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The Now World Reserved for Fire

"For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished: but the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men."

II Peter 3: 5-7

Peter wanted the young Christians who were attacked by false teachers to be ready to answer them, especially the deceptive teaching that the end of the world would not come. The false teachers said that the end would not come because "all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation" (4). Therefore the scoffers kept on in their sinning

because they believed that the Judge would not come.

Throughout the history of the church there have been those who deny that there will be an end to this world. This is the case with evolutionists, who declare that the same world has continued for millions of years. Others believe that they see constant progress and good development taking place in society, and they urge everyone to cooperate in bringing every aspect of this wonderful world into the service of man.



Peter believes differently. And he wants the young Christians to see it as he does. Not just because this is his personal opinion. But rather because his conviction arises from the revelation of God. The Bible calls all men to live in the realization that the end is coming, and with the end there will be the judgment (Heb. 9:27)!

First, God used the prophets of old to alert and warn the church that "there shall come in

the last days scoffers" (II Pet. 2:1; 3:2, 3). Jesus too said that "many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (Matt. 24:11). So the very fact that there are these false teachers/scoffers indicates that it is the last days. This earth will not continue endlessly. There is an end. And the end is near.

Second, Jesus also gave clear warning that the moral condition of human society would become increasingly worse (Matt. 24:12). And He warned of the development of the man of sin and of the power of Antichrist just before He Himself would return. Iniquity will abound, and the kingdom of darkness will grow increasingly. The calling of the church remains unchanged: proclaim the gospel, call men to repentance and faith, warn of the judgment to come. As Enoch and Noah did, so has the true church done, and must continue to do.

Our text teaches us that the present creation will end by means of a catastrophic destruc-

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

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

Prof. Barrett L. Gritters
4949 Ivanrest Ave. SW
Grandville, MI 49418
(e-mail: gritters@prca.org)

BUSINESS OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
Mr. Timothy Pipe
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137
PH: (616) 457-5970
FAX: (616) 457-5980
(e-mail: tim@rfa.org)

Postmaster:

Send address changes to
The Standard Bearer
1894 Georgetown Center Dr.
Jenison, MI 49428-7137

CHURCH NEWS EDITOR

Mr. Ben Wigger
6597 40th Ave.
Hudsonville, MI 49426
(e-mail: benjwig@juno.com)

NEW ZEALAND OFFICE

The Standard Bearer
c/o B. VanHerik
66 Fraser St.
Wainuiomata, New Zealand

UNITED KINGDOM OFFICE

c/o Mr. Sean Courtney
78 Millfield, Grove Rd.
Ballymena, Co. Antrim
BT43 6PD Northern Ireland
(e-mail: covenantreformed@audiostore@yahoo.co.uk)

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tion, which will be followed by the establishment of the new heavens and new earth in which righteousness shall dwell. Christ's coming will bring this present dispensation to an end, and He will establish His everlasting kingdom in the new creation.



You see, the scoffers are willfully ignorant. That is their sin. It is not that they do not know. They know of the instruction of coming judgment. They know of the promise of Christ's return and of the judgment to come. They know that all things do not continue unchanged. In fact, the hue and cry of global warming is exactly about change—that things do not continue as they were. But they willfully ignore and deny Jesus' coming again to judge. They consciously suppress any thought of it. It is not as if they do not have sufficient information and intellectual knowledge. Rather, as our text makes clear, their problem is one of spiritual, ethical blindness—a malady due to a perverse will and a wicked heart.

Their willful ignorance is due to their enmity against God and their love of themselves, along with their own ungodly desires. They desire to ignore the promise of Christ's coming to judge the ungodly for their ungodly deeds (Jude 15).

That of which they are willfully ignorant is, at its heart, the word of God. The heart of their willful ignorance is "the word of God" (5). The almighty and efficacious word of God promised the coming again of Jesus to

judge. God's word accomplishes what it says. It is an effectual word. It is the gospel, the good and glad tidings of redemption in Christ, which delivers from sin and death and takes His people into the Father's house in the new heavens and new earth. And this word proclaims a day of judgment for the ungodly. It is a day of destruction for the present heaven/earth. The whole world of the ungodly will be destroyed as the just and righteous punishment of God for all their ungodly deeds.

