

The Standard Bearer

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What Manner of Persons Ought We To Be

“But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?”

II Peter 3: 10-12

Peter is writing to new Christians whose faith is being challenged by false teachers (2:1; 3:3). One of the tenets of the Christian faith questioned by the false teachers and scoffers was the truth that Jesus is coming again to judge. Peter had just given a clear and biblical answer to that challenge. The young Christians

need not doubt whether God's promise would be fulfilled. God came once already to judge the world (5, 6), and Jesus is coming again to judge and to reward!

Jesus' second coming will be with power and great glory. This coming again will bring the fullness of salvation to the whole of the elect church. And it will bring sudden and complete destruction to this present world. Our text considers this latter aspect of Jesus' return.

Peter writes about this tremendous destruction in some detail. It is most interesting to note that Peter does so from the perspective of the present conduct of believers in light of such complete destruction of this present world. The knowledge of the coming great fire gives believers a calling: “what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?”



Let us observe with interest that the promise of Jesus' return to this earth is identified as “the day of the Lord” (10) and “the day of God” (12). When Jesus comes again,

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He will be identified as “the Lord.” When He came the first time, it was in great humility. In fact, His lowly birth was the first step in His state of humiliation. But when He comes again, it will be very different. His return will be the final step in His state of exaltation. The exalted Jesus will be seen and known by all as Lord of lords. Every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:11). His return will be the culmination of all His work. He will be exalted as Lord of all!

And Jesus’ second coming will be known as “the day of God,” for then God will be justified before all. Jesus’ return will vindicate God and His promises before all false teachers and scoffers (blasphemers, atheists, agnostics, and all idolaters). God will show Himself to be the one and only God. Then all His promises and threatenings will be fulfilled. Then God will justify His elect before the eyes of all the world; and the ungodly will be convinced of their deserving eternal judgment.

The day of the Lord and of God is coming. It will come “as a thief in the night” (10), i.e., suddenly and unexpectedly. This is how it will be for the ungodly only. This is the nature of the Lord’s coming for those who think that everything will continue as it has been and talk only about peace and safety. They are children of the night and will most certainly be caught by surprise (cf. I Thess. 5:2, 3). But those who are children of the light and of the day (cf. I Thess. 5:4, 5) will not be surprised. They will be expecting His return, were praying for it, and saw Him coming in all the “signs of the times.”

The coming of that day will be marked with a great fire. This fire will be so great that it will completely burn the heavens and the earth. And it will be “with a great noise” (10)—a thunderous roar, as God shakes them prior to the fire (cf. Heb. 12:26, 27). The “heavens shall pass away,” i.e., be folded up as a coat is folded and laid aside. This metaphor was used to picture perishing or dying. The sun and moon shall be darkened. And the stars shall, as it were, fall from their places.

*Every dream of man
for a better world
will literally
go up in smoke!*

In this fire the earth “and the works that are therein” (10) shall be burned in the furnace of God’s judgment. Every work of man’s hands will be destroyed. Every product, every invention, every discovery will be gone as in a moment. Skyscrapers, complicated electronics, man’s art (symphonies, literature, paintings), and every accomplishment in science and medicine will be destroyed. Every dream of man for a better world will literally go up in smoke!

This will not be a natural fire. But it will be the real fire of God’s consuming, intensely furious wrath! Think of the devastating power of atomic and nuclear bombs in

order to get a hint of the power of divine fury. It destroys utterly, so that this present creation as we know it will be no more. “Melt” (10) and “dissolved” (11) are translations of the same word, and mean: to undo, to overthrow, to break up what was together. The destruction will not be merely that of external forms. There will be also a loosening of the rudimentary elements. The elements (the

first things) of which all things are composed will be destroyed. The physical particles that are arranged to form things will be no more. The destruction of this world will be complete!

The coming of the day of the Lord is what will introduce the new world—the new heavens and a new earth (13). The present world will be destroyed, not annihilated. For out of the ashes of the present world God will graciously produce the new. This is the way we receive a kingdom that cannot be moved (cf. Heb. 12:28, 29).



This tremendous calamity will certainly take place. In light of this inevitable event, how ought we to respond? That is Peter’s question. “What manner of persons ought ye to be?”

What is required of believers when they know that things will not continue and last forever? When they know that all things in this world will come to a definite end? When they realize that any dream of a wonder-

ful earthly world is false? What are the implications for Christians who realize that this great fire is divine judgment on a creation that is defiled by sin and has been under God's curse ever since man's fall into sin? What an interesting perspective of this present world: man considers it glorious and worthy of saving (as an end in itself), but God sees it worthy of the consuming fire of His wrath.

What manner of persons ought we to be? We ought to be "looking for" our Lord's return (12). The word that is translated "looking for" has the idea of an expectation. Not only do we know He will return, but also we should eagerly anticipate it. We have a strong desire for Christ's return because it will bring us into glory with Him and into the presence of Him whom we love with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We will then be able to see Him in all His dazzling glory and power, which sight will thrill us. This will mean that we too will partake of that glory, and we shall be delivered from all forms of sin and death. Is it any wonder then that we ought to be eagerly looking for our Lord's return?

What manner of persons ought we to be? We ought to be "hasting unto," that is, "hastening." This does not mean, of course, that we can make the day come more quickly—it is fixed in God's eternal plan. But there is something we

do that hastens that day from our perspective. Consider the attitude of a believer who is praying for that day to come, especially when he is earnest in this prayer. When we pray earnestly, then we are thinking a lot about Him whom we love and we are ever eager for His glory to be revealed. When we pray this way, then we prepare ourselves for that day by living as those who are watching for His return. We are reading the signs of the times. We have our lamps ready and our lights burning.

If we are eager for our Lord's return to bring judgment and glory, then we will be conducting ourselves in a holy manner: "all holy conversation and godliness" (11). This is a striving ever to serve God acceptably or pleasingly, with reverence and godly fear (Heb. 12:28). This godliness is a living as before God's face. Then we are faithful stewards, using all His gifts to us in anticipation of our Master's "Well done!" This is what it means to live soberly, with clear and correct thinking. Such thinking tells us of the folly of seeking the things of this world, with its pleasures, for they will all burn up in the great fire! Such thinking prods us to seek that which is above where Jesus is. Then, like the patriarchs of old, we will ever be seeking the city that has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

What manner of persons ought ye to be?! 

EDITORIAL

REV. KENNETH KOOLE

A Couple of Issues Worth Pondering

It is not our intention to turn the editorial department into one of lifting quotes from other sources, offering brief comments on them, and so keep our readers informed about what is happening all around us. We realize there is another *SB* rubric that satisfies that requirement. But in this editorial I have decided to depart from the norm and do just that. There are

a couple of items I have read recently that I think are worth bringing to the attention of our readers along with a few brief comments.

They are items I would label as 'Signs of the Time.'

The first item I quote is a letter of reflection sent by an acquaintance of mine, an acquaintance with whom I have stayed in contact over the years and who sends reflections on biblical

and spiritual matters to a number of friends he has on an e-mail list.

The brother's comments have to do with drinking coffee during the Sunday worship service. Note, not drinking coffee in a church building, perhaps *after* the worship service has concluded, which is one thing, but being invited to do so *during* the service, which is quite another.

We deem this worthy of space

in the *SB* not because we see signs of this becoming a practice in the PRC anytime soon, but because what the brother ran into is a growing trend in churches that want to be known as “user friendly” (a label adopted by more and more churches these days, sad to say). And sooner or later we or our young people are going to have conversations with acquaintances (maybe even relatives) who talk about starting just that practice in their own congregations, and when we express surprise mixed with disapproval are sure to be asked that all too common question, “Well, what is wrong with that?” After all, they may point out, “Your minister can take a drink from his glass of water during the service, can’t he? And you pop a peppermint or two, don’t you? So, then, what’s wrong with others taking a few relaxing sips of coffee?”

(We leave it to the reader to come up with an answer that explains the difference, something to be discussed around the dinner table, perhaps. To be forewarned is to be forearmed).

The conclusion my friend came to when faced with this growing and disconcerting practice in a church he happened to be visiting one Lord’s Day is, we judge, most helpful in answering that inevitable and self-justifying question.

His letter of reflection is entitled “Go Ahead and Have Your Coffee.”

I was at a church recently, when it was announced that the

congregation would be able to drink coffee during the worship service.

That makes me wonder what worship has become. Singing songs is worship. Singing songs with a cup of coffee in your hands is also worship, I guess, because churches serve coffee to worshippers and don’t discourage coffee drinking during the service. So the expectation is that Christians, for whatever reason, cannot do without coffee for an hour or more to be totally focused on worship to the God to whom they claim to have dedicated their lives.

