

The Standard Bearer

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CONTENTS

<i>Meditation</i>	It Is God That Justifies REV. JAMES SLOPSEMA	266
<i>Editorial</i>	Our Need for Seminary Students REV. KENNETH KOOLE	269
<i>God's Wonderful Works</i>	The Creation Narrative As Real History REV. JAMES LANING	272
<i>Strength of Youth</i>	Just Words? REV. GARRY ERIKS	273
<i>Things Which Must Shortly Come to Pass</i>	Postmillennialism (5) PROF. DAVID ENGELSMA	276
<i>When Thou Sittest in Thine House</i>	Choosing the One Thing Needful MRS. MARGARET LANING	280
<i>All Thy Works Shall Praise Thee</i>	Behold the Fowls of the Air: Migration MR. JOEL MINDERHOUD	283
<i>Bring the Books...</i>	Book Review MR. CHARLES TERPSTRA	286
<i>News From Our Churches</i>	Activities MR. BENJAMIN WIGGER	287

It Is God That Justifies

Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?
It is God that justifieth.

Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died,
yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right
hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Romans 8:33, 34

The preceding verses place us in eternity. "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his son. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified" (vv. 29, 30).

On that basis, assurances are given to us whom God has called to faith in Jesus Christ and conformed to the image of His Son.

Nothing can be against them (vv. 31, 32).

Nor, according to the verses we consider here, can anyone condemn them.

The holy writer asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect.... Who is he that condemneth?"

These are rhetorical questions, the answer to which is obvious. None can condemn the elect, because it is God who justifies them.

This is especially true in light of the fact that God justifies the elect in Jesus Christ, who died, who is risen, and who sits at God's right hand to make intercession for them.

A Terrible Accusation!

The word of God before us speaks of God's elect. The elect of God have already been described in verses 29, 30. There the holy writer, Paul, speaks of those whom God did foreknow in love and did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son.

Being born in sin, mankind bears the image of the devil, so that he is desperately wicked. But there is a people whom God has known eternally in His love. These He did predestinate (predetermined) to be conformed (and thus transformed) to the image of His Son.

This is the decree of election.

The apostle Paul points out in the next chapter (9:11-13), in connection with Jacob and Esau, that this election was not based on foreseen good works. Election and reprobation are determined by God's sovereign good pleasure.

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Those whom God did predestinate He also calls. The call refers to the saving call of the gospel to faith in Jesus Christ. All those whom God did predestinate He irresistibly calls to faith in Jesus Christ. By their faith in Jesus Christ they are conformed to the image of Christ. That is their salvation.

The word of God speaks of a charge being laid against these elect and condemning them.

When we who belong to Jesus look at our lives, it is clear to us that charges could easily be brought against us, resulting in our condemnation. True, we have been conformed to the image of God's Son by a new birth. Yet, the work of salvation is only begun, so that there is much sin in our lives. Sometimes the sins are shocking.

That the elect of God sin daily is the clear testimony of Scripture. The apostle Paul acknowledges this about himself in the previous chapter. "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" (Rom. 7:19). And we read in I John 1:8, 10, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.... If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

Every elect believer freely acknowledges this. To confess his sins is one of the marks of his faith.

Many step forward to lay charges against the elect and condemn them.

Satan has done that. In Revelation 12:10 he is called "the accuser of our brethren," who "accused them before our God day and night." All through the Old Testament, Satan had access to heaven, and he charged, before God, that the saints had no right to be there on account of their sin. Thankfully, Satan has been cast out of heaven with the exaltation of Christ.

The world, under Satan's control, also accuses the elect and condemns them.

They did that to Jesus, who had no sin. They constantly charged Him with blasphemy because of His

claim to be the Son of God. Finally, the Jewish Sanhedrin condemned Him to death on that charge.

The servant is not above his master. The world also accuses the elect of God in Jesus Christ. Sometimes they condemn the elect for their righteousness. The saints are criticized and even condemned by the world for their

large covenant families, their Sabbath-keeping, as well as their stands against divorce and remarriage, abortion, and homosexuality. And the world delights in every opportunity to condemn the elect when they in their weakness stumble into sin.

Even our conscience accuses us. Our conscience is the voice of God testifying that we have done good or evil. One can in unbelief sear his conscience, so that he does not hear the testimony of God about his sin. But the elect believer hears the testimony of God in his conscience. The testimony of God in his conscience is the same as the testimony of God in the written word. He is a sinner. And so his conscience accuses him of his sin.

More accurately, God, through the sinner's conscience, accuses him.

A Glorious Justification!

But it is God who justifies.

Justification is the verdict of God, our Judge, that we are righteous before Him and without sin.

God is the Judge of heaven and earth. He knows all that we do. He hears every word we speak. He even knows the inner thoughts of our heart. And He passes judgment on our life. His verdict is either guilty or righteous. If He sees so much as one sin for which we are responsible, He will declare us guilty and condemn us to horrible punishment. He reserves the verdict of righteous for those only who can stand before Him without sin and in perfect obedience.

Justification is the verdict of God that, in His judgment, one stands before Him in perfect righteousness and without sin.

God justifies the elect.

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The elect are those who are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, being joined by Him to Jesus Christ.

These elect, however, are conformed to the image of Jesus Christ only *partially*, so that sin clings to everything they do.

These are the elect whose consciences testify to them that they are sinners.

These elect God justifies. In spite of their many sins, He declares that they are perfectly righteous before Him.

And so the question arises, “Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? Who is he that condemneth?”

Again, these are rhetorical questions, the answers to which are obvious. And the answer is, no one. No one can effectively lay a charge against God’s elect so that they are condemned. The elect certainly have sins that make them worthy of condemnation, but no one can come forward with any charge against them that will result in their being condemned—not the devil, not the world, not even their own conscience. This is because God, who knows all their sins, has justified them.

In light of God’s justifying verdict, who would even *dare* to step forward with a charge against the elect to seek their condemnation? The devil has done so. The world does so. Under the influence of the unbelief of our sinful nature, our consciences would condemn us. But how dare they? God has justified us!

And, being justified, we are heirs of eternal life.

A Sure Basis!

The basis for our justification as God’s elect is Jesus Christ.

Interestingly, our works and efforts are not mentioned at all as being the basis of our justification. Let all those who would present their own works to God as the basis for their justification, either partially or entirely, take note.

The word of God calls our attention solely to Jesus Christ.

It is Christ that died. By His death on the cross, Jesus took upon Himself the curse of God due to all the elect. And He did so in perfect obedience. Through His atoning death, Jesus obtained a perfect righteousness that serves as the basis for our justification.

Not only has Christ died, He has risen again. This is the seal of God’s approval on Christ’s atoning work. Had Christ not fully covered the sins of all the elect, which sins were also on Him, He would be still in the grave. But now is Christ risen. And His resurrection is the proof of our justification (Rom. 4:26).

But there is more. Christ is at the right hand of God and makes intercession for us. As our intercessor, Jesus is our Advocate with the Father (I John 2:1). As our advocate, Christ establishes our innocence before God on the basis of His perfect sacrifice. In response, God justifies us, so that we are justified also in our consciences.

All this must be understood in the context of faith. We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

God brings all His elect to faith. This faith believes all that God has revealed in Scripture. This faith also embraces Jesus Christ as the only ground and hope for salvation. It is by this faith alone that we are justified. This is because faith joins us to Christ. And, because we are joined to Christ, God imputes to us the perfect righteousness of Christ.

Let us then cling to Christ by faith.

Let us not advance our good works as the basis for our righteousness before God. This is not the faith to which God calls the elect. Those who in unbelief advance their own works as the basis for their justification forfeit the benefit of Christ’s work and perish in their sin. Do we not read, “Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace” (Gal. 5:4)?

Let us by faith cling only to Jesus Christ to find the justification of God that makes ineffective all charges that may be brought against us to condemn us. ☪

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Our Need for Seminary Students

Or: Let Us Be Praying That the Spirit Stirs the Hearts of Young Men to Prepare for the Gospel Ministry

The church's need for ministers has always been great.

Christ's words found in Luke 10:2 apply to the whole New Testament age. "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send labourers into his harvest."

There never has been a time when the church could not use more men to go into all the world to preach the gospel as pastors and teachers.

But there are times for a particular denomination when the words of Christ ring especially true. The Theological School Committee (TSC) and faculty of our seminary are convinced that for the PRC that time is now.

Therefore, this article.

Our readers are surely aware that we have at present six vacant churches in a denomination of but thirty-one congregations. If it were not for our three professors preaching every Lord's Day (often twice), five students licensed and active (one of whom, from North-

ern Ireland, ends his 'tour of duty' in our circles this coming May), and a handful of retired ministers pitching in to help (all but one in their 70s), there would be a lot of reading sermons (or tapes, as the case may be). Reading sermons, etc. will do in a pinch, but, as both elders and congregations realize, it is not the same as the lively preaching of the gospel week by week by a pastor who knows his flock and proves that both in the word brought and in congregational prayers offered.