The word says that this heaven/earth are "kept in store, reserved unto fire." This world is reserved "unto fire." The words "unto fire," are, literally, "by fire." This means that the very element of this world's *destruction* (fire) will be also the element that *reserves* it. This present world is one of fire in its core. Men walk on and live very close to fire. A fire that will destroy them.

As men were willingly ignorant in Noah's day—eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage—so they live today. They act as though there is no judgment coming. They continue in their false, this-worldly hope and expectation. They express this ignorance by scoffing at the Bible's teaching of Christ's return.



To demonstrate the perversity of the scoffers and false teachers, Peter speaks of the destruction of the first world. There was a first world. The world "that then was" was an entirely different world (heav-

ens and earth) from what we have now, because that world stood "out of the water and in the water" (5). Literally, Peter writes that the world that then was stood through the water. It would seem that the amount of dry land was smaller, and it was surrounded by water. And the heavens consisted of "the waters which were above the firmament" (Gen. 1:7).

The world that then was (standing out of the water and in the water) perished through the very element of its existence: it was overflowed with water. The flood of Noah's day was a universal flood. Further, that first world was destroyed by the word of God, by the very same word that created and sustained it. The powerful word of God that caused the water to be the very element of its existence also caused it to perish by that very element.

Peter is demonstrating that this is proof that the wicked scoffers who call into question God's promise of a certain end are willfully ignorant. Therefore the Christians must not heed their scoffing nor doubt God's promise—no matter how long it seems to take to be fulfilled. The destruction of the first world by the flood shows that the reasoning of the scoffers is false. Things have not continued unchanged since the creation. In the destruction of the first world by the flood there is a type of the promise of Christ's coming again to judge. The flood was not THE end. It was an end. And it was a clear promise of Christ's coming again to judge.

Also in Noah's day they willfully scoffed at God's word of judgment. Both Enoch (Jude 14-16) and Noah (II Pet. 2:5) proclaimed the coming of judgment. Still more, the people of that day were surrounded by the very word of God that would destroy them—the water. But they went

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It is the gospel....*

on mocking, laughing, and feasting (completely involved in the present) until the flood destroyed them all.

Today there is the same power and sure word of God. By this word “the heavens and the earth, which are now” are reserved by fire (in the core of the earth) unto the day of judgment by fire. Man is surrounded by the word of God. Men know of the fire in the earth’s core and of the possibility of a nuclear fire. But knowing it,

they in their unbelief scoff at any thought of a God who will burn this world in the fire of His fierce judgment.

When the present heaven and earth are destroyed by fire, it will be THE end. Then the very “elements will melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (10). That end will be THE end—the final end of all things.



We who have this knowledge are to respond correctly. First, we must, with increasing fervency, proclaim: Believe! Repent! Repent, or perish! Second, we must not be swayed by the scoffing of the wicked. Rather let us, “according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness” (13, 14). And let us pray, Come, Lord Jesus. Come quickly!



Editorial

Prof. Russell Dykstra

To Be or Not to Be Reformed: Upholding the Formula of Subscription (2)

The Formula (or Form) of Subscription (FOS) is a form that Reformed churches require all their officebearers to sign. These churches do so because they love the Reformed faith, and thus determine to adhere to the adopted confessions—to Reformed confessions. The heart of the form is this promise: We not only *believe* what the confessions teach, we will *uphold and defend* them.

The FOS was formulated by churches in the Netherlands—churches in the thick of the battle for the truth of the Reformation. The history of the form indicates the importance and even the need for it in any church that will be Reformed—both then and now. It demonstrates that signing the confessions truly is a

long-standing Reformed practice. In addition, history reveals why the church drew up a *form*, and required officebearers to sign it.

The Reformation came to the Netherlands from Germany very soon after Luther’s posting of the ninety-five theses in 1517. In fact, the Reformation’s first martyrs in Europe were from the Netherlands (in 1525). When Calvinism was introduced to France and the Netherlands, it was adopted very quickly, and most of the churches of the Reformation in these two countries became Reformed rather than Lutheran, in doctrine and in practice.