The thing that disturbs me is not that practitioners like me might be confused, but [that] those in leadership are apparently confused. The Bible clearly states that we are to show reverence to God and to the things that represent His person and presence. The writer of Hebrews wrote, “Let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably

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with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire” (Hebrews 12:28, 29). The Old Testament reminded the Israelites, “Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence

for my sanctuary. I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:30; 26:2). The passage is interesting because the sanctuary at that time was a tent, not the great temple that was later built. Yet the presence of the Lord makes even the most commonplace setting very special and deserving of our reverence, even an auditorium.

I guess I could wash people’s feet with a latte in my hand or serve the poor or work with the homeless while I am sipping coffee. [But] imagine standing before a judge or meeting with an important person like the President and walking in with a cup of coffee in your hand. That would be considered disrespectful because it in some ways trivializes the interaction. But imagine even more if those in leadership encouraged you to do so. [That they should do so] when it comes to worship tells me a great deal about who they think God is. God is trivial, not to be taken entirely seriously. “Go ahead and have your coffee while you worship the God of the universe.”

By the way, this absolutely corresponds to my responsibility to my neighbor. If worship is trivialized where I need not respect God, why should I not also trivialize the needs of my neighbor? Or ignore them, for that matter?

This is further evidence of the Christian church’s malaise. Muslims pray to Mecca repeatedly in a totally humbling position. Other faiths go through rigorous preparations in order to even enter the presence of their gods. But, hey, for Christians, worship is really no big deal. Grab a latte and while you are

sipping it, maybe give God a nod or a wink because it will make him happy. He likes it when people take a few seconds from their totally self-absorbed lives to notice him during the worship service!

Are we really so dependent on coffee that we can't leave it alone for just one hour a week in order to give God the respect he deserves?

I guess I actually do care....

The brother's observation is 'spot on.' Even the heathen know that for worship to be worthy of the name "worship," it must involve a display of reverence and humility. The contrast between the heathens' honoring of their idol gods, which are no gods, and contemporary Christianity's absolutely shabby, disrespectful treatment of Jehovah God, the one true and living God, could not be greater. What more and more of Protestantism is involved in these days is not worship at all, but sacrilege.

In biblical times believers were known to fast for days, and even weeks on end, as an evidence of their sincerity and to underscore what was at that time their one consuming concern. In our day church-attendees cannot be required to fast for even one hour or put aside their precious creature comforts. After all, the impression might be left that this church is actually requiring the worshiper to stand consciously before Almighty God and to put Him before self. How 'user friendly' would that be?

How a church that cannot even bring herself to require of those who attend to leave their Starbucks

at home for an hour or two on Sunday morning can yet imagine that she in all seriousness can confront these same 'sippers' with the call to Christ-defined discipleship, namely, the call to deny oneself, take up one's cross, and to follow Him, we leave to the reader to assess.

Indeed, symptomatic of Christendom in our day—sipping one's Starbucks while one prays.



The other item of interest deals with a matter that, if anything, indicates to an even greater degree how advanced the work of the Spirit of Antichrist is these days. It is an item lifted from the on-line site *LifeSiteNews.com* (January 9, 2009). The article, written by a John Jalsevac, deals with modern-day language dishonesty, something our ungodly and anti-Christian society increasingly resorts to in the interests of covering over what otherwise would be exposed as transparent wickedness and might, I say *might*, even trouble the practitioners' sleep.

In no arena is this attempted cover-up of wickedness by language manipulation more common than that of the hot issue of abortion.

Jalsevac entitles his article "Abortionists As Euphemists," with the subtitle "The curious case of the shifting language."

Most abortionists are euphemists, by which I mean merely, to quote [G.K.] Chesterton, "that short words startle them, while long words soothe them. And they are utterly incapable of translating the one into the other, however obviously they mean the same thing."

If, for instance, you say to an abortionist, "The excessive burden upon the mother, particularly in light of the rights to autonomy, privacy and reproductive freedom, of an unplanned pregnancy precludes any ethical objections to surgically removing the products of pregnancy post-viability, but prior to completion of delivery," a gentle, indeed a radiant smile will cross his face, and he will dose off as if to a lullaby.

Note well, no reference is made to a baby developing in the womb, but rather to "products of pregnancy," a phrase increasingly found in pro-abortion literature. Jalsevac continues:

Say, on the other hand, in a forceful, straight-forward way, "Crush the skulls and suck out the brains of your children!" and he will leap from his seat, startled and full of objections.

But the two sentences mean precisely the same thing.

Or, if you were to say, "An analysis of the cost-benefit ratio of carrying to term a fetus found via amniocentesis to have non-disjunction of the 23rd chromosome (i.e., a down-syndrome child—kk) invariably leads to the conclusion that medical resources would be better allocated by discontinuing the pregnancy," your average abortion supporter will sway like a child borne carelessly upon the waves of a warm summer sea.

But unapologetically bellow forth the declaration, "Save the money! Kill all disabled kids!" and you will get a very different reaction indeed. But, once again, cold

logic says that the two propositions propose precisely the same thing.

Abortionist literature is chock full of a million similar instances. Pro-abortion writers keep a whole stash of such long words at their disposal, which are ushered forth to carefully hide the tracks of any stray meaning that might have crept into their sentences....

Indeed, the abortion industry has developed a whole dictionary full of euphemistic phrases to disguise the evils they are seeking to justify. The very name chosen by its practitioners, “pro-choice,” is a euphemism, when in reality they are “pro-abortion”—the killing of the unborn. But that they will not acknowledge. They do not kill the unborn, they merely “terminate unwanted pregnancies.” They do not practice “partial-birth abortions,” no, they practice “D&E”—that is, “Dilation and Extraction.” You know, something like pulling out a troublesome tooth. And so it goes—detached, clinical language to salve the conscience of all involved and to disguise the evil.

This cover-up of wickedness by euphemism and ‘double-speak’ is nothing new, of course. It is similar to that used by the Nazi propaganda machine to cover its evil and soft-pedal its devilry as it pursued its ‘solution’ for the ‘Jewish problem’—masters of euphemism and double-speak, to hide from the world what it was up to and to salve the conscience of a nation that tried its best to pretend it did not know what was really taking place. The Jews were not being

taken to “Concentration Camps” or to “Death Camps,” but to “Detention Centers.” And the nation was not involved in exterminating all Europe’s Jews, but going through the difficult but necessary process of “ethnic cleansing.”

So it is today. And not just in the abortion industry, but in big government as well. Politicians do not acknowledge that they flat out lied. No, they apologize for providing “disinformation.” And on the ecclesiastical scene, no one is guilty of adultery or fornication, but merely of “engaging in an improper relationship.” Sin is no longer sin, it is rather an “inappropriate response” in difficult circumstances. Lawyers do not lie under oath, but now and again they are forced to acknowledge that they “inadvertently misrepresented the truth.”

And so it goes. Great evils considered and committed by those dominating society, and soothing words spoken to minimize the wickedness as well as to help all and sundry to filter out the criminal actions too few really want to acknowledge. “We are basically good people, after all.”

And with the erosion of truthfulness in language goes the erosion of morality and sensitivity of the conscience.

The longer this goes on, the greater the aversion of a society to words that may prick its consciences and maybe even trouble men in their sleep. In other words, there develops a growing aversion to all truth, to the truth of God’s Word and law in particular. And those who dare to utter these truths and confront society with these troubling truths

about itself are considered divisive and disturbers of the peace. And then it is but a small step to begin to justify not only muzzling this troublesome lot but to begin talking about the need for “detention” and “rehabilitation centers” lest they ferment sedition and acts of terrorism next.

All in the name of public safety and the larger public good.

Our own country has at present a party in power that shows every indication that it would not mind at all if it could pull the plug on every channel of criticism (the exercise of free speech) against its policies and a “big brother” control of every facet of life. After all, such denouncing of present government policies may stir up random acts of violence; and that, all agree, must not be.

All underscoring what? That the spirit of the Antichrist stirs with increasing vigor. And once the Father of Lies and his agents control the defining of the very meaning of words themselves, accepted ‘truth’ becomes whatever the great Liar wants it to be.

We may be sure that in such a society there will be no room for those who yet are governed by the Word and His Truth. The truth is too powerful in exposing liars for what they are.

The thing about liars is, they do not like to be reminded of the fact.

Regardless, God’s truth endures and is eternal, and those who speak it with conviction will triumph in the end. ☮

RCA Integrity

Introduction

Observing what is going on around us in the church world can often be a very depressing exercise. Usually what “makes the news” is the kind of event that gives evidence of appalling apostasy in the church. Therefore, we often take note of the worst events that are taking place in denominations and churches around us.

Certainly much could be written about the terrible apostasy taking place in the denomination we give attention to in this article, the Reformed Church in America (RCA). In this article, however, attention will be given to a movement called RCA Integrity, which seems to represent the best of what is going on in the RCA. RCA Integrity is a conservative movement that began with a desire to “promote biblical truth and grace”¹ in the RCA, and seems to be the best hope for a reformation in the denomination, leading to a return to biblical and confessional orthodoxy.