And, in our circles, having one's own pastor is more than having a dependable stated-supply to preach every Sunday. Our 'preachers' do much more than preach on Sunday and chair the monthly 'church board' (council), as is done elsewhere. They are expected to teach most of the catechism classes; lead various societies; visit the sick, dying, and shut-ins; do their part in family visitation; serve on denominational committees; and do pastoral counseling as the need arises.

Not for the fainthearted or lazy.

Which is all to say that, in our congregations, vacancies leave big shoes to fill.

Lest some young man become discouraged at this point, let me en-

courage him by assuring him that congregations used to require more!

Relief has been granted.

A couple of decades back, the minister (college-educated, and hence with typing skills) was commonly the one who typed up the bulletin Saturday night as well (with his wife helping). I well recall my first two pastorates, handing my wife the announcements I had dutifully typed out, which she in turn typed onto a stencil (an hour or so tedious task, as anyone knows who remembers anything about stencils), which I then carried to church to churn out a 100 or so copies on the latest Gestetner, manually-run, mimeograph machine.

Nowadays most of our congregations appoint a bulletin clerk, and the minister's involvement is minimal—meaning, these days PR ministers have one less responsibility to worry about.

How did 'old' Rev. Vos put it in one of his memorable meditations? "I salute all janitors!" (due to their patient service to the various congregations and fielding the complaints of both the frigid and the hot).

Well, I salute all bulletin clerks! High time they got their due.

How old was 'old' Vos when he wrote and honored all those long-

Rev. Koole, co-editor of the SB, is president of the Theological School Committee.

suffering janitors? I am guessing around 58. How old am I? Funny you should ask.

You say I digress. Perhaps. I am, after all, approaching 60. It happens. But it is a digression leading to a main point.

What is of special concern to the TSC and faculty is not merely the six vacancies, serious though that is, but also the ages of the ordained ministers now actively serving in our denomination (at present 31 in number if you include pastors, missionaries, and professors).

Now for the telling number: almost half (14 of those 31) will be of retirement age in the next 10 years (65 years being the standard used). This is a sizable percentage 'nearing' retirement age. This is not to say that our ministers are required by the Church Order to retire at age 65. Most may continue for a few years beyond that, perhaps even into their 70's. But the last few ministers to retire had to request emeritation prior to reaching 70 due to health issues. That cannot be ignored.

And of those 14 who are 55 years and over, four will be 60+ this year.

Which all leads to this: our churches need a sizable influx of young men into our seminary over the next decade, and graduations following, just to stay even with the retirement rate. Without that, our six vacancies, that now seem too many, will become even more.

And consider that this somewhat sobering assessment is from the optimistic perspective that all our present ministers will serve full term, that is, until the normal age

of emeritation. But I trust by now we have learned that the Lord does not guarantee that either.

A sobering reality.

Adding to what is facing us is that our three professors are in their mid-50s. As many of you know, the constitution of our seminary requires the TSC to begin seeking a replacement for each professor when he turns 65. As things now stand, strict adherence to the constitution would mean we will

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have three professors all going through the retirement process at the same time (a mere 10 years ahead). Wisdom requires that we avoid that, of course, and that the process be staggered so that one professor is replaced before the next replacement process begins.

We can inform you that the TSC has already appointed a committee to put some thought into this looming reality, so that the transitions take place with as little disruption of the instruction at seminary as possible. But, regardless of the process decided on, within the next decade the process to replace our three professors must begin. Three new vacancies will result.

Who will fill those vacancies?

Men upon whom the Spirit places the call to the pastoral ministry are sorely needed.

At present we have six students in seminary, one graduating this year, three the following year, D.V., and then a gap of one year until two more are ready in 2013. That is enough to take care of our present six vacancies, but what of the 14 men who will be reaching retirement age in the next 10 years?

So, there you have it.

On a positive note, we understand that at present there are some young men taking courses in college to satisfy pre-seminary requirements. We know of one young man of our churches intending to seek entrance this coming fall, D.V. And we have heard of others who are seriously considering pursuing a course of study that would lead to seminary.

Such is most welcome news.

But the need for finding replacement for 14 men in the next 10-15 years, in addition to filling six present vacancies, is a matter of no little concern. It works out to 20 vacancies, if all things remain as they are.

And what must weigh upon us as Protestant Reformed people is that we must not be so provincial as to be concerned only about taking care of ourselves and our own congregations first. "Missions can wait! Our vacancies must be filled!"

If that is all we focus on, then I am convinced that the God of Jonah will rise up and testify against us. "Yet 40 days [in a short while] and Nineveh [with all its little ones and cattle] shall be overthrown!" (cf.

Jonah 3:4). We had better not be found out-at-sea ignoring the call to go out into all the world to preach the gospel in these last days.

We live in days when the cry for faithful gospel preaching comes from all parts of the world: "Come over and help us!" Such requests may not be lightly dismissed.

But the ability to answer such cries requires MEN, men whose hearts have been stirred by the Holy Spirit both to feed Christ's flock(s) and to launch out into the deep.

Can such men (young and not so young) be found?

What can you and I do about it?

Well, first of all, we had better be found praying with fervor to the Lord that He provide us with the much needed laborers.

That's how we began this article, if you recall. Jesus Himself exhorted His church: "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he send labourers...." Little praying? Little return! On the other hand, be assured our Lord honors obedience to His exhortations.

Councils must be urging their ministers to be beseeching the God of Jonah to lay this calling upon the hearts of our young men, making sure that none are sleeping in the bottom of our 'fishing' boats, deaf to this call, when they ought to be thinking very seriously about preparing for the ministry.

I don't know that one need go so far as to threaten to throw some young man overboard if he demurs, but I do recall a man named Farel getting a bit forceful when a young fellow named Calvin thought he

could slip through Geneva and retire to scholarly pursuits, thereby avoiding the call to the ministry!

So there is precedent for collar-ing likely candidates with some serious talk.

Congregational prayers are the place to begin, but added to that must be the prayers of fathers at the table, with their sons listening, for the Lord to lay this matter on the hearts of young men.

And there is biblical precedent for mothers making it a matter of prayer as well. Let's not forget Hannah.

Family visitation is an excellent time for officebearers to ask the teenage sons, "Have you considered the gospel ministry?"

If gifts are discerned, surely it is not out of line for teachers in our schools and for members of the congregation to confront young men with that question too: "Have you considered the ministry?"

And let's not imagine that only a young man fresh out of high school and going to college is a suitable candidate. Married men with families already started are not to be overlooked or excused from considering this calling. We presently have more than one man now serving as minister who returned to college in his 30's to satisfy the pre-seminary requirements for entry. In fact, one of them is serving us well 'on the hill' as we write.

But he is not getting any younger either.

A concluding word is in order, a word addressed directly to young men themselves.

I offer a quote lifted from the

writings of 'old' Rev. Vos. Back in 1963, when our churches faced a similar shortage of ministers and seminary students, he penned a forceful meditation based on I Samuel 1:27, 28 (where Hannah returned [dedicated] her child Samuel to the lifetime service of God at the tabernacle).

Are there any God-fearing young men who read this?

Yes, it is late on the calendar. It is very late. It should have begun with your mom. [i.e., preparation for the ministry!—kk] But how about the holy ministry in your church? Are you not concerned about the fact that we are woefully short of ministers?

Would it not be heaven for you to say: "Speak, for Thy servant heareth"?

And heaven with its joyful angels, would say, Amen!

Interestingly, the meditation from which these words come was reprinted in the *SB* in 1997 (Vol. 73) when our churches again felt the pinch of vacancies.

A meditation worth being read by young and old again.

So, though 'old' Vos has been dead these past 30 years, we still refuse to let him 'retire,' so sore is our need.

And, be assured, so dear to his heart was the well-being of 'his' beloved PRC that I am sure nothing would gladden his heart more than to be told, "Dominee, your exhortations urging young men to consider becoming ministers in Christ's church are still bearing fruit in the twenty-first century." ☞

The Creation Narrative As Real History

Many who deny that the days in Genesis 1 are real days try to persuade us to believe that God did not intend for us to take Genesis to be a record of real history. Some say the Bible begins with a myth. Others say it begins with a vision filled with symbolic language. Either way, they are trying to convince us that the events recorded in the first chapters of Genesis never took place. Such teachings we must wholeheartedly reject.

Real History, Not a Vision

Some have said that just as the Bible ends with a series of visions containing symbolism, so it began with symbolic language. But there is a clear difference between the book of Revelation and the book of Genesis. Unlike the book of Genesis, the book of Revelation repeatedly speaks of that which John *saw*: "And I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns" (Rev. 13:1a). This is something John saw in a vision, and it contains references to objects that are obviously symbolic.

But such is not the case with the Genesis creation narrative. Moses did not write, "And I saw plants brought forth out of the earth." Rather, he speaks as one who is giving a record of real historical events. Additionally, the objects mentioned in the narrative are not merely symbolic. Unlike the beast in Revelation with seven heads and ten horns, all the creatures spoken of in Genesis do actually exist.

