeat and shame of King Jesus.

How Christian Reconstructionism rails against amillennialism as an eschatology of defeat! The father of postmillennial Christian Reconstruction, Rousas J. Rushdoony, was fierce, even vicious, in his condemnation of amillennialism.

Amillennialism...[is] in retreat from the world and blasphemously surrender[s] it to the devil. By its very premise...that the world will only get worse...it cuts the nerve of Christian action.... If we hold that the world can only get worse...what impetus is left for applying the word of God to the problems of this world? The result is an inevitable one:...amillennial believers who profess faith in the whole word of God...are also the most impotent segment of American society, with the least impact on American life. To turn the world-conquering word of the sovereign, omnipotent, and triune God into a symbol of impotence is not a mark of faith. It is blasphemy.⁶

The earthly victory of the church within history is of the greatest practical importance for postmillennialism. Only the prospect of this “success” motivates the church and the believer to zealous Christian activity. In postmillennialism’s promise of earthly victory is found the incentive for the church to preach the gospel, especially in the work of missions; to teach her members and the human race the law of God; and, in the end, to make human society Christian.

The Puritans saw, and their doctrinal descendants still see, the postmillennial hope of the conversion of large numbers of converts, perhaps a majority of the human race, as the incentive for missions. “The hope [of the Puritans and their disciples] for the [postmillennial] latter days was the compelling motive behind Anglo-American missions.”⁷ It is the theme of Iain H. Murray’s *The Puritan Hope* that the expectation of the conversion of multitudes in a coming “golden age” was the driving force of the mission zeal of the Puritans and their disciples and that only this “Puritan hope” will energize the church today.⁸

Postmillennialism’s hope of a “Christianizing” of the nations is also the incentive for the believer to carry out his Christian calling in the world. Without the promise and hope of postmillennialism that the efforts of Christians will be successful in forming a Christian world, at least externally, charge the postmillennialists, the church and Christians become lethargic and impotent. Only belief of a “millennium or a triumph of Christ and His Kingdom in history,” wrote Rushdoony, will motivate Christians “to conquer the world and to assert the ‘Crown Rights of King Jesus.’”⁹

It is by no means only the Christian Reconstructionists who make the outward, earthly, visible, sensibly impressive success of the word of God in history the main motivation of the Christian’s zealous conduct in the world. Despite his acknowledgment of the hope of

³ J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 19, 20.

⁴ Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1958), 47.

⁵ K. H. Miskotte, cited in G. C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 298; emphasis added.

⁶ Rousas J. Rushdoony, “Postmillennialism versus Impotent Religion,” *Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on the Millennium* 3, no. 2 (Winter, 1976-77): 126, 127.

⁷ James A. De Jong, *As the Waters Cover the Sea: Millennial Expectations in the Rise of Anglo-American Missions 1640-1810* (Kampen: Kok, 1970), 55.

⁸ Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1971).

⁹ Rousas John Rushdoony, *God’s Plan for Victory: The Meaning of Post Millennialism* (Fairfax, Virginia: Thoburn Press, 1977), 2, 8.

the second coming of Christ—an acknowledgment that is largely defensive—Iain Murray exhorts the “Puritan hope,” that is, postmillennialism’s “golden age” and the great revival that will usher it in, as the motivation for diligent Christian activity that will positively influence culture. Murray suggests that the main reason for “the loss of national purpose, the loss of will to advance, the indiscipline and futility of permissiveness” of our day is the “pessimism” that results from the church’s failure to hold and proclaim the “Puritan hope.”¹⁰ The title of the concluding chapter of *The Puritan Hope* is “The Prospect *in* History: Christ Our Hope.” The preposition says it all.

Not the hope of the second coming of Christ as the end of history with its blessings and glory for the church and the elect child of God—the *biblical* hope—but the hope of a millennium within history—the *Puritan* hope—is the main incentive of the church’s activity and of the Christian life.

Conversion of the Jews

A second fundamental element of postmillennialism is its expectation of a large-scale conversion of Jews in the future. The significance for postmillennialism of a future large-scale conversion of racial and national Jews cannot be over-emphasized. All postmillennialists hold this view. The conversion of the Jews will signal the beginning of the “golden age.” It will also bring about the conversion of the vast majority, if not the totality, of the Gentile nations of the world and, thus, the “Christianizing” of all the world upon which the heart of postmillennialism is set.

Although, in fact, all the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning a glorious future for Israel as the Messianic kingdom of God contribute to this expectation, postmillennialism’s hope for the Jews rests mainly on Romans 11:1-32. Particularly, Romans 11:25, 26 is the basis: “Blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved.” Postmillennialism, whether Puritan, Presbyterian, Reformed, or Christian Reconstruction, reads the passage as though the word “so” in verse twenty-six were “then” and understands “Israel” in verse twenty-six as physical Jews.

Based on its interpretation of Romans 11:25, 26, post-

millennialism teaches that sometime in the future, when God has brought the fullness of the Gentiles to salvation, He will *then* convert a large number, perhaps the majority, of physical Jews. Some, with “unbounded optimism,” expect the conversion of every living Jew. And “then” (as postmillennialists interpret “so” in verse twenty-six) all Israel, that is, all the Jews (as postmillennialists understand “Israel” in verse twenty-six), will be saved. This salvation of all Israel will be the beginning of the coming great revival. Then, postmillennialists add, the revival will continue in the saving of multitudes of Gentiles among all nations. Thus will be brought about the “Christianizing” of the whole world and the “golden age.”

Jonathan Edwards expressed the Puritan conception of the national conversion of the Jews and its importance for postmillennialism.

The Jews in all their dispersions shall cast away their old infidelity...and shall flow together to the blessed Jesus... and shall...declare his praises unto other nations. Nothing is more certainly foretold than this national conversion of the Jews in the 11th chapter of Romans.... Though we do not know the time in which this conversion of the nation of Israel will come to pass; yet thus much we may determine by scripture, that it will be before the glory of the Gentile part of the church shall be fully accomplished.¹¹

The contemporary Presbyterian postmillennialist Joe Morecraft III agrees.