RCA Integrity’s Organization

RCA Integrity is a very organized movement. In 2006 a group of RCA pastors appointed a steering committee. In 2007 the steering committee wrote and adopted a “Covenant for Integrity” and a document setting forth its “Foundational Principles,” which “officially launched RCA Integrity.” An executive committee was then appointed to carry out the work of the organization.²

The Preamble of the Foundational Principles explains that “RCA Integrity is an association of assemblies, churches, ministers, and members of the Reformed Church in America (RCA) committed to the Purpose, Covenant, and Membership Guidelines of the Asso-

ciation. RCA Integrity is a self-governing association which is neither affiliated with nor sanctioned by the Reformed Church in America.”³ The organization’s website (<http://www.rcaintegrity.org>) lists 12 churches and about 200 individuals who have become members.

The main commitment members make is to “[a]ffirm the Covenant for Integrity in the RCA and agree to teach and promote what is consistent with it (quoted from the ‘Foundational Principles’ document).” Because of the importance of this Covenant for the movement, it is quoted in full below:

Preamble

This Covenant was written in hope and humility—in hope that God will protect the Reformed Church in America from moral and theological error; and in humility, asking God to continue the much needed work of sanctification in our own lives. For the holiness and happiness of God’s people, we write to define and defend the marvelous truth about grace and the full graciousness of truth. This Covenant is not meant to replace the Bible or our Confessions. At times in the life of the church, however, it becomes necessary to clarify doctrinal boundaries and re-establish cherished truths in order to preserve and strengthen the foundation. This Covenant was written for such a time as this.

Our commitment to Christ and His Word compels us to affirm....

Article I: The Glory of God

God’s chief purpose in all that He wills, thinks, and does is the glory of His name. Moreover, every person, indeed all creation, exists for this same purpose: to glorify God. God is sovereign, such that there is nothing unseen, unknown, or undetermined by God in all of creation, time, or eternity.

Article 2: The Authority of Scripture

The Holy Scripture of the Old and New Testaments is the ultimate authority, without error in all that it intends

¹ Quoted from RCA Integrity’s account of its history found at: http://www.reliable-pages.com/irca/?page_id=23, May 3, 2010.

² Ibid.

³ http://www.reliable-pages.com/irca/?page_id=18, May 3, 2010.

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to teach, and altogether sufficient for Christian faith and practice. The Bible reveals universal truths which are true for all people at all times and can be known with certainty and clarity. The authority of Scripture should not be made subject to or equal with other writings or human experience. As divine revelation, Scripture accurately describes who God is and how He wishes to be addressed, including the trinitarian language of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Article 3: The Gospel of God

Humanity's greatest need is to be reconciled with God. The gospel is compromised when the grace and love of Christ are expressed without the ultimate objective of calling sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. The appropriate response to sin is one that believes in the power of God to change lives, hopes in the mercy of God to forgive sins, and loves enough to call sinners to confession and transformation. God is inclusive in that He calls all to come to Him in faith and repentance. God is exclusive in that only those who believe in Jesus Christ and seek to keep His commands can be assured of salvation. The gospel is the good news of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection and should not be equated with or reduced to mere good deeds, humanitarian relief, or societal reform.

Article 4: The Uniqueness of Christ

Jesus Christ is unique among the so-called gods of this world. Only in Jesus can we have salvation, fellowship, and a true understanding of God. Jesus Christ died on the cross as a substitutionary sacrifice for sins, and in so doing absorbed God's wrath and eternal judgment upon our sin. We are counted righteous before God based on the imputed righteousness of Christ. Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. No one will be saved apart from the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Salvation is received through personal hearing of and conscious believing in the gospel of Jesus Christ. The unrepentant and unbelieving will not be saved, either in this life or after physical death. Apart from Jesus, who is the eternal Son of God incarnate, we cannot see, know, or glorify God as He is.

Article 5: The Confessional Church

We recognize six doctrinal Standards: the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Athanasian Creed, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, and the Canons of Dort. Although authored by humans and imperfect, these Standards are nevertheless faithful and trustworthy expressions of the doctrines of Holy Scripture. Our common commitment to these Standards is the critical component of our denominational identity and

unity. Calls to church unity should not be made at the expense of truth and purity.

Article 6: The Covenantal Church

Members of the RCA have entered into a covenantal relationship with God and one another which obligates each one of us to be accountable to others in the community. This obligation may at times require the exercise of church discipline, one of the marks of the true church. Any judicatory which fails to exercise pastoral oversight and church discipline for those who have strayed from the truth of Scripture or the doctrines of our Standards is remiss in its duties. Establishing, upholding, and defending the truth of the gospel is not antithetical to church health and evangelism, but is essential to the ministry, mission, and unity of the church.

Article 7: The Gift of Sexuality

Marriage is a joyful covenanting between one man and one woman. All sexual intimacy is divinely designed for and should be expressed solely within the covenant of marriage. Any teaching or practice which blurs gender distinction, such as homosexuality, bisexuality, or transsexuality is contrary to Scripture. Same-sex "marriages," even in committed and consensual relationships, are contrary to Scripture. Ordination to the offices of the church for any person who unrepentantly practices or promotes any form of sexual sin, whether fornication, adultery, homosexuality, or the like is to be prohibited.

Article 8: The Dignity of Human Life

All human life is to be treasured as a gift from God. Any practice which demeans human dignity, such as pornography, racism, abuse, exploitation, persecution, abortion, and euthanasia is immoral and unjust.

Does RCA Integrity Have Strengths?

The strength of the RCA Integrity movement is that it unashamedly professes that the basis of church unity is the truth of Scripture as set forth by the Reformed creeds. It is heartening to see that in the RCA there is a group of people committed to promoting the Reformed creeds. Rev. Kevin De Young, a member of the executive committee, has even written a short commentary on the Heidelberg Catechism, the title of which admits that this Reformed creed has largely been forgotten in the RCA: "The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism."

A second strength of the movement is that it is ready to identify and oppose errors that are contrary to Scripture and the confessions and that are creeping into the

RCA. Once again it is heartening to see that there are those in the RCA who are willing to call sin *sin*. In its “Covenant” the organization commits itself to fighting against serious sins such as homosexuality, abortion, and euthanasia.

In affirming the authority of Scripture and the confessions and in denouncing the above-mentioned sins, RCA Integrity shows that it is willing to address some of the crucial issues that are being dealt with in the denomination. Rev. Ron Sanford, also a member of the executive committee, explains this as one of the organization’s goals in an article entitled “Why RCA Integrity Exists,” explaining that the organization was formed in response to “spiritual falsehood” that exists in the RCA. He gives examples of such “spiritual falsehood” writing:

Within the RCA, I have, or know of others who have, personally encountered ministers in the RCA who: scoff at the doctrines of Calvinism, deny the sovereignty of God, do not believe the Holy Scriptures are sufficient or authoritative, reject universal truth, deny the necessity of the cross, discredit our need for repentance, do not believe personal faith in Christ is essential for salvation, distort the biblical views of gender and marriage, and have abandoned the sanctity of life.

The willingness to speak out against ministers who hold such heretical views is heartening because it too often seems to be the case that those who call themselves conservatives in apostatizing denominations are silent and refuse to speak out about the issues of the day.

Criticizing RCA Integrity

Although it is possible to find some positive things to say about RCA Integrity, in the end there are some fundamental problems with the organization that are so serious that the organization should not even exist. If the problems with the organization are so serious that the organization should not even exist, why write about anything positive in the organization? The answer is that although the organization itself should not be promoted, the members should be encouraged to continue to do the things mentioned above. By arguing that RCA Integrity should not exist, I am not at all saying the members should not fight for the truth. I am only saying they should and can do it without the organization.

One of the fundamental flaws of the organization is that instead of promoting unity it creates division.⁴ RCA Integrity, in its very nature as an organization that includes only some members in the denomination, is a faction in the RCA. One is reminded of the situation the apostle Paul addresses in his first letter to the Corinthians, in which he describes and condemns the divisions in the congregation, writing, “that everyone of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” In the RCA, there are those who say, “I am of RCA Integrity” and those who say, “I am not.”

The Preamble of the group’s Covenant is certainly correct that there are times when the church needs to make timely statements defending and promoting the truth, but this is the business of synods, which make statements that are binding on all the members of the denomination. Synodical statements promote unity in the whole denomination because they bind all the members to confess the same thing. An organization such as RCA Integrity (which admits it is a para-church organization: “neither affiliated with nor sanctioned by the [RCA]”) includes only those who choose to be members, who by joining, immediately identify themselves as a faction in the church and make themselves guilty of schism. If the members of RCA Integrity think there needs to be a statement to clarify doctrinal boundaries and re-establish “cherished truths,” they do not need to make a new organization that will be for some of the members of the RCA, let them bring a proposal to synod to adopt a statement for the whole denomination.