Furthermore, if the creation of Adam is merely symbolic, then so might be Adam's fall. And if our fall in Adam is merely symbolic, then so might be our resurrection in Christ: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (I Cor. 15:22).

If all in Adam really did not die, then it would follow that all in Christ really will not be made alive. That is how serious it is to deny the historicity of the creation story.

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Real History, Not a Myth

The Genesis creation narrative is history, not a myth. Myths arise out of the mind of sinful men, but Moses wrote Genesis when he was borne along by Christ's Spirit. Napoleon referred to history as "a fable agreed upon," and in many respects this is true of history as conceived by man. But such is not the case with the history recorded in Scripture.

Different nations have different myths. These myths were often invented to convince the citizens of a given nation of their great origin and destiny, and to assure them that some divine force was with them, fighting for them. Not surprisingly, many have argued that just as different nations have had their different myths about their different gods, so the Hebrews wrote a book containing myths about their great origin and destiny, and about how their God fights for them and is leading them to worldwide dominion.

To support this notion, many like to point out that the heathen nations also have myths about creation and about a great flood, and that some details in these stories are similar to those found in Genesis. But these similarities may be explained by the fact that all those who left the ark knew the truth about creation and the flood. But as time went on the unbelievers in Noah's generations corrupted the story.

If Genesis is a myth, then the whole Bible is just a collection of myths. And if the events recorded in Scripture never really happened, then we are still in our sins, and have absolutely no hope. But thanks be to God the Scriptures are not myths. In fact, the Scriptures themselves declare to us that they are not myths. In II Timothy 4:4, the word translated "fables" is the Greek word for myths: "And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables." In this verse, the truth of Scripture is contrasted with myths. It says that one who truly believes the Scriptures loves the truth and rejects myths. He believes the creation narrative to be a record of real historical events, setting forth truths that are fundamental to the whole of the Christian faith. 

Just Words?

No matter what you do or where you go, there is one thing you do every day. You talk. From the time you get up in the morning until you lay your head on your pillow at night, you talk. Your life is filled with communication. In the kitchen, the family room, the car, the classroom, the hallways of school, on the basketball court or baseball field, you talk. In our techy society, you have many ways to communicate: texting, Facebook, email, instant messaging, Twitter, etc. Yet the primary way of communicating is talking. God has given to man the unique ability to put thoughts and desires into words. What an amazing gift of God!

This amazing gift of God has been corrupted in so many ways by sinful man. One of the ways that it has been corrupted is the filthy communication of profanity. You live in a world saturated by open profanity. You can hear God's name taken in vain and many crude four-letter words from neighbors, from co-workers, or from other young people. Profanity and blasphemy are common on the TV, in the latest rap songs, in the movies, at the mall, and even on the basketball court or ball fields. This filthy, God-dishonoring language is not something new. Since Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit in the Garden, profanity has existed. But today profanity is more and more common. The world laughs at it.

How much has worldly profanity influenced your speech? Do you think profanity is just words? Have you become numb to it? Do you use profanity?

I want you to understand that profanity is not neutral in God's eyes. The world says profanity is ordinary, normal, and harmless. But this is not true. Scripture teaches that words are powerful, important, and significant. This is true because you speak every word in the presence of the God who created your ability to speak and has purchased you, body and soul, with the precious blood

of Jesus Christ. Profanity must not be a part of your repertoire of language as a child of God. Everything you say speaks about your relationship to God. Your choice of words is extremely important today. May God give grace to turn away from the corrupt communication of profanity.

What is profanity? Broadly defined, profanity includes much of the evil, filthy communication found in the world. Profanity certainly includes taking God's name in vain. But profanity also includes the corrupt communication of vulgar, sexual language, and the language that refers to bodily functions and body parts in crude ways in conversation. As those who hear regular sermons on the third commandment of God's law, you know that taking God's name in vain is wrong. Although the third commandment is very important, I also want to examine with you the use of other vulgar language of the world. I do not need to spell out these words for you. You know what these words are. They are the words that are "bleeped" on the television. They are the words that are spelled out with the first letter and then ---- in print. They are the words in the comics that are censored with symbols (##@**^!!) when the character stubs his toe.

Have you ever thought such language is not that bad? Have you ever thought that this language is ordinary and harmless, that it is just words? This is what Satan and the world want you to think. They want you to think words are harmless and have no value or real meaning. When you are angry, it is normal to use these words. The world's psychology says that the use of these words can be a good way to vent bad feelings and frustration. Maybe some of you think, "Rev. Eriks, you are making a mountain out of a molehill. This is not a big deal. They are just words."

Following the example of the world, some of you may be battling spiritual bilingualness—speaking two different languages. This happens when, on the one hand, you know what the Scriptures say, but on the other hand,

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you convince yourself that this kind of language is not so serious. The world uses this bilingual speech. Although profanity is part of this life, the culture today has some sense that such language may offend others. In the public forum, attempts are made to clean things up, while such language is used privately. We see this in sports. The athletes and coaches carefully choose the words they say when interviewed or when they are in public. But when they are on the court or in the field, profanity-laced tirades erupt from their mouths—you are able to read their lips, after all. In public they speak properly and carefully, avoiding profanity. But in the heat of battle and in everyday life, a torrent of foul words flows from their lips.

Are you bilingual in this way? Do you talk one way in front of your parents, teachers, and elders (without the profanity), and another way with your friends (with the profanity)? At home, at school, and at church you clean up your mouth, but at work or with your friends you speak the vulgar language of profanity. Are you bilingual?

What does God's word say about this? The determining factor is not what *you* think about this. Don't let Satan and the world tell you that this is harmless, because it is not. Do you see Satan's lie? He is telling you that the sin of profanity is good and normal. How slick Satan is. If you think that profanity is not a big deal, you have bought into Satan's lie.

Let us hear what God says in His word, because His word is our authority in life. God says something else about this evil, filthy communication. Ephesians 4:29-31 forbids this kind of communication:

Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers. And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice.

God says in the third commandment of His law, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." God says that profaning His name is serious. It is so serious that in the Old Testament a man who took God's name in vain was stoned to death. The Heidelberg

Catechism, in Lord's Day 36, teaches us that "there is no sin greater or more provoking to God than the profaning of His name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death." This should make us pause before we would ever take profane language on our lips. James 3 (please read this chapter) exposes the great destruction of the tongue that no man can tame—"it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (v. 8); and "Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be" (v. 10).

Why is profanity so seriously sinful? There are two matters we must consider from Scripture. First, as with all sin, profanity is a matter of the heart. Jesus teaches the relationship between words and the heart in Luke 6:43-45:

For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil: for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh.

Jesus uses the figure of a tree. There is an organic connection between the roots of a tree and the fruit it produces. Jesus says the same is true of our words. The words we speak are always connected to our hearts. With trees, if the tree is not producing good fruit, there is a problem with the tree. So also is this true with your words. Sinful words indicate a serious heart problem. The heart problem is that you are not seeking God and His glory. If you take God's name in vain, this indicates you do not truly fear His name at that moment. Consider a man who strikes his thumb instead of the nail with his hammer on a construction site and he hops around cussing and swearing with every profanity in the book. These are not just words. These words reveal problems found in this man's heart. They reveal that this man does not have a proper awe and reverence for God. Words are not just words. Words are windows into our hearts. When you use profanity, it reveals that you have idols in your heart. Profanity says that at that moment you are not concerned with worshiping God. The problem with profanity is that they are idol words. Profanity uses words

to serve self instead of worshiping God and building up others. The world says that profanity is a way to vent our pain and bad feelings. The Scriptures say that profanity indicates that we do not have a proper view of language in relationship to God.

Second, profanity moves you away from God. Satan and the world say that profanity is neutral. In other words, it cannot hurt you. These words are just words and do not affect you spiritually. Do not believe that lie. Profanity moves you farther from God. I can demonstrate this from Ephesians 4:29, 30. When corrupt communication is used, the Holy Spirit of God is grieved. This means profanity turns you away from the Holy Spirit and His work. This does not mean that the Holy Spirit's work is resisted. It is not. But this teaches us that profanity has an effect on our spiritual lives. Profanity does not edify or bring you or the hearer closer to God. Profanity does not keep you at the same place. Profanity actually drives you from God. Profanity keeps your heart at odds with God.

Profanity keeps our hearts at odds with God because profanity is linked to immorality, as we read in Ephesians 5:3-5:

But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Profanity (foolish talking) is tied to immorality (unclean-ness). The stern warning of the Scriptures here is that no man who continues walking in these sins has the inheritance of the kingdom of God. This shows clearly that profane words are not harmless, ordinary, and normal. They do nothing to help our relationship with God. In fact, they only hurt that relationship by turning us away from God. "Let it not be once named among you."