Romans 11:1-32 contains a prophecy that someday in the future the Jewish people *en masse* will receive Jesus Christ as their Messiah and enter into the Christian Church. This conversion of the Jews will be accompanied with, and result in, the Spiritual resurrection and reconciliation of the whole world to Christ—global revival and reformation—the Christianization of the earth.¹²

The future conversion of large numbers of physical Jews is of fundamental importance to postmillennialism because this is the one prophecy of Scripture (as postmil-

¹¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The History of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d), 312, 313.

¹² Joe Morecraft III, “The Triumph of Christ’s Kingdom in History: The Victory Orientation of the Futurereview (sic) of the Bible and the Westminster Standards,” *New Southern Presbyterian Review* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2004): 94.

¹⁰ Murray, *The Puritan Hope*, 225.

lennialists read Scripture) that clearly foretells brighter days ahead in history for the church. If the church can look forward to a mass, even national, conversion of Jews in the future, why can she not also expect the mass conversion of all nations? and the “Christianizing” of the entire world? and the church’s (or, Christian Reconstruction’s) dominion over all the life of all nations? and a “golden age” of a thousand years, or hundreds of thousands of years, of earthly peace and prosperity?

Against all the overwhelming testimony of the New Testament to dark days of lawlessness, apostasy, Antichrist, and tribulation for the church in the last days; against all the plain teaching of Scripture that both under the old covenant and under the new covenant the church is always a remnant and a little flock; against all the evidence of two thousand years of new covenant history that it pleases the Lord Christ to establish, maintain, and expand His kingdom in true churches and in faithful saints, with their children, who live in antithetical opposition to a world that lies in darkness (whose god is Satan); against the unanimous witness of the Reformed confessions that the kingdom of Christ will be perfected and the fighting Christian will reign with Christ over all creatures only “hereafter,” that is, at and by the second

coming of Christ¹³—against all of this, a wonderful conversion of masses of Jews in the future is the biblical wedge (so reason the postmillennialists) by which the optimism of postmillennialism may be introduced into the eschatological thinking of the church.

And thus may be driven out of the church’s thinking the debilitating pessimism and defeatism of “blasphemous” amillennialism—the pessimism and defeatism of the testimony of the New Testament to dark days; of the scriptural teaching of the remnant; of the evidence of history that the kingdom of Christ is always a spiritual, opposed, and battling kingdom, arrayed to the very end against the hordes of Satan (Rev. 20:7-9); and of the Reformed confessions, which direct the hope of church and believer to the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the body, the vindication and reward of the final judgment, and the everlasting reign of the saints over all creatures in a new world. 

¹³ “...until the full coming of thy kingdom, wherein thou shalt be all in all”; “...with free conscience fight against sin and the devil in this life, and *hereafter*, in eternity, reign with him over all creatures” (Heidelberg Catechism, Questions 123, 32, in Philip Schaff, *Creeeds of Christendom*, vol. 3, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1966, 352, 353, 318; emphasis added).

The Nature of the Office of Elder (1)

The Office of Rule

Having concluded our treatment of the office of deacon, we will examine various aspects of the office of elder, as God permits. My goal is not to treat every aspect of the office of elder in as much detail as I did the office of deacon, but to focus more particularly on various aspects of the work of the elders.

We begin by noting the nature of the office of elder: it is the office of rule in the church of Jesus Christ.

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Scriptural testimony

That the office of elder in the church of Jesus Christ is one of rule, Scripture indicates in two ways. The first is by the words the Holy Spirit used to refer to this office.

The first word is “elder,” which refers to a person who is advanced in age. Actually, in the Old Testament, the English word “elder” translates three different Hebrew words. Listed in order of most common to least common usage, they mean “old one,” “great,” and “gray headed.” Clearly, all refer to one who is advanced in age. In the

New Testament, the word translates the Greek word *presbuteros*, meaning “aged one,” from which we get our word “presbytery,” referring to the session of elders.

Strikingly, this word is used most often in Scripture not to refer to aged people generally, but to refer to the office of ruler in the church of Jesus Christ. In the Old Testament it usually refers to those who had the rule in Israel; in the gospel accounts and in Acts, to those who were joined with the chief priests in ruling the Jews; and in the epistles, to the office of elder in the New Testament church. As instances of this latter, we read that Paul and Barnabas “ordained them elders in every church” (Acts 14:23); that the apostles and elders gathered in Jerusalem to decide the question about circumcision (Acts 15); and that Paul called for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him in Miletus (Acts 20:17).

Why would the Holy Spirit use a word that literally indicates advanced age, to refer to the office of elder? To underscore that rulers in the church ought to be mature men in all respects; and maturity comes with age. Some of the gifts necessary to rule well are natural gifts, which a man might have while young; but God also uses life’s experiences and the process of sanctification to hone these gifts, in preparing a man for the office of elder. Wisdom, patience, and self-control are just some gifts that are developed over time. An instance of this is clearly seen in the wise counsel that the old men gave the new king Rehoboam, in contrast to the foolish counsel of the men his own age (I Kings 12:1-11).

Without placing this qualification in terms of a specific age, God does require that elders in the New Testament church be men who are mature in the faith: “not a novice” (I Tim. 3:6).

The second word, which makes even more clear that the office is one of rule, is the word translated “bishop” (Phil. 1:1; I Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:7) or “overseer” (Acts 20:28). It is the word *episkopos*, from which we get our word “episcopal.” While our King James Version more often translates the word “bishop” than it does “overseer,” the idea of oversight is the more literal meaning. A bishop is one to whom is entrusted the spiritual oversight of others.

Once in Scripture, these two words are used in the same context to indicate that they refer to the same office. To the elders at Ephesus, Paul said “the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers” (Acts 20:28).

The second way in which Scripture indicates the office of elder to be one of rule is by explicit teaching in several New Testament passages.

One such is Acts 20:28: “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.” To take heed, to oversee, and to feed, all imply rule.

Romans 12:8 speaks of an office in the body of Christ when it says, “he that ruleth, with diligence.” The apostle has just spoken in verses 7 and 8a of the office of the teaching ministry, and speaks also in verse 8 of the office of deacon. To the office of elder he refers by the words, “he that ruleth.”

In his first epistle to Timothy, the inspired apostle makes plain that the office of elder is one of rule. A qualification for the office is that the bishop rule well his own house, “For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?” (I Tim. 3:5). And I Timothy 5:17: “Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor...”