Another criticism of RCA Integrity is that organizing and joining such an association is not a proper or an effective means for rooting error out of the church and promoting the truth.

There are two proper and effective means for dealing with error and promoting the truth: sound preaching and Christian discipline. The members of RCA Integrity, especially the ministers, ought to promote and engage in preaching that condemns heresy and expounds sound doctrine. They should also focus on bringing charges against those who promote and tolerate “spiritual falsehood,” bringing them before the ecclesiastical courts, de-

⁴ There are statements in the Covenant that I believe deserve criticism, but instead of focusing on them I am focusing on what I believe are the most serious problems with RCA Integrity.

manding either repentance or excommunication. When error has taken root in a denomination, the only hope for reformation is sound preaching and Christian discipline, not the organization of a para-church organization such as RCA Integrity.

Conclusion

Whether it is necessary to leave a denomination that has fallen into as many gross errors as the RCA has is a legitimate question that some may be asking at the end of this article. My own opinion is that it would be best for those who love the truth of the Reformed faith in the RCA to find another church home where the truth is clearly confessed and defended. However, the members of RCA Integrity have decided for the time being to stay in the RCA and seek reformation. While I do not believe they are making the wisest decision, I do pray for them and encourage them to seek to bring about reformation by using the means by which God has preserved and purified His church throughout the ages: sound preaching and Christian discipline.

Taking note of a conservative movement in the RCA does not at all diminish the seriousness of apostasy taking place in the denomination. However, we constantly pray for churches damaged by the inroads of apostasy that there may be a return to the “old paths,” to the truth of Scripture as confessed by the Reformed faith. One of the reasons we in the Protestant Reformed Churches humbly pray that God will preserve us in maintaining the truth of the Reformed faith is that our testimony may be of help and encouragement to those who are fighting for orthodoxy in churches where the truth is being set aside for the lie. So we write about RCA Integrity in part hoping that we may be of encouragement to the members of the movement.

Examining a conservative movement in a “falling” church is also instructive for members of faithful denominations. The chief lesson is that false doctrine and sinful practices must be met *immediately* with church discipline and, if necessary, excommunication, as we see the tremendous obstacles members of RCA Integrity face in promoting the truth in a denomination where apostasy has taken strong root. 

WHEN THOU SITTEST IN THINE HOUSE

REV. ARIE DEN HARTOG

The Noble Calling of the Wife to Submit to Her Husband

In considering the calling of each party in Christian marriage, we must always proceed from God’s work of creation. We do not proceed from humanistic teaching, certainly not from the modern-day worldly philosophy of marriage, which is all wrong. Genesis 1 and 2 gives us the literal history of God’s creation of marriage. Marriage is not a mere social institution arising from man’s social evolution and designed according to human wisdom to fit a certain time and circumstance. Marriage

is God’s good creation at the beginning. The order of marriage was established by God for every age.

The institution of marriage required that both male and female be made in the image of God. God created man and woman equal in this respect. Woman is not some lesser form of creature. God created woman to be a personal, moral, rational creature, with a soul as well as a body. The husband may not treat his wife as though she is not a person in her own right. God created woman an intelligent creature like man. The godly man recognizes his wife to be an intelligent, moral, and spiritual creature of God. The husband who understands this respects the intelligence, opinion, and moral judgment of his wife and

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is ready to be corrected at times through the good counsel and admonition of his wife. In marriage, husband and wife make all the great decisions of life together. Together husband and wife seek to live according to the will and purpose of God. They were called to live morally and uprightly together before God. They mold and correct and support each other in this high calling before God.

God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone, I will make him an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:18). The inspired apostle reflects on this in I Corinthians 11:8-12:

For the man is not of the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man in the Lord. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things are of God.

Let no one argue with these words, because they are the Word of God. Adam was created in such a way that he needed an help meet. He was not complete in himself. He was created with a deep need for a help meet. God filled this need by making for him a creature according to his need. Man must never imagine that the wife that God has given to him is someone he can easily do without. God created woman in such a way that she could fill the deep need of man. God gave Adam and Eve love for one another in marriage. This love in no small part arises out of the need they have for one another and the great joy of filling that need in each other's life. When husband and wife serve one another, they learn to cherish one another as God intended.

When Adam first laid eyes on Eve, whom God Himself brought to him, he said with great joy and excitement, "this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of man." The marriage relationship was intended by God to be the source of great joy and happiness, and intended to be a relationship of intimate communion and fellowship of man and wife.

God by His work of creation established the order of marriage for all times. He made man first and He created woman out of man. Man, because he was created first, was made the head of his wife. God created Eve out of man to be the help meet for Adam.

Man and woman were not created the same in every respect. God arranged the personality of the man and personality of the woman so each could complement the other. The personality of each is beautifully distinct and different, so that the arrangement of marriage could not just as well be turned around. Man was created in such a way that he could be the head of his wife. His nature was so created that he could fill this role. The woman was created in such a way that she could serve her husband as his help meet. Her personality was arranged differently than that of the man for this purpose. The glory of woman is not attained by her striving to be like the man. Her calling is not to rival the position God has given to her husband, but rather, to live and serve in the noble position that God has given uniquely to her according to her nature.

Sin grievously marred the marriage state. There is virtually no relationship among men that has been more deeply affected and corrupted by man's fall than the marriage relationship. Both man and woman became corrupt and evil in the fall. This is revealed in the wicked tyranny of man over his wife after the fall. Man's role in marriage does not give him the right to treat his wife in pride and cruelty and harshness. As we noted in our previous article, God commanded man to nourish and cherish his wife and to lead her with discretion. He is to honor and protect her, and to remain faithful to her his whole life long. He is called by the grace of God to love her even as Christ loves His church. The fall involved the rebellion of woman from her God-ordained place in marriage. Eve's first act of rebellion took place when, independently from her husband, she listened to the lie of the devil, and chose the word of the devil over the word of God. The inspired apostle Paul speaks of this in I Timothy 2:

Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in transgression.

Many ungodly and foolish women have brought great trouble, sorrow, and grief to their own marriages and families. Striving for a place of honor, they are in great dishonor before God and the object of His displeasure and judgment.

God has, in His great mercy and through the power of His grace and Spirit, redeemed us by Christ Jesus. Only through this redemption is Christian marriage at all possible. In Christian marriage, both husband and wife must live by the grace of Christ and according to the Word of God, and only then can they expect the favor and blessing of Christ on their marriage. After the fall, there cannot be a perfect marriage on earth. It is unrealistic to imagine that our marriages will be perfect. Even the best marriage on earth will be marred by sins of both husband and wife. Both husband and wife often fail miserably. Yet Scripture sets before us the ideal for marriage, and we must, with the help of the grace and Spirit of Christ, strive to live according to this ideal. Each partner in marriage must be ready to bear with the weaknesses of the other, knowing himself and herself to be a sinner and being always ready to forgive their partners. Each must go with the other to the cross of Christ for daily forgiveness and reconciliation.

The God-given calling of the Christian wife in marriage is that of submission to her husband. This is a noble calling, contrary to what any proud self-seeking woman of the world might imagine. Repeatedly the Word of God gives the woman this instruction:

Wives submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything (Eph. 5:22-24).

This is strong and clear language. Similar teaching is given in other passages of Scripture: I Corinthians 11:1-12; I Corinthians 14:34, 35; Colossians 3:18; I Peter 3:1-6; I Timothy 2:11-15. Always the teaching is the same. Let the wife be subject to her husband. This is not a culturally-conditioned instruction; it is the instruction from the Lord for Christian marriage in every age and culture.

The subjection of the wife to her husband must be a godly submission of the heart. It must not be one that is rendered grudgingly with bitterness in the heart. It is not a submission of a slave that is rendered in hopeless and miserable aggravation of spirit. The subjection of the wife must be with grace in her heart, willingly and

cheerfully. The submission of a wife to her husband is different also from the obedience of a child to its parents. The godly wife is called to submit to the man to whom she is equal as an image-bearer of God. She is not the slave of her husband and ought not be regarded by him as such. She is called the willing and loving help meet of her husband. Her submission is also distinguished from the obedience of children to their parents. Her submission is with intelligence equal to her husband and with mature knowledge.

The submission of the wife to her husband is honorable in the sight of God. It is despised by the modern-day world, but it is honorable before God. Paul speaks of the submission of a wife to her husband as being "as unto the Lord," and as being "fit in the Lord." Many women have suffered because of the abuse of wicked husbands. God does not honor such husbands. When there is physical abuse on the part of the husband there must at times even be court-ordered separation for the protection of the wife. Because of the fall into sin the woman will have to be ready at times to suffer for the Lord's sake, sometimes because of the sin of her own husband. The Lord is grieved by a husband who is the occasion of the suffering of his wife in marriage, even by verbal abuse.