I am not going to tell you which words you may or may not use. Of course, all taking of God's name in vain is forbidden by Scripture. We must not use the euphemisms for God's names, like golly and gee. But I am talking about the other vulgar words found in the world. I could form a list and command you not to use

these words. But this still would not change the heart. The heart is the issue here. God alone changes the heart to seek after Him. God calls us who have regenerated hearts to use words to serve Him and to build each other up. Profane words do neither of these things.

The truth that guides us in the use of language is God's sovereignty. God is Lord! He is the Lord of your tongue! God created speech. In fact, He was the first to speak after Adam was created. How amazing that must have been for Adam to hear God speak to Him. How amazing that God still speaks to His people in human language so that He can be known. Through words we know Him in truth. Because God created speech and spoke first, God determines how we must speak. So often when I talk, I want to do it my way. But when we understand that God is Lord, then we see that we must speak in the way that God has designed. Profanity is the distortion of sin, and is not the way God sovereignly designed for communication. As one of His children, saved by grace, I want to serve my sovereign God with my words. May this be the great desire in all of our language.

The only hope we have to be free from the sin of profanity is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. There is hope for our speech. We need this hope because, as James 3 makes clear, no man can tame that little tongue. Men have been able to tame the king of the beasts, elephants, tigers, and even killer whales. But no man can tame his tongue. This does not leave us hopeless. Our hope is found in Jesus Christ. This is the hope found in II Corinthians 5:14, 15:

For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

The cross of Jesus Christ frees us from self-serving bilingualism to serve Him. In the cross of Jesus Christ alone is the hope of forgiveness and the power to conquer profanity. The words we speak are not just words. They are the words we must use to serve our Lord. 

Chapter Four

Postmillennialism (5)

The Postmillennial Interpretation
of Revelation 20 (cont.)

The Loosing of Satan

Just as Satan has been bound by the exalted Jesus Christ at the beginning of the millennium, so he will be loosed by Christ at the end of the millennium. The loosing of Satan is taught in verse seven of Revelation 20: “And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison.” In harmony with the truth that the binding of Satan refers to Christ’s preventing Satan from deceiving the nations during the period of the thousand years (Rev. 20:3), the loosing of Satan will mean his deception of the nations: “And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog” (Rev. 20:8).

This final feature of John’s inspired vision of the millennium poses a huge problem for postmillennialism. Evidently, even on a postmillennial interpretation of Revelation 20 history will end in a massive, worldwide revolt against the kingdom of Jesus Christ. But this prospect contradicts postmillennialism’s fundamental conviction, and dearest desire, that Christ’s kingdom will enjoy an earthly victory over all its foes within history. Anything else, on postmillennial thinking, would mean the defeat of Jesus Christ.

The problem of the loosing of Satan, to launch a worldwide attack on the kingdom of Christ at the end of the millennium, has occasioned a rift in the ranks of the postmillennialists. In the past, the overwhelming majority of postmillennialists were forced by the clear and conclusive testimony of Revelation 20:7-9 to recognize that the millennium will be followed by a powerful,

widespread uprising against Christ and His kingdom. They acknowledged a final apostasy from Christ on the part of multitudes that had confessed allegiance to Christ and outwardly observed His law during the millennium, even though these postmillennial theologians saw that this apostasy at the very end contradicted their notion of a final victory of Christ within history.

Pessimistic Postmillennialists

Jonathan Edwards recognized that, after the long time of the church’s enjoyment of millennial glory on earth, “a little before the end of the world, there shall be a very great apostasy, wherein a great part of the world shall fall away from Christ and his church.” Edwards based this teaching of a “dark time” for the church towards the very end on Revelation 20:7-9.¹

The postmillennial Presbyterian J. Marcellus Kik wrote that after the “Christianizing” of all nations during the millennium “there will be a world-wide apostasy.” This apostasy will take place “just previous to the second coming of the Lord.” Constrained by Revelation 20:7-9, the otherwise optimistic Kik warned the church of “fearful days...for the Christian Church” towards the end of history. He sounded like a good amillennialist.

That this gloomy prospect troubled the ardent postmillennialist, in view of its drastic tarnishing of his “golden age,” he indicated when he wrote: “It may seem strange that it will be possible to turn a host of happy people, prospering under the blessing of God, into such a world-wide rebellion.” This is indeed strange. But this is by no means the strangest aspect of a final apostasy and rebellion for postmillennialism. The strangest of all

¹ Jonathan Edwards, *The History of Redemption* (Grand Rapids: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.), 325-328. The nineteenth-century Scot postmillennialist David Brown likewise taught a final apostasy on the basis of Revelation 20:7-9 (see his *Christ’s Second Coming: Will It be Premillennial*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983, 440-449).

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Previous article in this series: February 1, 2010, p. 198.

is that a postmillennialist thinks that history comes to an end with the overthrow of the postmillennial kingdom of Christ and, therefore, with the defeat of King Jesus. “The apostasy will cover the earth. Only a remnant represented by The Beloved City will remain faithful.”²

Leading Christian Reconstructionist Gary North also was compelled by Revelation 20:7-9 to recognize the breakup of the millennial kingdom of Christ by a vast apostasy towards the very end of history.

There may be a few isolated postmillennialists who deny that this prophecy [Rev. 20:7-9—DJE] refers to a rebellion at the end of history, but such a view makes little impression on anyone who reads Revelation 20. Those who accept the plain teaching of Revelation 20 must admit that a rebellion occurs at the very end of history. In fact, this rebellion calls down God’s fire from heaven, which ends history.³

North confronted the “troubling question for postmillennialism” that this scenario raises: “The postmillennialist argues that the kingdom of God is to be progressively manifested on earth before the day of judgment.... Then how can these events take place?”⁴ To solve this problem, North wrote an entire book. The

² J. Marcellus Kik, *An Eschatology of Victory* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1971), 234-245).

³ Gary North, *Dominion & Common Grace: The Biblical Basis of Progress* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987), x. The book is of particular interest to Protestant Reformed readers. The learned Christian Reconstructionist agreed with the Protestant Reformed Churches regarding common grace: “God also shows no favor to the non-elect, covenanted followers of Satan” (ibid., 37). Courageously violating the code of silence of Reformed theologians regarding Herman Hoeksema, North praised Hoeksema as “perhaps the most brilliant systematic theologian in America in this century” (ibid., 6). Dr. North has his moments. The trouble is that they are not eschatological.

⁴ Ibid., 250, xiv.

solution turns out to be an intriguing understanding of the doctrine of common grace.

North assured his readers, especially his postmillennial readers, that “the final rebellion” of Satan and hordes of humans “at the end of the millennium is no testimony against postmillennialism.”⁵

(Unboundedly) Optimistic Postmillennialists

Some of North’s postmillennial cohorts are not convinced. It seems to them that a worldwide rebellion against the millennial kingdom of Christ towards the very end of history represents the defeat of Christ and the refutation of a, if not *the*, fundamental principle of postmillennialism. Writing in the Winter 1998 issue of *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction*, leading Christian Reconstructionist Martin G. Selbrede revealed that the father of Christian Reconstruction, Rousas J. Rushdoony, called the admission of a final rebellion against the Messianic kingdom,

by his own disciples, “an amillennial hangover.”⁶ This was an odd figure for one who was himself intoxicated with the heady wine of an earthly victory of a carnal kingdom of Christ in history. But this dismissal of the teaching of a final apostasy and rebellion as the after-effects of amillennial drunkenness did indicate that Revelation 20:7-9, rightly understood, confirms the amillennial doctrine of the last things. History will come to an end, not with an earthly victory of the kingdom of Christ in a “golden age,” but with a massive assault upon Christ’s kingdom. Rather than a world-dominating empire, the true church will be a beleaguered city.

⁵ Ibid., 178.

⁶ Martin G. Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” *The Journal of Christian Reconstruction: Symposium on Eschatology* 15 (Winter 1998): 204.

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Selbrede himself took sharp issue with his postmillennial allies over their doctrine of a final apostasy on the basis of Revelation 20:7-9. With what in postmillennial circles is a damning indictment, Selbrede condemned Gary North's defense of a final apostasy as "an ultimately pessimistic postmillennialism."⁷

Selbrede refused to recognize a final apostasy that will break up and follow the millennial kingdom of Christ, if only for a short time. On the contrary, according to Selbrede, the millennial kingdom of Christ on earth will go from strength to strength until every human then living will be regenerated and obey the law of God from the heart. Selbrede predicted "the conversion of the total population of the world" prior to the second coming of Christ.⁸ "There simply [will not be] any unregenerated people around.... The number of unregenerated as a percentage of the world population will be steadily decreasing down to zero."⁹

To such a world, in which absolutely every human without exception is a born again, sanctified, law-abiding citizen of the kingdom of Christ, Jesus Christ will return.