And the writer to the Hebrews refers to the elders when he exhorts the believers, “Remember them which have the rule over you...” and “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account...” (Heb. 13:7, 17).

Indications from the Reformed confessions

Our Reformed confessions support the thesis that the nature of the office of elder in Christ’s church is one of rule.

The Belgic Confession, Article 30, indicates that the work of the elders is to punish and restrain transgressors by spiritual means. This work of judgment is an aspect of rule.

Two articles of our Church Order indicate this as well. Article 16, speaking particularly of the office of minister, indicates that it is his duty, “with the elders, to exercise church discipline and see to it that everything is done decently and in good order.” This article specifies that the rule involves oversight and administering discipline. And Article 23 reads:

The office of elders, in addition to what was said in Article

16 to be their duty in common with the minister of the Word, is to take heed that the ministers, together with their fellow-elders and the deacons, faithfully discharge their office, and both before and after the Lord's Supper, as time and circumstances may demand, for the edification of the churches, to visit the families of the congregation, in order particularly to comfort and instruct the members, and also to exhort others in respect to the Christian religion.

This article indicates that the elders have the rule over fellow officebearers, and broadens the idea of rule to include comfort and instruction.

Finally, the Form for Ordination of Elders and Deacons indicates this to be the nature of the office of elder. After having observed that the word is applied to two offices in the church—that of pastor and elder—the Form speaks particularly of the latter:

...the others, who did not labor in the Word, and still did serve in the church, bore a particular office, namely, they had the oversight of the church and ruled the same with the ministers of the Word. For Paul (Rom. 12)...speaketh...particularly of this office, saying, *He that ruleth, let him do it with diligence*; likewise, in another place he counts government among the gifts and offices which God hath instituted in the church (I Cor. 12)....

Then, in setting forth the duties of the office of elder, the Form mentions that elders are

to take the oversight of the church which is committed to them, and diligently to look whether every one properly deports himself in his confession and conversation; to admonish those who behave themselves disorderly, and to prevent, as much as possible, the sacraments from being profaned; also to act (according to the Christian discipline) against the impenitent, and to receive the penitent again into the bosom of the church....

The minister then asks the elders to vow that they will faithfully take up their work “in the government of the church,” and after they have so vowed, exhorts them to “be diligent in the government of the church which is committed to you.”

The church's need for such rule

The church of Jesus Christ needs this rule; she needs the office of elder in her midst.

Proof enough that she needs this office and rule is the fact that Christ Himself placed the office in the church, and prescribed its basic function. Christ gives His church nothing that she does not need.

Reformed churches recognize the need for this rule by insisting that the office of elder be present in every congregation. Reformed churches further insist that every group of believers who, for whatever reason, desires to gather for worship and fellowship but cannot have their own elders, be placed under the care of the elders of another church. This is Article 39 of our Church Order: “Places where as yet no consistory can be constituted shall be placed under the care of a neighboring consistory.” When the consistories of existing churches become too small to function as a consistory (when there is only one elder able to serve), or when we designate a group of believers to be the object of our mission work, we implement this article.

With this need for office, some might take exception. Are not these sinners saints? Does not God work in each by His Holy Spirit?

This was essentially the argument of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who said to Moses and Aaron: “Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” Jehovah answered their objection decisively, reminding us that in the day of judgment He will destroy those who in their heart despised His officebearers.

For any who ask why the office of elder is necessary, not because they despise the office but because they truly desire to be instructed, the answer is this: while God works in each by His Spirit, and sanctifies His elect, all Christians still stand in need of government, and all Christian organizations need rule. Not every member of the church on earth is sanctified; in the church is a carnal element. Not every sanctified member of the church always lives as though he is sanctified; some give themselves over for a time to a life of sin. And even godly believers find that the work of the elders is a gracious means of God to help us battle against sin in our hearts.

Why, specifically, does the church need elders? Following are some scriptural reasons.

The church needs elders to promote decency and order. The apostle's admonition "Let all things be done decently and in order" (I Cor. 14:40) requires not only willing believers, but also godly elders, to implement.

For this reason, all government is necessary—whether in the church, home, or civil sphere. Government in the church is a creation ordinance, instituted already in the state of righteousness: Adam was created to be the head of Eve in things spiritual, as well as earthly.

Sin makes the need for such government all the more urgent. Sinners do not seek decency and order; by nature we seek ourselves, and are willing to violate God's law if that serves our own advantage. Decency and order, in the way of following God's law, the elders enforce in the church.

The church needs elders to guard her from her enemies. Within and without, the church battles against the forces of sin. So the apostle Paul exhorted the elders of Ephesus to diligence in taking heed to themselves and to the flock, because grievous wolves would enter in; even

some who were elders would divide the congregation by their perverse words (Acts 20:28-29). Godly elders take the lead in this battle.

The church needs elders to administer the law and rule of God. The work of the elders is not primarily to make laws—God has made the laws; rather, the work of the elders is to administer those laws—to see that they are being kept in the congregation. Such was the duty not only of the king in the Old Testament, but also of the many judges whom the kings appointed. So also the writer to the Hebrews exhorts them to "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account ..." (Heb. 13:17).

Finally, the church needs elders to show her that Jesus Christ does, by His Spirit and Word, rule in His church. For these elders rule in the authority of Christ; and they administer the rule of Christ Himself.

Let us thank God for the presence of this office in our midst! 

Recognition of Other Reformed Churches (2)

"Churches whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials shall not be rejected."

Church Order, Article 85.

The Same, but Different

Article 85 of the Church Order prohibits the Protestant Reformed Churches from rejecting other churches and denominations "whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials." Churches that differ from us in essentials are to be rejected. But churches that differ from us

only in "nonessentials" are to be received. And with such churches official relationships are to be established.

The mandate of Article 85 arises out of the marvelous truth of the catholicity of the church, a truth dear to the hearts of Reformed believers. The church of Jesus Christ is scattered throughout the whole world. According to the sovereign decree of election, God gathers His church out of every tribe, nation, and language on the earth. It is the privilege of the Protestant Reformed Churches to seek out other true churches around the globe, in order to manifest the unity and catholicity of the church of Christ.