The instruction of I Peter 3:1-6 is striking. The situation described in this passage is a marriage between a believer and an unbeliever. Probably this situation arose because both husband and wife were unbelievers when they first married, but later the wife by the grace of God came to know Christ. She was converted to God. The husband was not converted. The two in this marriage are now spiritually opposite. The husband does not know and love the truth. The wife in such a marriage will have to be ready to suffer for Christ's sake. Peter does not counsel such a wife to rebel against her unbelieving husband and to leave him. Rather, she is to try to win him by her godly behavior. This godly behavior is the behavior of submission to her husband, which requires on her part continually a meek and quiet spirit. This is remarkable. According to Peter, such behavior of the Christian wife is in the sight of God of great price.

According to the Bible, a life of service is an honorable calling. The husband is called to love his wife as Christ loved His church and gave Himself for her. This is honorable for the Christian husband. The wife also follows

the example of Christ. She follows the example of the Lord of glory, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. The wife's life of service to her husband and family is one of self-sacrifice and humility, and this is noble in the sight of God.

The husband is called to honor his godly wife in her service to him and to the children that God gives to them. The virtuous woman described in Proverbs 31 is devoted to her husband and children. When she lives in such devotion she is like a rare jewel to her husband. There are few like her. She brings great blessing on her marriage and family, and she serves the church of God well

for the benefit of the generations of the covenant. Her husband safely trusts in her and has no need of spoil. She has many beautiful virtues. Among them is the fact that she "openeth her mouth with wisdom, and in her tongue is the law of kindness." She excels all those who pride themselves in the vanity of mere outward beauty and bodily attraction by which many receive the adulation of the ungodly world. The godly wife and mother is honored when her children rise up and call her blessed. Her husband also, and he praises her. He ought to do this, for he must recognize that he has received a great treasure from the Lord Himself, for which he must be continually thankful. 

The Only Way of Salvation

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 5

Question 12. Since then, by the righteous judgment of God, we deserve temporal and eternal punishment, is there no way by which we may escape that punishment, and be again received into favor?

Answer. God will have His justice satisfied: and therefore we must make this full satisfaction, either by ourselves, or by another.

Question 13. Can we ourselves then make this satisfaction?

Answer. By no means; but on the contrary we daily increase our debt.

Question 14. Can there be found anywhere one who is a mere creature, able to satisfy for us?

Answer. None; for, first, God will not punish any other creature for the sin which man hath committed; and further, no mere creature can sustain the burden of God's eternal wrath against sin, so as to deliver others from it.

Question 15. What sort of a mediator and deliverer then must we seek for?

Answer. For one who is very man, and perfectly righteous; and yet more powerful than all creatures; that is, one who is also very God.

How thankful we can be that the Bible does not end with the message of man's sin and condemnation and that the Catechism goes on from man's misery to the way of deliverance.

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We now begin the second main section of the Heidelberg Catechism, which teaches us the gospel—the good news—of salvation for sinners. But the Catechism moves very slowly, and we are not introduced to the Savior until partway through the sixth Lord's Day. Instead, the catechism becomes very pedagogical, leading us to Christ very logically and carefully. There is no "easy-believism" or a simple "sinner's prayer." Instead, the Catechism reaf-

firms our depravity, shows the impossibility of salvation through man's effort, and presents us with the gospel of sovereign grace. God plans salvation, God provides the Savior, and God sovereignly brings sinners to Himself. Salvation is of the Lord!

Reconciliation

Have you been reconciled to God?

One important way to think of salvation is "reconciliation." Paul uses this word to sum up the whole gospel. He says that God has "given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18-19). To reconcile is to reunite those who are estranged from one another, by removing the barrier to their relationship. Reconciliation changes their position from hostility to friendship.

How sweet is reconciliation! When an estranged man and his wife are reunited, when brothers who have been fighting for years make peace, when a wayward child returns—these are times of joyous reconciliation.

Usually in this kind of reconciliation, both sides have to do something in order to make it possible for them to come back together. Both of them must want it; both must make apologies and changes in behavior; both must be forgiving and receptive. Reconciliation with God works differently than this.

For one, God does not need to be reconciled to us. No, He has done no offense, He does not need to make adjustments or apologies. The enmity that exists between God and man is man's fault. Isaiah 59:2 says, "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you that he will not hear." We humans are the ones who have to be reconciled. Our sin, in Adam and Eve, has estranged us from God. And, as the Canons of Dordt teach, "God would have done no injustice by leaving them all to perish and delivering them over to condemnation on account of sin" (Head 1, Art. 1).

Then further, man can do nothing to change his estranged relationship to God. If there is conflict in a marriage, in a family, or in the church, either party involved can initiate the reconciliation and make moves to repair the rift. But with God, that cannot be done, and in fact we by nature do not want that. We cannot say that we are sorry; we cannot mend anything. From our point of view, reconciliation is impossible. So, reconciliation is from God's side. God takes us who were originally made

to know and love Him, who now have fallen from that relationship, and He brings us back to Himself in Jesus Christ.

God Is Just

This reconciliation is real. It is not just a patch-up job, which shoves differences under the rug and moves on.

By nature we all prefer to think of God only in terms of mercy and love. We would like Him to be the kind of God who lets our sin go, without insisting on His own justice. And, in fact, this is how many people think of God today. How wrong, and how different to the God of the Bible, who says in Exodus 23:7, "I will not justify the wicked" and of whom the Scriptures say, "God is light, and in him is no darkness at all" (1 John 1:5). God cannot let go of the tiniest speck of sin. If He did, that would pollute His purity. Every sin, even the smallest, will be remitted only by payment and punishment.

Two things in the Bible make this truth of God's justice very clear.

First, the Bible teaches the reality of hell. Our sins deserve not only temporal punishment, but eternal punishment in hell. The doctrine of hell is not pleasant, but probably the greatest teacher of hell in all the Bible was Jesus Himself. In Matthew 25:41 He prophesies that, on the judgment day, He, Himself, as judge will say to some men, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."

The second proof is that God punished the sins of man in His own beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus Himself was free of sin, He still had to die in order to redeem His people. If it had been possible any other way, then God would certainly have spared His Son the suffering of the cross. But, the Bible says, God "spared not his own son" but gave Him up for sin (Rom. 8:32). God is just, and so He punished the sins of His people in the death of His own Son. If the sins of believers demand satisfaction, then it is impossible that the ungodly will escape hell.

Satisfaction

Because God is just, there must be satisfaction for sin. This too is a very important gospel concept. When someone is satisfied, he says, "It is enough." After dessert, with a full stomach at the end of a meal, I say, "I am satisfied."

God says, “It is enough,” and “I am satisfied,” only when every last sin has been paid for. Sin incurs a debt with God. Jesus teaches us to think of our sin this way when He teaches us to pray, “And forgive us our debts” (Matt. 6:12).

What is the debt? “The wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23). Death is not merely the soul’s leaving the body, but it is the soul’s going to hell to suffer, and the body later joining the soul in hell. This is what our sin deserves. This is the only way the debt of sin can be paid.

This debt of sin is not small, but is an infinite debt, a debt that cannot be calculated. That’s why the suffering of hell is eternal—it goes on into time infinite. You cannot calculate the debt of your sin. Every sin you commit, even the smallest sinful thought, makes you worthy of death, an eternity in hell. And how many sins aren’t there in your life, even in one day? Are there ten sins in a day, fifty, hundreds, thousands? Then add these up over a lifetime and there are millions. And each one warrants an eternity of suffering in hell, so the debt is infinite.

And, the Catechism tells us, “God will have His justice satisfied, and therefore we must make this full satisfaction either by ourselves or by another.”

Our Options

As far as we are concerned, there are really only two options for satisfaction. Either we make this payment ourselves, or someone else will have to do it for us.

If anything is clear from the Bible, it is this, from Genesis to Revelation, there is absolutely no way we can satisfy God’s justice ourselves. This debt is not like a multi-million dollar debt that an individual might have, to which he makes payments each month, which seem hardly to make a dent. It is not like the multi-trillion dollar debt of a country, which can get chipped away at when economic prosperity returns. No, this is an infinite debt, which means that even if massive payments were made, daily, for the whole of one’s life, the debt would not even begin to be paid. It is impossible for a finite creature to pay an infinite debt.

Besides, it is impossible for our works to pay anything. For one, God requires perfection, and our deeds are always sinful. Even our best are fraught with sin. Also, even if all our works were perfect, or if they were perfect from here on out, they would not merit anything with God.

Works of a creature can never merit with God, because the creature owes his best to God regardless.