This optimistic view of the grand finale of history (characterized by Selbrede as "unbounded optimism"), Selbrede called "eschatological universalism."¹⁰

Postmillennial Warfield

The phrase "eschatological universalism" and the doctrine of the last things it describes, namely, the salvation of every living human, are derived from the Presbyterian theologian Benjamin B. Warfield. Selbrede appealed to Warfield. The rejection of a final apostasy and the startling teaching of the eventual salvation of every living human are not merely the vagaries of some unboundedly optimistic Christian Reconstructionists. The sober Presbyterian Warfield taught that sometime in the distant future, prior to the coming of Christ, every living human will be saved. Explaining Romans 11:25ff., concerning the "fulness of the Gentiles" and the salvation of "all Israel," Warfield wrote: "The prophecy promises the universal Christianization of the world,—at least

the nominal conversion of all the Gentiles and the real salvation of all the Jews." He went on to speak of "the converted earth."¹¹

In a sermon on John 1:29, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," Warfield described Jesus' taking away the sin of the world as a process in history. The process will climax in the salvation of all living humans:

In the end, when the process is over, no unfruitful trees will be found growing in God's garden, the world, no chaff be found cumbering God's threshing-floor, the world. The vision he brings before us, let us repeat it, is the vision of the ultimate salvation of the world, its complete conquest to Christ.¹²

Warfield called this postmillennial expectation of the future, before the coming of Christ, "eschatological universalism." It is not the teaching of the final salvation of every human who ever lived, but the teaching of a future salvation of every human alive at that time. "The Scriptures teach an eschatological universalism.... In the age-long development of the race of men, it will attain at last to a complete salvation, and our eyes will be greeted with the glorious spectacle of a saved world."¹³

So extreme was Warfield's postmillennial fervor, and so consistent his theological thinking, that he wondered whether the salvation of every human might not include the "perfecting of the world"—the "complete elimination of evil from the world"—at the height of the "golden age."

Whether they [the biblical passages Warfield is considering—DJE] go so far as to say that this winning of the world implies the complete elimination of evil from it may be more doubtful. In favor of the one view is the tremendous emphasis laid on the overthrow of all Christ's enemies, which must mean precisely his spiritual

⁷ Ibid., 161.

⁸ Ibid., 222.

⁹ Ibid., 154.

¹⁰ Ibid., 152.

¹¹ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Prophecies of St. Paul," in *Biblical Doctrines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1929), 624.

¹² Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, "The Lamb of God," in *The Saviour of the World: Sermons Preached in the Chapel of Princeton Theological Seminary* (Cherry Hill, New Jersey: Mack, repr. 1972), 62.

¹³ Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Plan of Salvation* (Boonton, New Jersey: Simpson, 1989), 105.

opponents—all that militates against the perfection of His rule over the hearts of men.¹⁴

Heaven on Earth

The state of earthly affairs envisioned by eschatological universalism is simply heaven on this earth, apart from the presence of Jesus Christ at His coming. It is complete deliverance from every reprobate ungodly foe and virtual deliverance from sin, apart from the destroying and cleansing work of Jesus Christ at His return in the body.

Why would one living in those heavenly days even desire the coming of Christ?

It is evident that those carried away by this vision of the earthly future—Warfield, Rushdoony, and Selbrede—do not fervently long for the coming of Christ. Rather, their hope is fixed on the “golden age.”

That B. B. Warfield held these fantastic, thoroughly unbiblical notions is significant. Such eschatological fancies are not merely the dreams of wild-eyed “Fifth Monarchy Men” in Cromwell’s England or of rambunctious Christian Reconstructionists in Tyler, Texas and Moscow, Idaho. Rather, they are the logical implications of the basic tenet of postmillennialism: Christ’s kingdom must have dominion within history, and the dominion must be earthly, visible, and complete.

Indicating the appeal for postmillennialism of Warfield’s rejection of a final apostasy and proposal of eschatological universalism, if not the necessity of these notions on postmillennial principles, is the adoption of these ideas by the Presbyterian Loraine Boettner in the later, 1984, edition of his popular advocacy of postmillennialism in the book *The Millennium*. In the original, 1958, edition of the book, Boettner taught a final apostasy on the basis of Revelation 20:7-9, although, by his own

¹⁴ Warfield, “The Millennium and the Apocalypse,” in *Biblical Doctrines*, 663.

admission, he “wanted to accept Dr. Warfield’s position that there would be no final apostasy.” But in the later edition, Boettner “adopted the view of Warfield without apology...debunking the final apostasy doctrine.”¹⁵

Also Norman Shepherd, at the time an Orthodox Presbyterian theologian teaching at Westminster Seminary, was open to Warfield’s postmillennial doctrine, teaching it to his students as a “plausible” eschatology.

Norman Shepard (sic)...felt that “Warfield’s arguments were very persuasive, and that the interpretation, far from

being inadmissible, is in fact quite plausible.” He informed me [Martin G. Selbrede—DJE] that he did indeed mention Warfield’s view in class at Westminster, classifying it as both possible and plausible.¹⁶

It would not be surprising that a postmillennialist propose the resurrection of the dead saints prior to the coming of Christ. Why should the dead saints miss out on the glories of the millennial kingdom? Why should not Christ’s victory in history extend also to His dead citizens?

Optimistic as those who reject a final apostasy may be, they must still reckon with Revelation 20:7-9. How

do they evade the teaching of this passage that “when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed from his prison”? ☞

¹⁵ Selbrede, “Reconstructing Postmillennialism,” 148, 149. “We cannot believe that at the end God...will suddenly and purposefully throw away that victory [of the earthly kingdom of Christ of postmillennialism—DJE] and permit the Devil a world-wide triumph even for the briefest time” (Loraine Boettner, *The Millennium*, Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed, rev. ed., 1984, 74, 75).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150. It becomes increasingly clear that the formerly Orthodox Presbyterian and presently Christian Reformed theologian Norman Shepherd has been, and is still today, a powerful advocate of the theology and world-reconstructing purposes of the federal vision, especially as it is found in Christian Reconstruction. Not only does he teach justification by faith and works—salvation by law—but he is also a proponent of postmillennialism in its most extreme, “unboundedly optimistic” form: no final apostasy, but the salvation at some future time of all humans then living.

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Choosing the One Thing Needful

We can well imagine that day in Bethany. The kitchen was bustling with activity. The sweet smell of baking bread wafted from the oven. Pungent Mediterranean food simmered in pots over a crackling fire. The roasting meat mingled with herbs rendered a most savory aroma. Martha was putting forth her best culinary effort, and it was all worth it. Jesus was visiting, and they must serve him the choicest they had. She was determined this would be a feast fit for a king. Yet something was amiss: Martha lost her sous-chef.

Mary was not helping Martha with the dinner, but was sitting at Jesus' feet instead. She was engrossed with the words of her Master. This troubled Martha. Her gourmet meal was taking much time and effort. Vegetables need chopping, the butter churning, the fire tending, the pots stirring. Martha was cumbered about much serving, and a bit over her head in haute cuisine. "Lord, dost thou not care that my sister hath left me to serve alone? Bid her therefore that she help me."

Jesus had a better idea. Rather, Martha would be the one to learn a lesson here. In this teachable moment, Jesus gently answered her. "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things: But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:40–42).

Jesus put true Christian service into perspective. Martha thought she was doing an important act of service. Though Martha loved Jesus very much, her work became a distraction that day. To make matters worse, she tried to deter her sister from listening to Christ. Anxious and worried, Martha could take no time to listen and learn from the very one she served. She had no

time to learn from the Master Teacher and Prophet of all time. Martha had elevated outward service over inward meditation.

Jesus corrected Martha with precise words. He did not say that Mary chose one of the needful things. He did not say Mary chose the most needful thing. Rather, Jesus said one thing was needful—just one. Mary had chosen that good part. This is so uncomplicated, that even our children can grasp it. The one thing needful is simply to learn at Christ's feet with all our heart.

What was so special about Mary that she could nail this down? Some Bible commentaries analyze the personality differences of these two sisters. They surmise that Martha was a take-charge, type-'A' sort of woman. She would have made a great group organizer for worthy and needy causes. Some say that Mary, on the other hand, was quiet, thoughtful, placid, and sweet. As enjoyable as Mary may have been, we know that she was a sinner like the rest of us. Further, her very nature was at enmity against the one she sat before. No pleasant personality trait could have ever caused her to do what she did that day. It was, rather, entirely a work of God's grace.

It is by God's grace that we perform every good work, including cooking, housework, and other acts of service. When done by faith in the right spirit, they are important acts of love. But Martha at this moment was not performing her work out of faith. How often we also are weak in faith. We forget in our hearts to sit at the feet of Christ while taking care of our families, making meals for one another, helping at our Christian schools, or visiting widows and the sick. At such times, we become irritable and bicker with one another as Martha did. I am ashamed to think of how many times I have done this. We must all learn to be more like meditative Mary, that we might be best prepared for true Christian service.

What an example Mary is for us. For what is more fundamental in serving Christ than learning to under-

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stand His will and lovingly doing it? We can learn from her. May we pray for the humble spirit, the ardent desire to learn of Christ, and the deep love for Him that she had.

Our problem is that by nature we really do not like being taught. As Winston Churchill once said, "I am always ready to learn, although I do not always like being taught." When we walk in pride and self-reliance, we find we do not learn, and our problems just get worse. "...for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (1 Pet. 5:5b). Mary humbly chose the one thing needful because she understood that she knew nothing on her own.