If one wonders how long these Reformed churches have been requiring their officebearers to sign the confession, the answer is that these faithful Reformed churches practiced subscription all through their history. The French Reformed

Churches required ministers to sign their French Reformed Confession already in 1559. These churches were directly influenced by their fellow Frenchman in Geneva, John Calvin. The Walloon churches (French Reformed churches in the Netherlands) followed suit. They held a synod in April of 1563, and required the delegates to sign the French Confession of Faith (a creed very similar to the Belgic Confession.)

The Synod of Wezel meeting in 1568 did not yet require subscription, but “resolved that every one who had been lawfully called to the ministry should be asked at his examination whether he agreed in everything with the doctrine that was publicly taught in the churches and is contained in the Netherlands’ Confession of Faith and in the Heidelberg Catechism.”

The earliest broader gathering

*Previous article in this series:
January 1, 2010, p. 148.*

of the Reformed churches in the Netherlands, due to persecution by the Roman Catholics, actually met just outside the Netherlands in the city of Emden in October 4, 1571. They decided the following:

In order to demonstrate the unity in doctrine among the Netherlands churches, the brethren thought it well to subscribe to the confession of faith of the Netherlands churches; likewise to subscribe to the confessions of the churches in France, in order thereby to attest their agreement and unity with these French churches....

Notice this! Their concern was *unity in doctrine*. And the concrete demonstration of this unity was that the delegates signed the confessions of both the French and the Netherlands churches. The gathering did something else, namely, they exhorted all ministers not present to concur in the subscription of both these confessions. Clearly they saw the importance of the churches standing together in persecution, and they were convinced that standing together demanded agreement in doctrine.

In 1574, a provincial synod meeting in Dordrecht decided that all ministers must sign the Confession *and*, notice, the Articles of the fledgling church order.

Another provincial synod meeting in Dordrecht four years later decided that all ministers and professors of theology must sign the Confession. To this was added, "it would be good that the same be done by elders."

The General Synod of Mid-

delberg, meeting in 1581, passed the following motion: "Ministers of the Word, Elders and Deacons, also Professors of Theology (which is also fitting for other Professors) and Schoolmasters shall subscribe to the Confession of Faith of the Netherlands Churches."

Clearly the churches were concerned that all the churches maintain the doctrines of the Reformed faith in unity. Gradually this led to the adoption of forms designed for this purpose.

The Form of Subscription Developed

Classis Walcheren, meeting in 1574, drafted what is, apparently, the earliest FOS. It contains the essence of the FOS later adopted by the great Synod of Dordt some forty-five years later. In 1574 the form adopted was this:

We the undersigned Ministers of the Word of God...do hereby believe and confess that the Confession of Faith of the Christian churches of the Netherlands, lying under Spanish rule, contained in the 37 articles [the Belgic Confession, RJD]... conforms in all parts to the Word of God. And we promise to orient our doctrine and worship to it, in our teaching, consolation, and admonition, and to oppose what conflicts with it, according to our abilities.

Classis of Alkmaar in 1608 adopted a form, more detailed in its requirements. The classis required the ministers of the classis to sign the following:

We the undersigned preachers, under the jurisdiction of the Classis of Alkmaar, declare and witness that the teaching which is in that catechism adopted unanimously by the Reformed [the Heidelberg Catechism, RJD]

and which is comprehended in the 37 articles of the Dutch Reformed Churches [the Belgic Confession, RJD] agrees in everything with the Holy Word of God, and consequently with the foundation of the teaching of salvation. We promise to maintain this same teaching, through God's grace; and openly to reject all teachings which are brought against and oppose it; and with all diligence and faithfulness according to our ability to stand against them, as we affirm the same with our signatures.

The Great Synod of Dordt, 1618-'19

That, in brief, is the history of subscription leading up to the Synod of Dordt, which synod adopted the FOS that would be used by Reformed churches for centuries, and is still used by the Protestant Reformed Churches today. The history behind this synod gives indication of why the delegates crafted a lengthier and more explicit form than those adopted to that point.

The Synod of Dordt was called to deal with the Remonstrants—the followers of Arminius. For a few decades a controversy raged in the Netherlands over the doctrines of grace. The Remonstrants taught an election conditioned on faith and good works, a resistible grace of God, and a universal atonement. They also denied total depravity and the preservation of the saints.