Instead of paying off our debt, we add to it every day with our sins and need further forgiveness. Even the sinner in hell is not decreasing his debt, but continues in the irreversible state of hatred toward God, thus making his debt greater and greater. How impossible is a doctrine of salvation by “good works.” Those who trust their own works to get them to heaven are going to find out that, because nothing they have done merits with God, and because they did not trust in Christ, they themselves will have to suffer for their sins in hell.

So, we have to find someone or something else to pay the debt for us. Almost all religions teach that a person can bring something to his god to appease him, a gift or a sacrifice. Even Roman Catholics teach this. But on this point biblical Christianity is different.

There is no way for any creature to take and pay our sin before God. A cow or lamb sacrifice cannot do it, because animals are not equivalent to man before God. The same holds true for angels. Another fallen man cannot do it, because he has his own sins to be concerned with before God. If there was a sinless man, it would not be possible for him to do it because the burden of wrath is infinite, and a creature would be crushed under it before the debt was paid.

The Only Way

It is very clear, then, that our case is hopeless. From our point of view, reconciliation and satisfaction are impossible. The only way is that God devise a way that includes Himself, and the perfection and power of His own being, and that somehow God combine this to the human nature that must be punished. And so the kind of mediator we need is one who is Himself God almighty, able to bear the weight of our sin, one who is perfectly righteous, so that He need not pay for His own sins, and one who is a true man to take the wrath of God against man.

With this biblical and doctrinal logic, the Catechism is ready to introduce us to Christ, of whom the Scriptures say, “Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like unto his brethren” (Heb. 2:17). In question fifteen, though not mentioned by name, He is mentioned as “mediator” and “redeemer.”

A mediator is one who stands between two who are at odds and need to be reconciled. Christ, who comes from God, is our mediator, not to bring God down to us, but to bring us up to God, through taking on Himself our sin.

A redeemer is one who pays the price to purchase and set free those who are under bondage and in debt. Our bondage is sin and our debt is hell. Christ pays the price in the cross to set us free from the guilt and power of sin.

This is the gospel of reconciliation. Isn't it a glorious gospel? Paul thinks it is, and so he wants to preach it. God, he says, has "given to us the ministry of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:18). What good news when friends and family members are reconciled; you would tell everyone! What greater good news that God and sinners are reconciled.

So, Paul says, "Be ye reconciled to God!" (II Cor. 5:20). What does he mean? He means, "Believe on Jesus, God's provided Mediator!" There is no other way. 

Questions for Discussion

1. Why, when it comes to the second section of the Catechism on deliverance, does the Catechism take so long to get to Jesus?
2. What is reconciliation? What makes it such a rich concept?
3. What makes the reconciliation of sinners with God different from reconciliation between two human parties?
4. How would you answer someone who says that God, in His love, is simply willing to overlook and dismiss sin?
5. In Scripture, who speaks more than any other about eternal damnation?
6. Is it fair for God to punish someone in hell for a sin as small as gossip or slander? Isn't hell reserved for murderers and others guilty of the worse sorts of sin?
7. Why cannot angels or animals take our place before God?
8. Why cannot another man than Jesus die for our sins?
9. Why must our Mediator be true God?

STRENGTH OF YOUTH

REV. ALLEN BRUMMEL

The Book of Proverbs and Repetition

There are some things that we hear again and again, and at times we can become weary of the repetition. As young people we can chafe under the repeated warnings of our parents, teachers, and preachers. Why do they have to bring those same things up again and again? Can't they trust us? Don't they think we heard them the first time?

As parents teach their children, there are certain themes that come up again and again. There are certain warnings that are repeated. These themes and warnings are necessary because they are areas where the devil is es-

pecially at work and where we as young people are prone to be weak. The Bible teaches the need for repetition, and the book of Proverbs teaches what themes need to be repeated, over and over, for the spiritual benefit of our young people.

Your parents and those in authority know the peer pressures that accompany sin, and they know the craftiness of the devil. Remember, they were young at one time as well, and out of love for you they repeat certain themes. But, even more importantly, they know the Bible. And they know that the Bible teaches that there is an important place for repetition.

As you young people are aware, the book of Proverbs contains a wealth of instruction for young people. Solomon wrote the book for the benefit of his son. Proverbs

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8:1: "My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother." God spoke through Solomon and makes this His word for His sons and daughters. God, through Solomon, repeats certain themes that we must hear. In no specific order I want to mention six truths that I find repeated through the book of Proverbs, truths that Solomon viewed of highest importance in the lives of his spiritual children. I realize that there are many more themes found through the book of Proverbs. My list is quite subjective, but I believe that the other points can be fit under these main truths.

First, Solomon states repeatedly the need for children and young people to hunger after wisdom and understanding. One such passage is found in Proverbs 2:1-5:

My son, if thou wilt receive my words, and hide my commandments with thee; So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, and apply thine heart to understanding; Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the knowledge of God.

The most important thing that you young people can pursue is wisdom and understanding. What is your calling before God? You are bound as a student to be busy growing in knowledge and understanding, along with wisdom. This means that your school work, your catechism instruction, and the Bible studies in your life are of highest importance.

We are often not interested in wisdom or in understanding. We don't take our school work and catechism seriously. We are interested only in ourselves—our will, our pleasure, and our own pursuits. In those situations we need to hear again and again the fact that the most important pursuit in life is the pursuit of wisdom and understanding. Our sinful flesh, the wicked world, and the devil are constantly tempting us to pursue the foolishness of materialism, earthly honor, and sin. Solomon sets forth wisdom and understanding as attractive and desirable for the young person.

How do you show in your life a desire for those spiritual traits? How do you pursue them? What kind of mockery and shame are you required to endure for that kind of commitment? God never promises that the way of the godly young person will be easy. But God does

promise that those who pursue wisdom and understanding will experience God's rich blessing.

Second, Solomon notes the need for correction, and for that correction to be both administered and received in the right spirit. The foolish child rejects the admonitions of his parents and those in authority. Proverbs 13:1: "A wise son heareth his father's instruction: but a scorner heareth not rebuke." How do you respond to the correction of your parents? The way in which you respond reveals whether you are a wise or a foolish young person. If you respond with anger and try to run from those who correct you, then you are a fool. A fool is one who tries to ignore God and tries to convince himself that he can do as he pleases with no consequences. God won't be mocked by that kind of an attitude.

Our actions do have consequences. God, out of love for you, gives you Christian parents, teachers, and pastors who are called to show the love of God to you in the way of their correction and discipline. You must receive that correction and turn from your sins. You must also learn to appreciate the correction and see it as necessary for your salvation. Proverbs 3:11, 12: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth."

We need to remember our parents in our prayers, as God gives them a high and difficult calling. They are called to use the rod and reproof in the discipline of their children. Proverbs 29:15: "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame." When you respond to reproof by becoming angry with your parents or teachers or pastor, then you face the judgment of God. "He that being often reprov'd hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy" (Prov. 29:1).

Third, Solomon notes the threat of legalism as a strong temptation for a young person. Young people are better at following the letter of a law than the spirit of the law. They thrive on trying to twist and turn the words of their parents against the parents and their teachers against the teachers. Young people can be masters at twisting those words so that the words and rules work to their benefit. And they separate themselves from the sin by justifying their actions. Young people are adept at detecting inconsistency in others, while not realizing

their own lack of sincerity. They are inclined to separate their outward actions from their motivations. They will do what is required, but they will not do it with the right spirit or with the right motivation of heart. This legalism is condemned.

The fruit of this legalism is a spiritual and natural laziness. Rather than being diligent in the use of the gifts God has given, they become spiritual sloths. Solomon opposes this spirit by stressing the need for obedience from the heart. Proverbs 4:23: “Keep thy heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.” What is most important is not outward conformity. You need to live and walk in obedience from the heart. Don’t just go through the outward motions to please your parents and your teachers. They are looking for more than just outward obedience. They want to see evidence of a love for the truth and a desire to live your life for the sake of God and His glory.

Fourth, Solomon realizes the importance of good Christian friends and the threat of bad friends. “My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not” (Prov. 1:10). Repeatedly he warns against the ways of the fool and the need to forsake the foolish so that you can live. There are foolish young people all around you. Tragically, often we ourselves are the fools. We make ourselves and our own desires a god. We live for ourselves. The fool’s influence on your life is not for good, but for evil. The fool lives for himself and his own pleasure. The fool refuses to submit to instruction and discipline. The fool says in his heart that there is no God—I am god, and I can do as I please. Do you have the courage to turn away from such a fool? You will be mocked. And fools may seek revenge against you. But you need to separate yourself from those who are living as fools. You need to surround yourself with young people who respect their parents, who love God and love the church, and who seek to live their lives for the sake of God and His glory.