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By His Spirit and Word, Christ does indeed gather a catholic church. On the one hand, that church of Christ throughout the world is a unified church. It is one church, “*an* holy, catholic church.” It is a church united in the truth of her confession, a confession that is derived from sacred Scripture. She is united in the proper administration of the sacraments, as prescribed by Scripture. She is united in the faithful exercise of Christian discipline, discipline exercised according to the standard of Scripture. And she is united in the right worship of God, as the particulars of that worship are set forth in Scripture.

On the other hand, the catholicity of the church includes the truth that God establishes His church in each land in such a way that the church develops among that people and in that particular culture in its own unique way. Reformed churches have always maintained the principle of indigenous churches. “Indigenous” means “growing or living naturally in a particular region” (*The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary*). God in His providence establishes His church in the world. And He establishes it in diverse countries, regions, and lands, among many different peoples, cultures, and languages. In each place, the church manifests the body of Christ, but it manifests the body of Christ *in that place*. The church of Christ in the world is the same, but different.

Reformed churches must take the important principle of indigenous churches seriously not only when establishing churches through mission work, but also when establishing relationships with foreign churches. The principle of indigenous churches means that in establishing official ecclesiastical relationships, we do not allow nonessentials to stand in the way of full sister-church relationships. We do not suppose that churches in other lands must be exactly as we are. We must not reject churches whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials. That means, positively, that we must establish sister-church relationships with such churches, full sister-church relationships.

Usages That Are Nonessential

Article 85 speaks of “usages” that are nonessential. The original Latin of Article 85 referred to “*ritibus*,” that is, “rite.” The article concerns, therefore, rites, ceremonies, ecclesiastical customs and usages that are peculiar to a church or denomination.

Immediately this makes clear that the differences are not matters of doctrine. Our churches are united in doctrine. Together we subscribe to the Reformed Confessions (Three Forms of Unity and the Westminster Standards) and regard them as authoritative for doctrine and life. Our differences do not at all concern doctrine. Rather, our differences concern practices and customs that are “nonessential.”

What are these “nonessentials?” These nonessentials are neither prescribed nor prohibited by the Word of God. These nonessentials are not expressly referred to in the confessions. These nonessentials would not include what the church assemblies at the broadest levels have judged to be implications of Scripture and the confessions, as for example, the Protestant Reformed commitment to the teaching that marriage is for life, that nothing but death dissolves the marriage bond, and that divorced persons may not remarry so long as their spouse is still living. The Three Forms of Unity do not *expressly* teach this. Nevertheless, our churches are convinced that this is the clear teaching of Scripture and the implication of the teaching of the confessions, among other things, the teaching of the confessions regarding the seventh commandment of God’s law. In light of these synodical decisions—long the consensus teaching within our churches—the Protestant Reformed Churches may not establish sister-church relationships with churches that allow the remarriage of the “innocent party.”

“Nonessential” usages would include such things as lifetime eldership or term eldership. The practice in most Presbyterian churches is lifetime eldership—once an elder, always an elder. The Protestant Reformed Churches practice term eldership. Another nonessential would be the observance of the Christian holidays. Article 67 requires our churches to observe, in addition to the weekly Sabbath, Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension Day, Pentecost, the Day of Prayer, Thanksgiving Day, and Old and New Year’s Day. Most Presbyterian churches do not observe the Christian holidays, but only the weekly Sabbath. Article 63 requires the administration of the Lord’s Supper at least every two or three months. There may be churches that celebrate the sacrament more frequently. Included in the nonessentials would be whether the Ten Commandments and the Apostles’ Creed are read and recited during the worship service. Our churches have

officially judged that sister churches need not conform to this practice in our weekly worship services. This list of “nonessentials” could be multiplied. Such nonessentials must not stand in the way of ecclesiastical fellowship and formal ecclesiastical ties.

This matter of recognizing and receiving other Reformed churches that differed only in nonessentials was not merely an abstract matter for the Dutch Reformed churches. They were not in Article 85 dealing with a mere possibility. In fact, the great synod that drafted our Church Order did the very thing required in Article 85. The Reformed churches of the Netherlands invited the foreign Reformed churches to assist them in the great doctrinal struggle that the Synod of Dordt, 1618-19, was convened to resolve. Various foreign churches responded to the invitation of the Dutch, sending delegates who took an active part in the synod’s deliberations. The Dutch Reformed recognized the Reformed churches of France, Switzerland, Hungary, Germany, and the British Isles and reached out to them for their help in the Arminian controversy. The Synod of Dordt itself stands as a great monument to Article 85 and to the blessedness for the church in the implementation of the article.

Two Types of Relationships

The Protestant Reformed Churches establish two types of ecclesiastical relationships with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches. The nature of each of these two types of relationships is outlined in the Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches, the denominational committee that is involved in ecumenical relationships. Over the years, this committee has done a great deal of work on behalf of relations with other churches. And this committee, made up of ministers, elders, and professors, continues to expend a great deal of time each year working to deepen our relationship to the churches with which we have formal ties, and working to establish ties with others.

A full sister-church relationship with other churches includes the following:

1. Mutual acknowledgment of offices, so that ministers of sister churches are allowed preaching privileges in one another’s congregations and are eligible to be called by congregations in sister churches.
2. Mutual acknowledgment of membership attests.

3. The delegation and reception of delegates to the broadest assemblies of such sister churches.
4. Taking heed to one another’s life as churches; constantly acquainting one another with decisions of their broadest assemblies; mutual decisions as to revisions of and additions to the creeds, the Church Order, and liturgical forms.

Sister-church relationships can be established, of course, only with the approval of the broadest assemblies of the churches involved—in the case of the Protestant Reformed Churches, the synod. The Protestant Reformed Churches enjoy a full sister-church relationship with the Covenant Protestant Reformed Church of Northern Ireland.

Besides a full sister-church relationship, the Protestant Reformed Churches are also open to establishing “Corresponding Relationships” with other Reformed and Presbyterian churches. This relationship may be established with churches with whom we are laboring to establish a full sister-church relationship. But this relationship may also be established with churches with whom we have fundamental agreement, and yet there are differences that make the establishment of a full sister-church relationship impossible. The provisions of this relationship are also outlined in the Constitution of the Committee for Contact with Other Churches. The PRCA Synod of 2009 revised the stipulations regarding this relationship.