A first step in imitating Mary is recognizing that learning and discussing theology is not only for the men. Years ago, when my husband began to prepare for seminary, a wise professor gave him advice. He exhorted my husband, "Don't leave your wife behind. Talk with her and teach her the truths you are learning." My dear husband enthusiastically obliged. Learning together the truths of God's word has been a great source of joy in our marriage.

1 Timothy 2:11 says, "Let a woman learn in silence with all subjection." We often quote this verse to refute the apostatizing churches who ordain women to the office of minister, elder, or deacon. We stress the part of the verse that says, "in silence with all subjection." We know this means that a woman cannot teach in the worship service or have authority over the man in the official work of the church. We rightly emphasize this over against the false teaching that this was merely a cultural requirement that was limited to the people who lived in Paul's day. Yet, while rightly refuting the error, we must not miss the gem in the first half of the verse: "Let the woman learn..."

Not long ago, I went online to see what kind of Christian women discussion groups were available. With Yahoo alone, there are discussion groups for virtually every cause and interest. One women's discussion board caught my eye. In the description and rules of the group it said, "Leave the theology and debating at home for the men, it will not be tolerated, one warning and then you will be unsubscribed." What positive spiritual benefit could one possibly receive from a discussion group that has as its motto: Let only the men learn?

We women must learn. When we listen to the

preaching from Lord's day to Lord's day, we must do it at the feet of Jesus. May we be like Mary who "heard his word" (Luke 10:39) not only in her ears, but also in her heart. In our personal devotion times and in our Bible discussions with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we must always strive to learn. If we are married, we ought not forget that the Holy Spirit teaches us through the means of our husbands. It is good to ask them questions and encourage them to help us grow in understanding.

A strong motivator for learning comes also from our desire to teach our children. The main people we mothers witness to are our children. In order to teach them, we need to take the word we hear in the preaching and in our studying and discussions with others, and eat that word ourselves. Only then will we be prepared to give it to our children. We ourselves must embrace the principles behind the do's and don'ts, so that we can rightly teach them.

In our hearts we desire to be like Lois and Eunice, who faithfully taught the Scriptures to their son and grandson, Timothy. These women were faithful students of the word. How motivating it is when we think of how God used this instruction to prepare a man who went boldly to preach the gospel to many others.

Not only do we teach our sons, but our daughters, too. We desire our daughters to grow to be like Lois and Eunice. We want to see them become mature women of God like Priscilla. She, along with her husband, understood the Scriptures so well that their faithful instruction of Apollos is noted in Acts 18:26. Though Priscilla did not hold a special office and did not speak in the official work of the church institute, she rightly used her gifts to witness to a man who needed to understand "the way of God more perfectly." Lois, Eunice, and Priscilla are examples for us women, and we should point them out to our daughters as patterns for them to emulate.

Yet, not everyone thinks this way. My family receives mail at times from parachurch organizations promoting their books and seminars. One such example I came across is a catalog promoting family values. One of its product descriptions said, "This CD set teaches the blessings of having family time at mealtime...fathers set aside the burdens of the day and open God's word, where wives demonstrate their giftings, and where sons are catechized, and where daughters show their service."

I thought this sounded odd that only the men were said to open God's word, and only the sons were mentioned as being catechized. It is true that wives are to use their gifts, and serving dinner is undoubtedly something our daughters need to learn to do. But the wording of this advertisement left the impression that the wives do not need to open God's word, and that our daughters are merely to look on as their brothers learn theology.

The importance of letting a woman learn cannot be stressed enough. A wife and mother who stops learning at Christ's feet is counterproductive to a strong Christian family. We must continue to grow in the word in order to control our sinful flesh. We all tend to underestimate this. If we become complacent, we will be less content, more critical, less loving, more angry, less patient, and more of a gossip.

A wife needs to learn that she may grow more to live not unto herself, but unto her Lord, who has redeemed her. She needs to learn with her husband. In this way, she will experience the beautiful intimacy of marriage. By God's grace she will grow closer to her husband spiritually, loving him, honoring him, and submitting to him from the heart. Then the two of them, as one, will make more progress in lovingly and patiently rearing their children in the fear of God's name.

John Calvin said so aptly,

Doctrine is not an affair of the tongue, but of the life; is not apprehended by the intellect and memory merely, like other branches of learning; but is received only when it possesses the whole soul, and finds its seat and habitation in the inmost recesses of the heart.... To doctrine in which our religion is contained, we have given the first place, since by it our salvation commences; but it must be transfused into the breast, and pass into the conduct, and so transform us into itself, as not to prove unfruitful (Calvin's *Institutes* III.6.4).

"So, are you a Mary or a Martha?" I've heard this asked at times. I always feel a little sorry for our sister in Christ, Martha. How easy it is to judge a person on the basis of a single event. Some might think of Martha as an efficient worker, but one who lacks interest in spiritual matters. We wonder how on earth she could get so caught up with cooking and housework, that she did not bother to listen to God Himself when He sat in her own

home. Yet we are often just like Martha. And we need to see this, lest we wrongly exalt ourselves above her.

We also get distracted and stop listening to the Spirit of Christ, who is in our heart. We can be sitting in the worship service at church and find ourselves thinking about conversations we have had with people or how many potatoes we might need for Sunday dinner. Sometimes when we pray, our mind wanders to events that are coming up in the week.

We have difficulty finding that rare balance between the kitchen and fellowship with our family and our friends. We have guests coming over, and we want to make a magnificent dinner. We want the house to be spotless. While the guests are over, we have trouble relaxing and enjoying the fellowship. When we see this in ourselves, then our mind-set needs to change. A simple meal will do. A house that looks lived in is acceptable. The point of the get-together is to learn from Christ together and enjoy the precious fellowship.

Martha missed out on the fellowship that day. The same thing can happen to us, too.

Yet we know more about Martha than the fact that she needed correction. Even though she was a sinner like all of us, she was also of like faith. It would be unfair to think that she was just all about outward serving and nothing about inward spiritual meditation. In fact, she showed a deep understanding and remarkable faith when few others did at that time.

One of the most beautiful confessions in Scripture is hers. It was uttered soon after her brother Lazarus died (John 11:27). Jesus had just explained to her that He is the resurrection and the life, and that those that believe on Him, though they be dead, shall live. Then Jesus asked Martha, "Believest thou this?" "Yea, Lord," Martha responded, "I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, which should come into the world." By God's grace, Martha had learned to choose the one thing needful. She had learned to sit at Jesus' feet.

"One thing is needful." May we remember these precious words. For in the way of applying these words to ourselves, we will enjoy more intimate communion with our Lord. And the more we enjoy this heavenly communion, the more we will find that we truly commune with our husbands, our children, our friends, and all those who together with us are learning from our Lord. 

Behold the Fowls of the Air: Migration

Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord.

Jeremiah 8:7

With eager anticipation we await the return of the birds to our neighborhoods. Our eagerness to see and hear the birds again arises, in part, from the fact that their return signifies the end of winter. As Christians, we ought to welcome the end of winter and the arrival of spring, not so much because we dislike the snow or the cold weather, but because the end of winter is a reminder to us of God's covenant faithfulness. Jehovah promised Noah, and therefore us, that "while the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). His word is sure, and therefore we go forward in great confidence as the Lord leads us through the seasons of our lives.

The return of the birds to our neighborhoods is also pleasant because in their return we see the providential hand of our God. He directs the path of each and every bird. He tells each one exactly when to go and precisely where to go. The purple martin, for example, will return to the same nesting box year after year. We marvel at the means God uses to bring about these fascinating journeys. It is a wonder of creation. Bird migration provides an opportunity to praise God and to have confirmed in our hearts that with surety this is the wonder work of the sovereign Creator.

Mr. Minderhoud is a teacher in Covenant Christian High School and a member of Hope Protestant Reformed Church, Walker, Michigan.

Migration:

Each spring, on March 19, swarms of swallows descend upon the town of San Juan Capistrano, California. So regular is the swallows' return that the town has a special parade to celebrate it. The swallows leave San Juan Capistrano again on October 23 and travel the 6,000-mile trek to their wintering grounds in Goya, Argentina, a distance equivalent to a trip back and forth across the continental USA! Reach for your globe and see for yourself the immense distances these birds travel.

In another part of the world, across the Atlantic Ocean, the white stork makes a lengthy trip each year to Africa and returns in the summer to breed in Europe. It flies over land because it prefers to ride on the updrafts or the thermals (rising masses of warm air), which develop over land and not over the ocean. The ruby-throated hummingbird also makes an impressive migration. Native to the mid-western states of America, the ruby-throated hummingbirds migrate in autumn to the warmer climates of Mexico. They cross the Gulf of Mexico—a 500-mile trek—without stopping. The champion bird migration, however, belongs to the Arctic tern, which flies from pole to pole—a round trip of approximately 25,000 miles.