Fifth, we find Solomon repeatedly warning about the need for chastity and purity in sexual relationships. Solomon himself was guilty of sin in this regard, and God gave him the sensitivity to that sin and the grace to warn you and me. He repeatedly warns his son against wicked women who are eager to entice. The young man and young woman are constantly being pursued and tempted by the devil to give their bodies over to their lusts and

pleasures. There are wicked and foolish young people who have no love for God or for you. They talk about love, but all it is, is lust. They want to satisfy their lusts at your expense. Love gives. Love seeks God and His will. But lust takes. Lust is interested only in self. Resist these tempters and their temptations for God’s sake. Your body and spirit belong to Jesus Christ who bought them. Keep your bodies and your minds chaste and pure. Your sexual desires are to be enjoyed in marriage alone. Pray for grace to control those desires and seek to marry in the Lord. Those who treat lightly their sexuality are those who are on the pathway to hell. “Her guests are in the depths of hell” (Prov. 9:18).

Sixth, Solomon teaches his son the need to have a heavenly, eternal perspective. As we live in the midst of this earth, we need to be looking beyond the things of this earth. It is natural for young people to be concerned mainly, and often only, about the here and now. They lack the gift of being able to look ahead and see the consequences of their actions. They often lack the ability to view themselves as pilgrims and strangers on this earth. Again and again God warns us to keep a right focus with regard to our possessions and our ambitions. “Better is a little with righteousness than great revenues without right” (Prov. 16:8).

There are times when the admonitions and instruction are not enough. God has to wake us out of our earthly mindedness by touching us in our youth with a death of a young, close friend. God does this in order to encourage us to spiritual maturity and to give us a heavenly, eternal perspective in life.

May God encourage us to see the benefit of repetition. Rather than becoming angry or irritated when we hear the same warnings again and again, let us examine our hearts and minds. There is a deeper reason for these repetitions. You need to see your sin. And you need to see the need for forgiveness. If you don’t see your sin, you won’t see your need for Jesus Christ. God is speaking to you and reminding you how sinful you are and how great your need is for Jesus and His saving work. Repent of your sin and live out of the joy of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (I John 1:9). 

Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: An EP Study Commentary, by Iain M. Duguid, Carlisle, PA: EP Books USA. 255 pages (hardbound). Reviewed by Mark H. Hoeksema.

It is my conviction that whenever I encounter a new book, it is both necessary and helpful for me to know something about the author. It seems appropriate to know who he is, in order to determine the background, mindset, and perspective of what he writes. After all, no one writes in a vacuum. Everyone has a theological predisposition for better or for worse, and a viewpoint from which he approaches the Scriptures. To give a comprehensive and fair review, it is essential to know the predilections of the writer.

Iain Duguid holds a doctorate in Old Testament from the University of Cambridge, which the level of his knowledge amply demonstrates. He is a former teacher of Old Testament at Westminster West in Escondido, CA. Currently he is Professor of Old Testament at Grove City College in Pennsylvania and pastor of Christ Presbyterian Church. He is the author of several previous books, notably commentaries on Numbers, Esther and Ruth, Ezekiel, as well as several more works. It is clear that in his background and writings he holds to the Presbyterian tradition, and is therefore our cousin in the Reformed faith.

In his brief introduction the author gives his rationale for his writing on the three books that comprise this volume. Correctly calling these a “neglected trio of books,” he states:

The last three books of the Old Testament have not always received the attention they have deserved from the church. This is in some ways surprising, since the Gospel writers quote Zechariah 9–14 more often than any other biblical source in explaining Christ’s sufferings and death.... Part of the reason lies in the difficulty of the

material: the visions that are shown to us are complex, and the oracles often seem obscure.

He goes on to state:

Another ‘problem’ with these books lies in the fact that that they come sometime after the exile, when all that was left of God’s people was a small remnant living in poverty in Judah. They address a community that was living in a day of small things (Zech. 4), with little glory and no great triumphs to show off to a watching world.

In light of these very true observations, Duguid observes:

In a day like ours, which puts such a premium on charismatic leaders whose ministries exude glory and success, these books may be seen as something of an embarrassment. But if, like the apostle Paul, we are content to be broken vessels without glory in ourselves so that the glory of Christ crucified may be all the more plainly displayed, then we shall find much blessings in these books. In them, we shall read of the comfort and challenge that come from the presence of the living God in our midst, even when his glory is not on public display. In them we shall also read of the anticipation of the day when the glory of God would come to earth in the person of Christ and bring about the long-anticipated salvation of his people.

Duguid’s assessments are correct on every count. When was the last time that you heard a sermon based on the book of Haggai? What do you know about the writings of the post-exilic prophets, of which these three are primary? What do you know of the restoration of the Jewish people (and with them the covenant of God and the preservation of the line of David, culminating in Christ), who after their exile in Babylon faced the difficult task of rebuilding both their temple and their culture following a holocaust rivaling that of WW II? All of these issues and more the author explains by way of introduction to each section, often with practical application.

He does so by taking one section of these prophecies at a time. After a brief introduction to each chapter, he exegetes the various oracles and visions verse by verse

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and phrase by phrase, emphasizing key ideas by putting them in bold print to call attention to their meaning. At the end of the chapter, the author makes application not only to the church of the Old Testament, but also to the fulfillment of these prophetic words to the church of the New Testament. His applications are usually well done, and even profound. He thus gives good clarity to visions and prophecies that are often difficult and obscure.

A novel feature of this book is that the author gives his own translation of the original Hebrew. Often, but not always, his translation parallels the King James Version, although Duguid's is much more free. This method is recommended. How many times do not our ministers correct, clarify, and explain the meaning of the original text? By making his own translation, Duguid uses an economy of explanation in the rendition especially of the more difficult passages.

The author stresses the historical background of these prophecies, noting that "knowing that context helps us avoid reading the prophets' words as disembodied timeless truths" (p. 13). This emphasis is important and is well done, both with regard to world rulers and events, and concerning people and occurrences within Judah.

In a section called "Theological themes" that he intends to develop, he mentions God's presence, the Messiah, the final victory of God, and connections to the New Testament. In general he fulfills his intention to develop these themes; he delineates and explains them; and he is careful to apply them to the New Testament, especially in the "application" portion of each chapter. In addition, he connects the various oracles and visions not only sequentially and in relation to external events, but also internally, uniting them as to their content. Some unusual and difficult concepts could on occasion have been more fully explained, and a stronger and more definitive Reformed emphasis would have been preferable.

Speaking of Reformed, the covenant is mentioned often. Unfortunately, the author never defines it or specifies exactly how he understands it, which is not helpful. However, to the extent that it is possible to determine such matters, it appears likely from the language he uses and the context in which he uses it, that he views the covenant as a relation between God and His people—to his credit. Again, a bit more precision would be desirable.

Positively, Duguid is strong on the Reformed idea

of corporate responsibility, which he calls a "corporate dimension" (pp. 177, 178). He is also strong on double predestination (pp. 192-198). He uses the term "rejection" in lieu of "reprobation," but his meaning is obvious.

He stumbles, however, regarding the matter of divorce in Malachi 2:15, 16 (see pp. 219, 220). After mentioning the difficulty of the Hebrew in verse 16, he modifies the translation so that the Lord is not the subject of the hating of divorce. He makes the text read, "If [a person] hates and divorces [his wife], says the LORD God of Israel, 'he covers his clothing with violence.'" The subject of the hating and divorcing is then clearly an unspecified person, not God. He bolsters his position with God's permission of divorce in Deuteronomy 24 and Ezra 9-10. He goes on to say (correctly) that hate is "a covenantal term that describes a rejection of relationship that naturally issues in sending the wife away through divorce." But then he inexplicably and illogically draws the conclusion that "this passage does not present a blanket condemnation of all divorce, but only of certain kinds of divorce as being contrary to God's Word." In his application of this passage, he states: "Yet even while divorce should be unthinkable under most circumstances for believers, it is not the unforgivable sin." Thus he defends the teaching of the Westminster confession and weakens the biblical doctrine of marriage and divorce.

A couple of formal comments are also in order. In the prefatory material the author includes a helpful outline of the book. Though each chapter has a title, there are no chapter numbers, the inclusion of which would have been helpful for organizational reasons. The author also uses endnotes rather than footnotes. Although the current trend in publishing is toward endnotes, I despise them because they force the reader to flip back and forth in the book either to determine documentation or to obtain further information. Footnotes are preferable.

This book is recommended. It contains good basic exegesis and application, although it does not always draw as straight and distinctive a Reformed line as we might like. It does not always speak language completely familiar to us, but its ideas are basically sound. It will be helpful to ministers in sermon preparation, beneficial especially for society study, and suitable for reading by anyone desiring an increase of knowledge regarding these three prophets. 