- C. Corresponding Relationships with Other Churches.
 1. Where significant and broad agreement exists between the Protestant Reformed Churches and other churches, and yet differences are important enough to preclude a sister-church relationship, a corresponding relationship may be established.
 - a. These relationships may be arranged as circumstances may dictate provided:
 - 1) That whatever relationship may be arranged, the stipulations thereof shall be clear and unambiguous.
 - 2) That no merely formal ties shall be established, but only such relationships as will serve the actual welfare of the churches involved and the manifestations of our unity in the Reformed faith.

- b. These relationships shall be established only with those churches that not only accept the Reformed standards, or confessions consistent with the Reformed standards, but also maintain them in their ecclesiastical life.
- 2. The activities of corresponding relationships shall consist of:
 - a. Exchange of information which shall enable the churches to become better acquainted with each other. This exchange shall be implemented in the following ways:
 - 1) Exchange of observers at the broadest assemblies, if at all feasible.
 - 2) Exchange of minutes of the broadest assemblies.
 - 3) Exchange of denominational yearbooks and/or church directories.
 - 4) Exchange of the most recently published edition of the Church Order or Constitutions.
 - 5) Exchange of the most recently published edition of the confessional standards.
 - 6) Exchange of songbooks used in public worship, including the forms used for various occasions in public worship.

- b. Discussion by means of correspondence, committee visits, and conferences in order to confirm and strengthen our unity in Christ.

The Protestant Reformed Churches enjoy a “Corresponding Relationship” with the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Australia. Over the years this relationship has been mutually beneficial. We thank the Lord for the opportunity that our seminary has had to train ministers for the EPCA. We thank the Lord for the opportunities we have had to participate in conferences with our brothers from the EPCA, as well as to preach in their congregations. It has been of great profit for the members of our denominations to visit and to worship in one another’s congregations. And it was truly a joy to have one of the ministers of the EPCA, the Rev. Chris Connors, participate in the seminary’s Calvin Conference in the Fall of 2009.

The Protestant Reformed Churches gratefully acknowledge their ecumenical calling. They stand ready to seek out, assist, and be assisted by other Reformed churches throughout the world. We do not reject, but gladly recognize those churches “whose usages differ from ours merely in nonessentials.” 

Father’s Authority in the Christian Home (2)

Children obviously go through stages of growing up. At the beginning they have little or no knowledge or wisdom of their own. They must therefore be taught unquestioned obedience to their parents, before they are able to understand. This is a beautiful thing when it is the fruit of the Spirit’s operation in their hearts. Also we who are adults must, finally,

obey God with childlike faith and trust, even when we do not understand God’s infinite and absolute truth and wisdom. His wisdom far transcends our puny wisdom, and His ways in our lives are higher than our ways.

It is foolish for a father to allow little children to argue with him and then to cave in to their whims and foolish imaginations. Small children cannot make good choices for themselves. Their parents must make the important choices of life for them. As soon as children are able to understand, they must also be taught principles and truths that are the basis for an obedience with knowledge and understanding. But obedience must come before

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complete understanding. Children must obey simply because father says so.

The molding of the lives of children takes a lot of patience and persistence and firm resolution. Little children will often fail to live up to the expectations of their parents. Admonition must be given repeatedly and consistently, waiting, according to the covenant promises of God, upon the Lord for the fruits of His grace to appear in the lives of our children. Parents must not yield to the sinful demands of their children simply to avoid the unpleasantness of conflict with them or because they are weary of their sinful whining. Parents must not be discouraged when the fruits of discipline do not appear immediately in the lives of their children. They must continue to labor diligently. Stubbornness and natural rebelliousness in the heart of the child must be driven out by loving, firm, consistent discipline and by repeated correction. When children fall many times, they must be picked up and encouraged over and over again in the same way that God does for us as our heavenly Father.

Authority and discipline of our children must be exercised with constant care and watchfulness. Fathers need to spend time with their children. The time a father spends with them and the attention he gives to them gives him the opportunity to demonstrate his steadfast and faithful love, which is so important for the exercise of his discipline over them. He must observe their behavior and use every opportunity to give guidance and instruction. A father who is always gone from the home will do very poorly in exercising authority over his children. By spending time with his children the father learns their natures and becomes more adept at correcting and giving counsel and the necessary patient, loving discipline.

The exercise of fatherly discipline must not be to degrade and humiliate his children. Children must be lovingly and patiently corrected and disciplined in the way

of the Lord. Its loving purpose must not be to destroy but to build up and strengthen. Discipline must be done along with much encouragement. A father must not speak to his children only in order to admonish them. He must not be a harping and constantly evil critic of every behavior of his children. This will only exasperate and discourage the children. Submission and obedience must be praised and encouraged and rewarded with the promises of favor and blessing for his children.

As children are growing up, there is need for diligent and patient instruction in the truth of God and in the principles of His law with an open Bible. Young people will at times resist this. A father must be there during this crucial time of their lives to give the necessary guidance and instruction and discipline. He must teach them the reason for obedience, and the excellence and goodness of

this obedience in the sight of God. "For this is right [before God]" (Eph. 6:1). The parallel passage in Colossians 3 says, "This is well-pleasing unto the Lord."

Our young people are living in an increasingly wicked and immoral world, where they are being taught things as radical as that there are no absolutes of right and wrong, everything is relative. Young people are bombarded with many and graphic temptations in the world, such as the everywhere present and increasingly graphic display of pornography. Without the protection and continual guidance and example of their godly fathers, many will be led

into great evil by the temptations of the devil and of the wicked world in which they live and because of the weakness of their own sinful nature. Godly fathers must teach their children what is right and pleasing, honorable and glorious, in God's sight. When the world mocks and ridicules them, they must be taught their calling to be willing to suffer shame for the Lord's sake and to maintain His truth and righteousness in their lives.

The goal of the exercise of father's authority in the home is not the realization of his own human pride by seeking merely to produce children who are respectable

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and honorable in human society and who attain to great heights of learning and achievement and wealth in this present world. There is a great temptation to make this the primary goal of the disciplining of our children. How we love to boast about our own children. But the much more important goal of the exercise of father's authority in the home is to teach His children willing, submissive, loving obedience, from the heart, to God, which in the sight of God is of great price. Only such obedience is pleasing to God.