Bird migration is fascinating. It can mean thousands of miles of journey, an eventual return to the exact same nesting place, and an almost-to-the-day arrival or departure time. Scientists have been most enthralled by these migration patterns and have spent a good deal of time researching and studying bird migration. To date, however, they have studied only a few species of birds, and among these they have discovered already a variety of techniques used by the birds to navigate during their migrations. Further studies might very well reveal that other species of birds use entirely different techniques.

Clearly, much more remains to be learned about bird migration.

Some studies indicate that birds use a combination of their circadian rhythm (an internal clock of sorts) and a biological compass to find their way. The internal clock, like the internal clock in other animals, as well as in humans, is governed by specific hormones. In humans, for example, the hormone melatonin is secreted in different levels according to the amount of sunlight present. When the sun sets, more melatonin is secreted, which brings about a lowering of body temperature and a “sleepy” effect. At sunrise the body produces less melatonin, increasing body temperature, making one more active, alert, and ready to greet the day. As one hormone affects the sleep cycle, so also many other hormones are active in the body to regulate a variety of other bodily functions. Birds, too, have hormones—hormones that provide it with a sense of time. When this hormonally-driven internal clock functions in conjunction with information about the position of the sun or of the stars, the bird is able to determine its geographical location.

Other studies indicate that birds use their keen senses to help navigate their migratory path. Birds have incredible vision. This is in part due to the number of light receptors (rods and cones) on the retina. The more receptors there are on the retina, the keener the eyesight. Humans have approximately 200,000 receptors per sq. mm, while a common sparrow has approximately 400,000 receptors per sq. mm. With this keen eyesight, birds can discern tiny landmarks from altitudes of hundreds of feet. By means of these landmarks birds are able to direct their path and make it to their destination.

Birds also seem to pick up information about their path from sound waves. Birds are sensitive to sound waves in the infrasonic range. (Infrasonic sounds are in a range of sounds below human hearing ability. Some sounds of nature, like the sounds of an earthquake, cannot be heard by humans, but only felt as tremors.) Mountain ranges are thought to emit vibrations in the infrasonic sound range, which a bird can hear. Thus, a bird hears where mountains are even when they may not be seen.

Finally, birds have a strong sense of smell. The pigeon, for example, creates an “odor map” in its brain, based on the various odors and locations it encounters. Then,

when various odors are carried in the wind, the pigeon is able to navigate its way back home.

Finally, more recent studies are showing that some birds are able to navigate according to the magnetic field of the earth. New research seems to indicate that a clump of magnetic minerals found in the forefront of a bird’s head acts as a magnetic compass—directing the bird. Although this has not been proven, it is hypothesized as a contributing factor in a bird’s navigational ability. This is based on scientific findings, as reported in a recent journal article:

In a 2007 article in the German journal *Naturwissenschaften* scientists announced that they’d found tiny iron oxide crystals in the skin lining of the upper beak of homing pigeons, laid out in a three-dimensional pattern in a way that the birds might be able to sense the Earth’s magnetic field independent of their motion and posture, and thus identify their geographical position (www.backyardnature.net/birdnavi.htm).

Whatever means or combination of means God uses to direct a bird to its migratory home, we know and believe that it is by the hand of God that the birds are directed to their migration location. While the world maintains that these fascinating means have evolved over millions of years, we confess that God created birds with these navigational abilities and continues to govern and uphold them by His providential hand, so that the birds are able to accomplish their amazing migratory travels. That it is God Himself who governs the migratory and the navigatory ability of birds is clearly implied in His questioning of Job: “Doth the hawk fly by *thy* wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south?” (Job 39:26; emphasis mine). It is by God’s wisdom that birds fly and migrate. All glory and honor belongs to Him alone, the Creator and Sustainer of the heavens and the earth.

Marvelous Instruction:

Two key passages relating to bird migration are Jeremiah 8:7 (“Yea, the stork in the heaven knoweth her appointed times; and the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming; but my people know not the judgment of the Lord”), and, as mentioned previously, Job 39:26 (“Doth the hawk fly by thy wisdom, and stretch her wings toward the south?”). In Jeremiah

8, God calls to Israel's attention their slowness of heart to learn from His judgments. They ignore the warning of God about failing to heed His commandments. John Calvin writes:

By saying "my people," the Prophet no doubt intended more clearly to set forth their wickedness. For, as I have before said, such blindness in heathens would not have been so strange; but as they were the holy and peculiar people of God, it was far more shameful and monstrous that they knew not his judgment (*Commentary on Jeremiah*).

In commenting on this passage, both Matthew Henry and John Calvin refer to Christ's rebuke of the Pharisees, who could predict the coming weather on the basis of the external signs in the sky, yet could not discern the signs of the times. From this perspective, we are taught much by the migrating birds. The migrating birds obey God's commands and follow His decree to migrate. They are able to discern the signs God places around them that it is time to migrate, and they follow the path God has for them to go in their migration. How can they do otherwise? "But my people know not the judgment of the Lord."

Sometimes the church, like Israel of old, has departed so far and fallen into such grievous sin, that it is unable to discern the clear judgments of God. Such is the depths of depravity that, apart from the grace of God, we, by nature, would become so hardened in sin that we would be unable to discern the judgments of God. The warning is clear. Let us pray for grace that we may see the folly of our sins. As the birds recognize God's calling to migrate, may we recognize the judgments of our merciful God and turn from our sins.

The passage in Job 39 reveals to us also the truth that God is God. He providentially governs and directs all things according to His sovereign will and good pleasure. God reminds Job that the birds fly and migrate, not because of Job's power or wisdom, but because of His wisdom and power. As we see the songbirds return and the flocks of Canada geese soaring overhead, may our thoughts be lifted up on high to the greatness of our God.

God is to be highly exalted for His marvelous work in the creation—His work of guiding birds in their migra-

tion. This humbles us. We are truly nothing compared to Him. In addition, by faith we acknowledge that birds migrate, not as a result of some evolutionary process, nor because of some naturalistic law, but rather because of God's providential decree. The world quickly and foolishly attributes the migratory ability of the birds to some evolutionary process. By the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and by use of the spectacles of Scripture we see the evolutionists' folly in their attempt to discredit the mighty and wondrous work of our Creator God, while we humbly recognize bird migration as the work of the sovereign Creator of heaven and earth.

Honor and glory belong to God alone for His creation of the birds with their special characteristics, and for His providence, by which He guides and directs them to and from their migration homes. God, as the covenant God, does not leave or forsake His creation—for the creation also belongs to the covenant. "And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you; and with every living creature that is with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth" (Gen. 9:9-10). This includes the birds of the air. By His providence, God guides them, as it were by His hand, so that they arrive at precisely the same nesting place as last year, or pass through the very same town on the very same date as last year. Jehovah tells the birds to go—either by means of hormonal changes in their body or by the changing of the weather or by some other means. Bird migration is of the Lord. He is Lord of all. Even the birds obey His command and His law for them.

As much as the evolutionist tries to maintain that these migration feats simply occur by "natural means," we confess that God, in His sovereign good pleasure, is constantly active in His creation, and guides and directs all things to the end for which He created them. And that end is the glory of His most holy name! His glory is manifested, not only in that the marvelous feat of bird migration is accomplished by His effectual commands, but ultimately in that the bird migration causes us to consider His great care for us. That is the great and comforting doctrine of providence: if the birds of the air are provided for by God, how much more are we, the kings of creation? 

Fish Out of Water: Surviving and Thriving as a Christian on a Secular Campus, by Abby Nye. New Leaf Press. ISBN-13: 978-0-89221-621-5. 235pp. Paper. \$12.99. Available at Amazon.com and www.AnswersInGenesis.org. Reviewed by Abigail Nobel.

Are you attending college? Sending your child? Or preparing high school students for that next big step? If so, you are rightly concerned about the anti-Christian influences rampant there, and this book is for you. It presents difficult topics and biblical solutions in an entertaining, easy read. For that matter, I wish I'd had this author's insight twenty-plus years ago at my Christian alma mater. Although the author attended a secular institution, her book capably addresses similar problems presented by modern Christian colleges. Her epilogue nicely encapsulates arguments for and against attending both. Whether secular, nominally Christian, or doctrinally mixed, the higher education available today requires saints to make special preparation. The author says it well:

You won't survive as a Christian on a secular campus by simply being well versed on world views and different philosophies of thought.... The most critical defensive play needed on a college campus today is the ability to deflect the labels 'judgmental' and 'intolerant.'

Having written this book as a college student, pooled the experiences of others, applied biblical principles, and researched current literature, she knows whereof she writes. She credits—and is a credit to—her journalist parents for this well-written first book.