The Creation of the Heavens & the Earth (6)

Creatures Reproducing After Their Kind

According to the modern theory of evolution, certain species of organisms have evolved over time into new species. Simple species have gradually evolved into more and more complex ones. Such a teaching runs directly contrary to the biblical truth that plants and animals always reproduce “after their kind.”

After their own kind

On the third day, God made different kinds of plants, all of which reproduce after their own kind:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit *after his kind*, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth: and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed *after his kind*, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, *after his kind*: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:11–12).

On the fifth and sixth days of creation, He made the different kinds of animals. These, too, reproduce always after their own kind:

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, *after their kind*, and every winged fowl *after his kind*.... And God made the beast of the earth *after his kind*, and cattle *after their kind*, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth *after his kind*: and God saw that it was good (Gen. 1:21, 25).

The repetition here serves to emphasize that this is indeed an important truth.¹

When considering this subject it is good to distin-

¹ Interestingly, human beings are not said to reproduce *after their kind*. Perhaps that is because there are not different kinds of human beings. There are different kinds of plants and different kinds of animals, but there are not different kinds of human beings. All human beings belong to the same group.

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Previous article in this series: April 15, 2010, p. 324.

guish between what Scripture refers to as a *kind* and what modern science refers to as a *species*. Scientists set up their own criteria for what constitutes a species, and sometimes they are willing to admit that they find it difficult to define the word “species” in a way that would apply to all naturally occurring organisms. We, however, are speaking not of what the world refers to as a *species*, but of what the Scriptures refer to as a *kind*. So instead of saying that plants and animals reproduce *after their species*, we say that they reproduce *after their kind*.

This means that if two animals can reproduce, they must be of the same kind. The fact that one breed of dog, for example, can mate with another breed of dog, is proof that the two dogs, though perhaps outwardly quite different, are really the same kind. Dogs never evolve into some different kind of creature. When they reproduce, the result is always another dog.

Microevolution cited as proof for macroevolution

Evolutionists often use subtle arguments. Some say we should not fear the theory of evolution, since evolution merely means *change*. But evolution does not merely mean change. It means a very specific type of change—a change from one kind of plant or animal to a new one.

This brings us to consider a commonly held distinction, namely that between *microevolution* and *macroevolution*. Microevolution is said to refer to changes that take place within a certain kind of plant or animal (e.g., when the ratio of white moths to black moths changes within a certain moth population), while macroevolution is said to be a change from one kind of organism to another. Both kinds of changes are referred to as examples of “evolution.”

Such terminology is confusing and is used by some in an effort to deceive. Many, for example, who hold to this distinction argue that microevolution is proof for macroevolution. Yet these two changes are entirely different. Indeed there *are* changes that take place within a certain kind of plant or animal. But entirely different would be

a change from one kind to another kind. The latter, according to Scripture, never takes place.

The unchangeable God has an unchangeable purpose with each kind of plant and each kind of animal. Each

kind was created by God to teach us something. Not surprisingly, then, there is never a change from one kind of creature to another. The lesson we are to learn from each kind remains the same throughout the ages. 

NEWS FROM OUR CHURCHES

MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER

Congregation Activities

Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada now has its own web site at www.reformedalberta.ca. The site not only introduces and gives directions to Immanuel, but is intended for the purpose of evangelism throughout Canada. It contains a wealth of material, including the confessions with full proof texts, entire books, and most of the pamphlets of our churches. There are many areas that are still “under construction,” and new material will be added as time permits. Take time to check out this valuable resource, to which you can also refer family and friends.

The Building Committee of Providence PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited the men and women of their congregation to attend a PowerPoint informational meeting on Monday, May 3, at Heritage Christian School. The presentation consisted of possible scenarios of purchasing an existing facility, or purchasing land with the intent to build a facility, along with costs, budget scenarios, Building Fund amounts, and number of years and number of families needed to achieve these goals.

With thanksgiving to God, we join with the readers of the *Standard Bearer* in celebrating the organization of our new congregation in

Sioux Falls, SD. On April 23, Rev. Dennis Lee, pastor of the Edgerton, MN PRC, the calling church for our denomination’s mission work in Sioux Falls, led the service, preaching from I Peter 2:4-6, under the theme, “Lively Stones Built Up a Spiritual House.” A collection was taken for the newly organized Heritage PRC Building Fund. The event was held in the Starlight Room of the Holiday Inn, City Center in Sioux Falls. Heritage becomes the 31st congregation in our small denomination, and the first in South Dakota in 18 years. A congregational meeting was held immediately after the service, at which two elders and one deacon were elected out of the fifteen charter families, to provide spiritual leadership for the new church. The roster of the newly organized congregation will include thirty confessing members and ten baptized children. And Rev. Brummel accepted their call to serve as their first pastor.

The congregation of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI invited their community and our area churches to a conference, “Equipping Ourselves for the Office of Elder,” on April 30 and May 1 at Trinity PRC. Prof. Robert Decker spoke on “Shepherding,” and Mr. Deanne Wassink spoke on “Equipping Ourselves for the Task of Counseling.” There was also a panel discussion on the office of elder. The conference was streamed live at www.trinityprc.org.

On Thursday evening, April 15,

the congregation of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada approved a proposal presented by their council to install new furnaces and ducting in their church. The work is scheduled to be completed in early June, hopefully well before needed.

The Peace PRC in Lansing, IL hosted a Marriage Conference at their church on April 30 and May 1. Prof. Barry Gritters spoke on “God’s Will for Marriage”; Rev. Ron Van Overloop spoke on the theme, “The Calling of Husband and Wife”; and Rev. Garrett Eriks spoke on “Building Your Marriage.” The two-day event also included time for questions and answers, coffee breaks, and good Christian fellowship.

Mission Activities

The Berean PRC in Manila, the Philippines, hosted their annual conference on April 29 and 30. Each day’s conference schedule ran from 8:00 A.M. until 5:00 P.M. Missionary Pastor Rev. Daniel Kleyn presented four speeches on Reformed church government and Missionary Pastor Rev. Richard Smit spoke four times on “The Particular Grace of God.” The conference attracted between 60 and 70 registered participants.

School Activities

Heritage Christian School in Hudsonville, MI extended an invitation to their support family to come together on May 1 to celebrate and

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give thanks and praise to God for twenty-five years of Christian education. A great day was planned, with a focus on a program in mid-afternoon, with a special number by the kindergarten and first grade students and a keynote message by Rev. David Overway, a member of Heritage's first graduating class. The day also included games and dinner.

Eastside Christian School in

Grand Rapids, MI sponsored a meeting on April 26, featuring Mr. Don Vander Ark, a respected educator and former Christian school principal in Western Michigan. Mr. VanderArk addressed school board members and future school board members concerning the what, why, and how of being a board member. This helpful meeting also included a question and answer period.

Young People's Activities

The Young People's Society of First PRC in Holland, MI scheduled their bike-a-thon fundraiser for this year's convention for Saturday, May 1. Holland's congregation was also invited to join in biking the twenty-six miles with the young people.

Minister Activities

Rev. Lee accepted the call to Bethel PRC. ☞

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wedding anniversary

■ On June 12, 2010, our parents, **ROBERT and PHYLLIS BRANDS**, will observe their 40th wedding anniversary. We are grateful to God for bringing them together in marriage, preserving them spiritually, and using them for our instruction in the Christian faith. We pray that He will continue to bless them in their years together, and in their service of Christ and His church on this earth. "Behold, that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the LORD.... Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel" (Psalm 128:4, 6).

☞ Teresa and Rev. Douglas Kuiper

☞ Cheryl Brands

☞ Anita Brands

☞ Bethany and Jeff Winchester

☞ David and Amy Brands

☞ Linda and Bill Pipe

☞ Michael and Jenna Brands

☞ Brenda and Justin Pipe

☞ Scott Brands

☞ Lisa Brands

15 grandchildren

Loveland, Colorado

Reminder

■ The *Standard Bearer* is published only once a month during the months of June, July, and August.

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Men's Society of the Hope PRC in Walker expresses its sincere Christian sympathy to member Mr. Harry Rutgers and his family in the death of his brother, **MR. WILLIAM J. RUTGERS**,

on April 28, 2010. II Corinthians 5:1: "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

Harry Langerak, President
 James Schimmel, Secretary.

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Council of Southeast PRC extends Christian sympathy to Dave and Carol Devries in the death of Carol's brother-in-law,

WILLIAM RUTGERS.

We say with the psalmist in Psalm 103:17: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children."

Rev. W. Langerak, President
 Edward Ophoff, Jr., Asst. clerk

Reformed Witness Hour

June 2010

Date

June 6

June 13

June 20

June 27

Topic

"God Did Not Spare His Own Son"

"No Condemnation!"

"More Than Conquerors Through Him That Loved Us"

"Christ's Inseparable Love"

Text

Romans 8:31, 32

Romans 8:33, 34

Romans 8:35-37

Romans 8:38, 39