These errors strike at the very heart of the Reformed faith. The controversy therefore touched the Reformed confessions, because the Heidelberg Catechism and the Belgic Confession condemned the errors of the Remonstrants. Many a faithful consistory and classis had tried to prevent the spread of this evil cancer by requiring officebearers, particularly ministers, to subscribe to these creeds. Many with Remonstrant leanings had signed their agreement with the confessions. But subsequent

The FOS was formulated by churches in the Netherlands—churches in the thick of the battle for the truth of the Reformation.

events indicated that they had done so dishonestly.

Hence the Synod of Dordt passed the following telling motion:

It is decided that a standard form for subscription of the Confession, Catechism and synodical decisions¹ be drafted by means of which all ministers clearly certify their agreement with the accepted doctrine and by which the evasions of some who try to deceive the churches are prevented.

A committee of the synod then went to work drafting forms per this decision. Eventually the synod adopted a form for ministers of the word, another form for Professors of Theology, many of whom were not ministers, and a third form for schoolmasters.²

¹ The “synodical decisions” were those decisions particularly dealing with the controversy, what are known today as the Canons of Dordt.

² The concept of a form of subscription for teachers adopted by the churches indicates the close relationship that existed between church and school in the Reformed churches. In the Netherlands the teachers taught not only the “three Rs” but also the Heidelberg Catechism. The form for teachers was quite different from the one adopted for ministers and professors, and was in fact appropriate for their work of instructing covenant children. We plan to look at that form in a later issue, D.V.

The synod left it up to the individual classes to decide whether or not all the elders and deacons ought also to subscribe.

Over time, the subscription form for ministers was adjusted to include seminary professors as well as elders and deacons, and that form was used in the Reformed Church in America. It was also adopted by the Christian Reformed Churches shortly after they organized, and is still used by the Protestant Reformed Churches.

Why a Form of Subscription?

The history above recorded indicates the reasons why the Reformed churches wisely adopted the forms they did. The first reason, as the churches explicitly stated, was to express unity. It is no insignificant matter to manifest the unity of the church as confessed weekly (“I believe *an* holy, catholic church”). The Reformed churches understood well that the unity of the church is a unity in the *truth*. The reason for that is that the church’s true unity is Jesus Christ. The church is His body (I Cor. 12). Jesus made plain the connection between Himself and the truth with the bold proclamation, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). Jesus, being the revelation of God, is the truth of God. He is the Word (John 1:1).

Since the truth is the unity of the church, the God-ordained officebearers must be unified in the truth if the church is to be unified. Believers likewise must be unified in the truth. That unity will be manifest in their common confession.

The second function of the FOS is that it serves to keep the churches doctrinally pure. It does so positively by insisting that officebearers maintain the Reformed faith. And then, negatively, it purposes to guard the truth against error. Errors do not change essentially over the years. Satan, that great Deceiver, dresses the lie in slightly different garb from one age and location to another, but the lie remains the same. Thus the form, if honestly maintained, helps protect the church against heterodoxy as well today as when it was drawn up in the early sixteen hundreds.

To that end, in its very infancy, the Reformed churches in the Netherlands required that ministers sign the creeds. But since unscrupulous heretical ministers were willing to sign the creeds, Dordt saw the need for a form that would express exactly what is meant by such a signature.

We turn next time to the specific promises that officebearers make when they sign the Form of Subscription.



Letters

Growing old

As always, the *Standard Bearer* is a blessing. Just read the article on growing old, by Rev. Rodney Miersma, who, I see, is applying for emeritation, i.e., retiring from the ministry. Well, retirement is not so far away for me either—2012 or 2015, D.V. I found myself identifying with

much of what he wrote, especially the inevitability of dying. I should just like to mention a few verses that are also very applicable as we approach the winter of our lives and ought to encourage us—Psalm 92:13-15:

Those that be planted in the house of the LORD shall flourish

in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing; to shew that the LORD is upright: he is my rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him.

Julian Kennedy
Ballymena, NI



Why I Will Not Sign the Manhattan Declaration

On November 20 Charles Colson and his ecumenical friends released the “Manhattan Declaration: A Call of Christian Conscience.”¹ Colson and his friends have invited Christians “to [join] together across historic lines of ecclesiastical differences to affirm our right—and more importantly, *to embrace our obligation*—to speak and act in defense” of three truths:

1) the profound, inherent, and equal dignity of every human being as a creature fashioned in the very image of God, possessing inherent rights of equal dignity and life; 2) marriage as a conjugal union of man and woman, ordained by God from the creation, and historically understood by believers and non-believers alike to be the most basic institution in society and; 3) religious liberty, which is grounded in the character of God, the example of Christ, and the inherent freedom and dignity of human beings created in the divine image.