This kind of obedience is possible in the hearts of our covenant children only by the wonder of grace in their hearts and through the operations of His Holy Spirit in their hearts. The godly father must exercise his God-given authority in the raising and nurturing of his children as they grow up with this goal in mind. He must do this prayerfully and earnestly and in his own personal faith and dependence on the Lord.

The time will come when discipline has to be slowly withdrawn. Children must be brought to maturity. They must be able to go on alone. They must make their own good and responsible decisions in their life. Our fatherly discipline must prepare and equip them for this time of their life.

There is great joy in obedience before God. There is great joy in the favor and blessing of God. Children must know the reality of this in the behavior of their fathers. A father must not cast a dark cloud over life in his covenant home with his children by his own constantly morose appearance and behavior. There is a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time of joy and a time of sorrow. Fathers should not imagine that they are compromising their authority over their children when there is time for laughter and joy and happiness, the beginning of our everlasting joy in the Lord. The Scriptures command us to "rejoice in the Lord always."

There is a real and proper joy. This joy must be truly in the Lord. It is experienced not in the way of sin and rebellion against God but in the way of walking in His truth and enjoying His favor and blessing on our life. Proverbs 23: 24 and 25 says, "The father of the righteous shall greatly rejoice: and he that begetteth a wise child shall have joy of him. Thy father and thy mother shall be glad, and she that bare thee shall rejoice." The joy of the Lord is our strength. Singing and thanksgiving and

joyful praise to God are part of true Christian living. They must accompany times of necessary discipline, correction, and godly sorrow over sin.

Godly fathers must be careful not to provoke their children to wrath by their own sinful parenting. God's Word warns fathers about this. This happens when authority is exercised by the father in unholy anger and human pride. This happens when discipline is uncontrolled, harsh, cruel, and unprincipled. A father must discipline his children in such a way that his love and genuine concern for their spiritual welfare is clearly evident. Discipline must be clearly according to the Word of God and not simply to satisfy the expectations and pride of fathers.

Firm discipline, sometimes even causing necessary pain and sorrow for children, periods of crying on their part, will not be detrimental to the healthy spiritual and psychological development of children. Worldly child psychologists sometimes teach this, but with all their supposed learning, these psychologists are foolish and even evil. Properly administered godly discipline, and strong, principled instruction of children, will by God's grace teach them the fear of God and godly submission to Him in all of their lives. Certainly we must not compel our children to walk in our own sins. Some fathers actually do this, with total and defiant disregard of the law of God. What great evil it is when parents teach their children by word and example the ways of ungodliness that will lead to the judgment of God and great trouble.

In our discipline of our children we must always be sympathetic to their many weaknesses and shortcomings. We must not make unrealistic demands of them, nor expect that they will never fall. We must not become so angry with our children over their falls that for long periods of time we do not even speak to them. We must ever keep in mind our own sinfulness. We must be humble about our own weaknesses and sins and daily confess our own weakness, even before our children, and show true godly sorrow and daily repentance. Finally, when our children repent of their sins we must bring them to the cross and encourage and comfort them with the Lord's forgiving mercy and the joy and blessing of God's salvation.

In our next article we will write about the subject of the obedience of children. 

True Saving Faith

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7

Question 20. Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

Answer. No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.

Question 21. What is true faith?

Answer. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Question 22. What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?

Answer. All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.

Limited Atonement

The previous Lord's Days have demonstrated our need of Christ. Man is dead in sin and hell-worthy in himself. The only possibility for his salvation is the death of Jesus Christ, the perfect Mediator. Now the question arises, Is everyone saved by the death of Christ? Did Jesus take the place of everyone who ever lives in the history of this world? Did He die for all men, women, and children?

The emphatic answer is NO! The Bible does not teach that God loves all men and that Jesus died for everyone. This popular heresy, called "Universalism," denies the value and power of the cross of Jesus because it says that Jesus paid for the sins of people who end up going to hell anyway. It makes salvation a possibility for all, leaving the actuality of salvation up to the will of the sinner who, if he accepts Christ, is saved.

The Reformed faith teaches Limited Atonement, that Christ died only for His elect. This is biblical. In Matthew 1:21, Joseph is told that Mary's child will be named "Jesus, for he shall save *His people* from their sins." His people are

those whom the Father eternally entrusted to Him (John 6:37-40). Jesus Himself says, "I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep...and I lay down my life for the sheep" (John 10:14, 15), and then says to the unbelieving Jews, "Ye believe not, because ye are not of my sheep" (John 10:26). Simple logic tells us that if they are not of His sheep, then He did not lay down His life for them.

The Necessity of Faith

Without faith, salvation is impossible. Only those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ for all their salvation can and will be saved. The most important command in all the Bible is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ!" Hebrews 11, the great chapter in the Bible on faith, says that "without faith it is impossible to please him" and "he that cometh to God *must* believe." Hebrews 10:39 says we "believe to the saving of the soul."

Because of this the church preaches a message that demands faith. The church does not assume that all those who hear the gospel preached are believers. The church does not preach a gospel only for believers. "But now [God] commandeth all men, everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). Even those who are believers must hear the call to faith. It is through this call, that they exercise their faith.

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

Previous article in this series: August 2010, p. 451.

The Source of Faith

Faith is the means that God has appointed for salvation, but it is not a *power* that man has of himself. It is a *gift* of God through the work of the Holy Spirit (Eph. 2:8). Because of this, the Catechism speaks of faith as a graft. Man does not graft himself into Christ, but he is ingrafted by God in the work of regeneration. Remember, a farmer grafts a branch into a tree; the branch does not do this by itself. Once God has grafted us into Christ, we begin to receive spiritual life, and one of the first things we receive is the ability to believe. We “believe through grace” (Acts 18:27). This ability to believe is not given to all men, but only to the elect (Acts 13:48). When a person who is regenerated hears the gospel preached, that person responds to the gospel in faith because God has first given him/her the ability to do this. “The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God...because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14).

The popular Arminian position is that man has a free will, that Christ died for all men, that everyone has the ability to believe in Jesus, and that Christ leaves that choice up to the sinner. This heresy not only denies the power of the cross of Christ, but also denies the depravity of fallen man and the truth of election and reprobation.