A scan of the chapter titles gives a good overview. "Welcome Week" shows typical wry humor while describing morally offensive indoctrination methods: "Could it really be a coincidence that every Welcome Week activity had a strong politically correct undertow?" Some of her advice here brought a reminiscent smile: "If there's not a grade involved, it's probably not mandatory." Each chapter models timely support parents can give, and includes her "Hindsight Advice" for prospective students. This sample resonated with me:

Even when you're deflecting the half-truths and lies of moral relativism, make sure you're friendly. Reach out to others.... Pray you gain wisdom at college, not just knowl-

Mr. Terpstra is a member of Faith Protestant Reformed Church in Jenison, Michigan.

edge.... You'll want something more than facts and figures at the end of four years.

"Behind Closed Doors" addresses the wildly-prejudiced behavior liberal professors have exhibited in their sheltered domains, and offers biblical responses. What if your paper is graded down for its Christian perspective? What about being told a recommendation to grad school would depend on your affirmation of evolution? "Pick Your Battles" is in some ways an answer to "Fear Factor": are you one of the many who are afraid to speak up at all?

Beside expected topics such as "We Will Not Tolerate Intolerance" and "The Party Scene," I was surprised to find "Posters and Pin-ups." Perhaps this phenomenon is more recent than my college experience, or perhaps by not living on campus I overlooked this battle.

What's the big deal about posters? In one sense, they're not a big deal, but in another sense they are. Sure, they're just pictures with slogans, but those pictures with slogans have a cumulative effect. They constantly, steadily, quietly promote an immoral lifestyle. It is a rear attack on morality. The attack may be a silent one, but it is a successful one in that it often has the end result of desensitizing viewers to morality and absolute truth. Week after week, the posters portray a message which eventually wears on one's conscience. The posters paint a picture of the abnormal being normal and of sin being attractive, fun, hip, consequence-free, and desirable.

Surely an area for the Reformed student to apply the antithesis!

While some of Abby Nye's language is not traditionally Reformed, her advice is essentially sound.

...the absolutely, positively most important thing on the 'survive and thrive' list at college is to plug into a church.... It doesn't work to be a Lone Ranger Christian. You'll be swept away and you will not grow spiritually unless you have the accountability and encouragement that comes from Christian relationships.

As an added bonus, an extensive resource section spans Internet, newsprint, and literature. Scripture references, though from various versions, are apropos. I believe that for most Christians, education to develop God-given talents is a calling. That being so, they will find this book a valued arsenal for battles both on and off campus. ☞

School Activities

The Ladies Aid of Covenant Christian School in Lynden, WA invited the supporters of Covenant Christian to a Western dinner on Friday evening, February 12. The chuck wagon cooks were serving from 6 - 7:30 P.M. Dinner guests were also encouraged to come dressed in Western attire.

The parents and teachers of Hope PR Christian School in Grand Rapids, MI were invited to Hope's PTA meeting on the evening of February 11. The topic that night was, "Local Opportunities and God's Most Elegant Book."

The Fund-raisers of the Loveland Christian School in Loveland, CO hosted their annual Soup Supper on February 18 in the basement of the Loveland, CO PRC.

The 7th and 8th grade classes of the Hull, IA PR Christian School hosted a chapel on January 28 at the Hull PRC. Rev. Cory Griess, pastor of the Calvary PRC in Hull, spoke on the topic, "Remember Thy Creator."

Young People's Activities

The young people of the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI extended a special invitation to their congregation to join them Sunday morning, February 7, after their morning worship service, to hear Mr. Mark Hoeksema speak on "Principles of Biblical Interpretation."

The Young People's Society of the Immanuel PRC in Lacombe, AB, Canada invited their congregation to

join them for a day of skating, sledding, and fellowship, starting at noon, February 15, at Les Walker Park.

The Young People's Society of the Hudsonville, MI PRC was recently given permission to set up pop-can collection stations at two entrances of their church. Hudsonville members were encouraged simply to place their returnable pop cans in the bins provided, and the young people would do the rest. All pop-can funds will be used to help reduce the cost for the young people attending this year's convention.

The Young People's Societies of the area churches around Chicago, IL hosted a singspiration on Sunday evening, February 14, at Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN. A collection was taken for this year's PR YP's Convention.

The Jr. Young People's Society of the Faith PRC in Jenison, MI met Sunday, February 7, after their morning worship service to discuss proper dress for Christians. The young people were encouraged to come with Scripture and the confessions to shed light upon their pathway in this matter.

The young people of First PRC in Holland, MI hosted an Elegant Dinner on February 12 at their church. The young people promised to accommodate singles, couples, and groups, and their dinner guests had their choice of beef or chicken. Valet parking, as well as a nursery, was also provided.

The young people of the Peace PRC in Lansing, IL enjoyed a day of skiing at Bittersweet Ski Resort in Otsego, MI on Monday, February 15.

The Young People's Society of the Hull, IA PRC invited their congregation to join them on February 11 for their annual soup supper. The supper was held at the Hull Community Build-

ing. As with most young people's activities, the money raised went for this summer's young people's convention.

The young people of the Randolph, WI PRC asked for the support of their congregation at a Soup and Sandwich lunch on Saturday, February 6 at Randolph PRC. The young people served from 11 A.M. until 2 P.M.

The Young People's Society of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA thanked their congregation for all the donated items and help they received for a mid-January garage sale held Saturday, January 16. That one day event raised around \$2,000, which will go towards expenses for the young people attending this year's convention.

The Young People's Society of the Pittsburgh Fellowship held a fund-raiser to help pay the way of their members going to this summer's convention. In January they were busy selling fudge to family and friends. The profits of the sale were not tallied when we wrote this, but the young people were hoping for around \$200 to add to their funds.

Congregation Activities

Everyone in the First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada was invited to the parsonage for an evening of singing and fellowship on Sunday evening, February 14.

The Byron Center, MI PRC continues with their work in India. February 17 they sent two representatives, Mr. Mike Elzinga and Mr. Lee Oosterbaan, to spend time in Bible study with D. Rajastephen at the Shalom Children's Orphanage. This will be a time of study and

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

review, observation, encouragement, fellowship, and development.

Minister Activities

Rev. Audred Spriensma declined the call extended to him to serve as the next pastor of the Bethel PRC in Roselle, IL.

Rev. Andrew Lanning declined the call from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI to serve as their next pastor.

The Byron Center, MI PRC has extended a call to Rev. Audred Spriensma to serve as their next pastor.

The congregation of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN has extended a call to Rev. Audred Spriensma to serve as their next pastor.

On February 15, the congregation of the Hull, IA PRC extended a call to Rev. William Langerak to become their next pastor. 

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Synod

■ All standing and special committees of the synod of the PRC, as well as individuals who wish to address Synod 2010, are hereby notified that all material for this year's synod should be in the hands of the stated clerk no later than April 15. Please send material to:

Don Doezema
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Ladies Society of Hudsonville PRC expresses Christian sympathy to member Mary Lynn Postmus in the death of her brother,

GEORGE BODBYL.

We pray for the strength and comfort that can be found in God's word: Psalm 116:5, "Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints."

Sem. Brian Huizinga, President
Pat Lanning, Secretary

Resolution of sympathy

■ The consistory and the congregation of Edgerton PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to the Bleyenbergs family of our congregation, following the passing of their father and grandfather,

MR. ART BLEYENBERG, SR.

May they find comfort in God's word in Psalm 23:6: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever."

Rev. Dennis Lee, President
James VerHey, Clerk

Resolution of sympathy

■ The members of the Men's and Ladies' Society of the First PRC of Holland, MI express their Christian sympathy to Case and Fran Lubbers on the passing into glory of their uncle, a dear and faithful member of our Society,

MR. HENRY C. LUBBERS.

We pray that they may receive comfort in the words of 1 Corinthians 13:12: "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."

Paul Starrett, President
Pauline Bierling, Secretary

Resolution of sympathy

■ The council and congregation of Grandville PRC wish to express Christian sympathy to Michael and Monica VanderKolk, Tom and Gretine Bodbyl, Dan and Anna Mae Bodbyl and their families in the death of Monica's father and Tom and Dan's brother,

MR. GEORGE BODBYL.

"He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it" (Isaiah 25:8).

Rev. Kenneth Koole, President
H. DeVries, Assist. Clerk

Teachers needed

■ The Protestant Reformed School in Wingham was unable to hire teachers to fill its classrooms last year. Therefore we have changed our plans and are hoping to open for the 2010-11 year, D.V. We are seeking a teacher/administrator for a class of 9 students in grades 7-12. Teaching will be assisted by online curriculum for the upper grades. We are also seeking an elementary teacher to teach a class of 16 students in grades K-6. Volunteer assistance will be available. For more information, please contact board vice-president Mr. Harvey Kikkert, at (519)523-4823, or email hkikkert@hurontel.on.ca.

Resolution of sympathy

■ The Lord in his wisdom was pleased to take

MR. HENRY C. LUBBERS

to his eternal home on February 4, 2010. Through God's amazing work of grace, Mr. Lubbers was delivered from this world of sin and sorrow, and he rejoices instead in the blessings of heaven. We extend Christian sympathy to the Lubbers family in this loss.

"Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints" (Psalm 116:15).

Wes Koops, Vice-president
Darle Wassink, Asst. clerk