As the supporters of the independence of the early American colonies signed the “Declaration of Independence,” so the authors of the “Manhattan Declaration” hope that Christians will read it and show their support by signing it, which can even be done on the Internet. The document

¹ The “Manhattan Declaration” can be found at www.manhattandeclaration.org.

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

is receiving widespread support from Christian leaders. Dr. Bryan Chapell, president of Covenant Theological Seminary, wrote an article entitled “Why I Signed the Manhattan Declaration.”² So it seems appropriate to explain briefly why I will not accept the invitation to sign the Manhattan Declaration.

The reason I will not sign the declaration is not that I do not support the dignity of human life, or the truth that marriage is union between a man and a woman, or the idea of religious liberty. To be against these things would be something like opposing grandma and apple pie. Who, in their right mind, would do that? The reason I will not sign is that I cannot agree with the Declaration’s explanation of these truths.

As often seems to be the case with documents that intend to appeal to Christians of every creed (or of no creed, as the case may be), the Manhattan Declaration is plagued with vague statements that I would not be comfortable affirming. For example, the declaration says, “Through the centuries, Christianity has taught that civil disobedience is not only permitted, but sometimes required.”

Am I in favor of civil disobedience? That depends on what you mean by civil disobedience. If you refer to Acts 4, as the Declaration does, where Peter and John refused to obey the command of rulers to stop preaching, and you mean by civil disobedience that we may not obey the rulers when they command us to sin, then yes, I am in favor of civil

² Dr. Chapell’s article can be found at www.theaquilareport.com.

disobedience. But if you appeal to Martin Luther King, Jr. and the actions of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, and define civil disobedience as protesting laws of the government that do not require one to sin, then no, I am not in favor of civil disobedience.

I am not defending the laws of the government that were racist in the 1960s, and I am not interested in debating whether or not it was sinful for the government to make laws such as the one that required a black person to sit in the back of a public bus. What I am arguing is that many of the laws that caused civil rights advocates to rebel against the government in the 1960s, such as the requirement that black people sit in the back of a bus, did not require sin. This situation of a black person commanded to sit in the back of a bus is in no way comparable to the situation of Peter and John when they were told not to preach. For Peter and John, obedience to the rulers would have been disobedience to God. For a black person to comply with the government’s law and sit in the back of the bus would not have been sinful, and therefore, to disobey the law and sit in front was not only civil disobedience, but disobedience to God.³ The Manhattan Declaration arguably promotes such disobedience to God. I will not sign such a document.

I also will not sign the Man-

³ Someday it may be that Christians will be oppressed by such unfair laws, and Christians will be required by God to obey such laws as long as they do not mandate the commission of a sin.

hattan Declaration because, again as is often the case with documents seeking to appeal to a broad range of Christians, it subverts the gospel. As a member of the Protestant Reformed Churches, I object to the Declaration's affirmation of common grace and the idea that all men retain the image of God after the fall. Both of these ideas weaken the Reformed doctrine of man's depravity and therefore also detract from the grace of God in salvation through Jesus Christ. A man who is not totally depraved is not totally dependent upon God's grace for salvation through Jesus Christ. Denial of total depravity is therefore a subversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Consistent with its promotion of the doctrine of common grace, the Declaration subverts the gospel by advocating the idea that the church exists for the sake of the world. Though the Declaration says that the church must proclaim the "Gospel of costly grace," it claims Christians must seek the "common good" or the "public good." Thus, the Declaration is committed to the social gospel. Supporters of the social gospel believe that Christians supposedly declare Christ when they seek the good of the world. But that is not true. The gospel of Jesus Christ is about the forgiveness of sins, and that gospel is preached by the church and spread by believers only for the sake of saving elect sinners, not for the purpose of making the world a better place. So the Declaration distracts believers from what the gospel is really about.

I cannot sign a document that subverts the gospel of salvation by God's grace alone through Jesus Christ.