When we say faith is a graft, we are also saying that faith is a “living” connection to Christ. Faith is not like glue that holds two things together, or like a weld that holds two cold pieces of metal together. Rather, faith is like a blood vein that transports life to other parts of the body. Through this faith we continually feed on Christ. It is the “hand and mouth” of the soul. This means that the true believer is constantly exercising his faith. Salvation and conversion are not something that just happened at a certain time on a certain date, but they are the ongoing experience of the Christian. Apart from Christ, the Vine, there is no life for the branches. Abiding in Christ, the branches will bring forth fruit (John 15:1-8).

True Saving Faith

There are false faiths, which are not really faith at all. A man may say he has faith, when what he has is not actually true faith (James 2:14-20).

There is a false faith that knows of the reality of God, of hell, of man’s sinfulness and need for a Savior, but never trusts in Christ for forgiveness. The devils, and many

who have grown up under the gospel, have this kind of faith (James 2:19). We call this “historical faith.”

There is also a false faith that is very selfish, a faith that wants all the apparent blessings and special gifts of Christianity. But the one with this faith wants nothing to do with the true blessings of Christ—forgiveness that comes through repentance. This person does not seek to honor God, but wants honor only for himself (see Acts 8:18-20). We call this “miraculous faith.”

There is also a false faith that at first appears to be real, but then as time progresses is proved to be false. The person with this kind of faith is like the seed on the stony soil, in Jesus’ parable, that “heareth the word, and anon with joy receiveth it,” but “when tribulation and persecution” come, or the desire for earthly things gets too strong, the word is choked out, he is offended, and he leaves his “faith” behind (Matt. 13:20-21). We call this “temporary faith.”

How does your faith measure up in comparison to these? Is it a true, genuine, saving faith?

Let us see what true faith is, as described by the Bible and the Catechism. Wherever the Holy Spirit gives faith, two things will always be present. First, there will be a knowledge of what God has revealed in His Word, and second, there will be a confident trust in God’s promises.

Today, many describe faith as “a leap” into the unknown. Faith, they say, is like jumping off a high mountain or from an airplane into the fog below, hoping that God will be there to catch you.

But this is not faith. No, faith has substance. It believes objective, revealed realities. That is, God has revealed Himself in His Word, and faith begins with knowing God as revealed, and believing all that God has revealed to be true. Our faith has a firm foundation, the Scriptures, which are as true, sure, trustworthy, and enduring as God Himself. Central to the Scriptures is the revelation of Christ our Savior, and believing God’s revelation means we believe on Jesus Christ for all our salvation. How important it is, then, to know the Word and revelation of God. The Catechism will go on to fill in what this knowledge is, following the content of the Apostles’ Creed.

However, saying faith has a sure foundation does not mean that God tells us everything. No, life is still full of its unknowns. We do not know what troubles tomorrow may bring to our lives. But even so, we do know that God will not change. From the Scriptures, we know the permanency

of His grace and presence. Our life is something like walking across a deep canyon on a strong, solid bridge that does not even sway. There may be fog around us, so that we cannot see the depths of the canyon below, or even where our foot will land with the next step, but as we step forward, the bridge is always there, sturdy and strong. We don't know what is ahead, but we do know God will be there.

So faith is an assured confidence and trust in God. This confidence stems from what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. He has blessed us with "remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation," and because He has given us this, we know that He will freely give us all we need for life and death (Rom. 8:32).

Questions for Discussion

1. For whom did Christ die?
2. How would you answer someone who says that Jesus died for all men?
3. What makes faith so necessary?
4. Should the command to believe be preached to all? Should it be done regularly and repeatedly, even in an established congregation? Why/why not? Should you be offended when you hear a call to believe?
5. Where does faith come from? What does the Arminian teach? Can you prove from Scripture that it is God's gracious gift to the elect only?
6. What things does the biblical illustration of a graft teach us? (John 15:1-10)
7. What are some false forms of faith mentioned in the Bible? Why is it important for us to be aware of these?
8. What is the foundation for our faith? What do we believe?
9. Can Christians have confidence of salvation, for this life and the life of heaven? How?
10. Is the exercise of true faith easy?
11. How does the preaching of the gospel fit in a discussion on true faith? 

REPORT OF CLASSIS EAST

Special Session, October 13, 2010
First PRC – Holland, MI

Classis East met in special session on Wednesday, October 13, 2010 for the purpose of examining Daniel Holstege, the Pastor-elect of First PRC, Holland, MI. Rev. H. Bleyenbergh was the chair of this session.

Pastor-elect Daniel Holstege successfully sustained his examination, and a Classical Diploma was presented to him certifying this accomplishment. The consistory of the First PRC, Holland was authorized to ordain and install Pastor-

elect Holstege into the office of the ministry of the Word and sacraments in the Protestant Reformed Churches.

These are joyous occasions for our churches when a man is added to the ranks of those called to be a pastor. Thanksgiving to God for this gift was expressed in words and prayer.

Classis will meet again in regular session on Wednesday, January 12, 2011 at Trinity PRC.

Respectfully submitted,
Jon J. Huisken, Stated Clerk

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Evangelism Activities

The Evangelism Committee of the Hudsonville, MI PRC sponsored a personal-witnessing conference on consecutive Tuesday

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

evenings, September 28 and October 5. Each session followed the same format. First there was a short speech, followed by splitting into smaller groups to discuss various aspects of witnessing, meant to encourage those who attended in their own personal witnessing. On September 28 Rev. A. Spriensma spoke on "Personal Evan-

gelism: A Duty and a Delight," and on October 5 Rev. R. VanOverloop spoke on "Seeing and Entering Open Doors in Evangelism."

The Evangelism Committee of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited the men of their congregation, ages junior high and older, to a night of food, fun, and

good Christian fellowship, on Friday, October 15, under the theme, "First Line of Defense: Tackling Our Role As Men of Integrity." This evening was advertised as a great opportunity for fathers to bring their sons and for anyone to invite a friend.

In our last "News," we reported that Missionary-pastor Rev. W. Bruinsma was invited to speak at the Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA in mid-September. That same weekend Rev. R. Kleyn, Covenant's pastor, preached on "Sounding Out the Word," from I Thessalonians 1:5-10. Audio CDs of these two addresses have been mailed out to all the evangelism committees of our churches and can be ordered by e-mailing info@reformedspokane.org. While he was in Spokane, Rev. Bruinsma joined Rev. Kleyn at a radio station to record four half-hour radio segments with a neutral host introducing the PRCA to the Spokane community. These were aired on Wednesdays during the month of October on a network of six stations covering all of Eastern Washington, as well as northern Idaho and northern Oregon. They can be downloaded at www.reformedspokane.org.

On Friday evening, October 8, the Evangelism Committee of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC hosted Rev. W Bruinsma, our denomination's Eastern Home Missionary, for an informative hour about our churches' work in Pittsburgh. Rev. Bruinsma gave a PowerPoint presentation of the families of the mission and the labors we are do-

ing in Pittsburgh. Included in that presentation was information about some of the latest developments in our mission there, as well as about some of the more recent additions to the Pittsburgh Fellowship. Kalamazoo also invited the congregations of the Immanuel Fellowship Church and Covenant URC to this event.

The Evangelism Committee of the Byron Center, MI PRC hosted a Fall Lecture on October 14. Prof. H. Hanko spoke on the subject, "Biblical Parenting in a Sexually Depraved Culture."

Congregation Activities

We thank God for adding to our churches another minister of the gospel, as the Rev. Daniel Holstege was ordained into the gospel ministry and installed as pastor in First PRC in Holland, MI, on October 14. May it be our prayer that God bless him and all our ministers with faithfulness to their callings and that their ministries be a clear and shining light of the glory of God.

Rev. Holstege preached his inaugural sermon as pastor of First the following Sunday morning, October 17. Rev. Holstege chose to preach from Isaiah 40:1-2 under the theme, "Comfort Ye My People." Following that morning service, First hosted a welcome program, so the entire congregation would have opportunity to welcome their new pastor.

We should also note here that the October 10 bulletin of First also included a note of sincere appreciation and thanks to Prof. B. Gritters for providing their catechism preaching on Sunday mornings (about a year and a half) and also for teaching

their Monday evening catechism classes during their vacancy.

At a special congregational meeting September 21, the members of the Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI approved a proposal to purchase acreage/house/and pole barn at the southeast corner of 8th Avenue and Quincy, just off M-6, a little to the east of Jamestown. We can also report that workbees are scheduled to prepare the property for an open house on November 13. So if you want to take a look, save that date.

Denomination Activities

At the request of our denomination's Contact Committee, Professors Dykstra and Gritters showed pictures and talked about their visit this past summer to South Africa and to six churches in Namibia. This presentation was given in the auditorium of Grandville High School in Grandville, MI, Sunday evening, October 3. Judging from the size of the crowd, there is a lot of interest in this particular contact between our denomination and the churches there. If you have opportunity to see this presentation at a later date, we strongly urge you to do so. It was a very interesting hour.

The members of the Reformed Free Publishing Association met on September 23 at Hope PRC in Walker, MI for their annual society meeting. Besides hearing reports about the various aspects of their work, the members also heard Prof. H. Hanko speak about his soon-to-be published commentary on the book of Galatians.

Sister-Church Activities

There are many benefits of having two pastors laboring in the British Isles for the Covenant PRC in Ballymena, and one of those benefits was realized for the first time on Sunday, October 10, when Rev. A. Stewart and Rev. M. McGeown did a pulpit

exchange, with Rev. McGeown preaching in Ballymena, and Rev. Stewart preaching for the Limerick Reformed Fellowship.

Minister Activities

Since our last "News," Rev. C. Haak declined two calls. One from

the Hope PRC in Walker, MI and the other from the Wingham, Ontario PRC.

Rev. Bruinsma has received two calls, one from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI, and the other from the Edgerton, MN PRC.



ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding Anniversary

■ We thank our heavenly Father who, in His great mercy, has been faithful to His covenant promise to keep our parents, **RICHARD and JANNET MOORE**, in His care as they celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary on November 23, 2010.

We thank our sovereign Lord who has worked through our parents to bring us up to fear Him in all our lives. Their love shown by their godly rearing of us is a constant reminder to us of God's faithfulness to keep His covenant and mercy with His people. May God's faithfulness continue to be their strength and comfort as they continue their sojourn on this earth together. "Know therefore that the Lord thy God, he is God, the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations" (Deuteronomy 7:9).

- ❖ Brian and Carolyn Tolsma
 - ❖ Henry and Lee Ann Ferguson
 - ❖ Brian and Denise Gritters
 - ❖ Jack and Brenda Brands
 - ❖ David and Kimberly Moore
 - ❖ James and Melanie Molenkamp
 - ❖ Joel and Anita Moore
 - ❖ Rachel VandeBrake
 - ❖ Stacie Grimm
 - ❖ Matthew and Stephanie Medema
- 55 grandchildren
10 great-grandchildren

Holland, Michigan

Resolution of Sympathy

■ The Council and congregation of the Faith PRC express their Christian sympathy to Mr. and Mrs. Mark Scholten, Faith Scholten, Mr. and Mrs. Jeff Scholten, Mr. and Mrs. Dave Doezema, Mr. and Mrs. Jason Scholten, and Mr. and Mrs. Brendan Looyenga and their families in the passing away of their mother and grandmother, **MRS. SENA SCHOLTEN.**

"I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (II Timothy 4:7, 8).

Rev. Andrew Lanning, President
Richard Flikkema, Clerk

Wedding Anniversary

■ With much thankfulness to our heavenly Father, we rejoiced with our parents, **HENRY and KATHY VANDER MEULEN**, in the celebration of their 50 years together on October 14, 2010. By their godly example in marriage we have been able to see the beautiful picture of Christ and His church. We have been blessed by their guidance, example, and covenantal faithfulness throughout these 50 years. We pray the Lord will bless them in the coming years and keep them in His care. "I will praise thee, O LORD my God, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore" (Psalm 86:12).

- ❖ Starla and Bernie Mulder
- ❖ Wade and Julie Vander Meulen
- ❖ Tim and Lorraine Vander Meulen
- ❖ Heidi and Matt Moore

19 grandchildren
1 great-grandchild

Lynden, Washington