Is it because I hold to the distinctive views of the Protestant Reformed Churches that I

believe the Manhattan Declaration subverts the gospel? No. Every Reformed and Presbyterian Christian ought to reject it because it tolerates the corruption of the gospel of salvation by God's grace alone through Jesus Christ.

I am not referring now to any section of the document that explicitly denies the sovereign grace of God by teaching that salvation is partially dependent upon man. I am referring to the fact that those who sign this document intend for both those who affirm God's sovereignty in salvation and those who deny it to set aside their differences in order to come to agreement on the issues dealt with in the Declaration. Reformed people who believe salvation is the work of Jesus Christ alone are expected to sign this document with Roman Catholics, who believe that salvation is the work of sinners themselves (perhaps along with Mary and other saints) in addition to the work of Jesus Christ. The impression is left, then, that Rome's problem of denying the sufficiency of Christ in the work of salvation is not really so serious and is less important than the fact that Rome is on the right side of some social issues. So far this is already enough to get me worked up.

But especially offensive is the Manhattan Declaration's effusiveness towards Rome. Those who sign this document compliment Rome for its efforts to promote the "common good." For example, the Declaration gushes that "Papal edicts in the 16th and 17th centuries decried the

practice of slavery and first excommunicated anyone involved in the slave trade." Not only does a signature affixed to this document overlook Rome's doctrine, it pats Rome on the back! Do not the Reformed Christians who sign this document remember what else Rome did in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Do they not remember that Rome excommunicated and anathematized people other than those involved in the slave trade, namely, those who were involved in teaching justification by faith alone and all the other great biblical truths of the Reformation? Do they not remember that Rome oppressed faithful, Reformed Christians in a manner that rivals and perhaps surpasses the oppression that slaves experienced under their slave-masters? Rome wreaked havoc on the church and tried to destroy the gospel of Jesus Christ! No, I will not sign the Manhattan Declaration and applaud Rome for seeking the "common good."

Instead of signing the Manhattan Declaration, I have signed my name to the Belgic Confession, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dordt. I am content with these documents because

they set forth the whole counsel of God concerning salvation in Jesus Christ. Let Reformed churches and believers promote the Reformed creeds and the truths contained in them. The world will not become a better place. But by the grace of God sinners will be saved.



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The Fruit of the Spirit (7): Clothing Ourselves with Gentleness (1)

The next item in the list of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22 is gentleness. This word is sometimes translated elsewhere in the Bible as “kindness.”

This is another virtue that we learn to desire and that we pray that the Spirit of Christ will work in us more and more by the means of grace and His inner working. In fact, it is one virtue that the Lord calls us “to put on” in Colossians 3:12. “Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved,... kindness....” We must put on, or clothe ourselves with, gentleness towards one another in the household of faith.



What is gentleness or kindness?

Gentleness is a virtue of God Himself. In Luke 6:35, we learn that our heavenly Father is “kind unto the unthankful and to the evil.” In that verse Christ teaches us to be kind unto our neighbors upon the earth. The basis for that command of Christ is the fact that the Father is kind unto the evil and unthankful. Certainly that is very true concerning the salvation of God’s people. He is very gentle unto the unthankful

and evil such as we are. In fact, while we were yet His enemies, the Father sacrificed Christ for us and thereby redeemed us from our sin, evil, and unthankfulness towards Him. That is the greatest demonstration of God’s kindness unto His people, who in their sin and according to their nature are evil and unthankful. In spite of our evil and unthankfulness, the Father in His sovereign kindness saves us according to His eternal counsel. Now, according to that example and on that basis, we are called to reflect that gentleness unto our earthly neighbors in all our dealings with them.

That glorious kindness of the Father towards His elect in Christ Jesus arises out of His grace. We are taught that truth in Ephesians 2:7: “That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his *kindness* towards us through Christ Jesus.” Here we learn that the grace and goodness of God flow unto us through Christ Jesus in this way of *kindness*. Although we deserve a crushing and eternal blast of God’s indignation because of our sin, yet God in His grace is kind unto us. He is not kind unto those who are not in Christ Jesus. The “us” of Ephesians 1 is not all men, but, according to Ephesians 1:4, the “us” is God’s elect. To all those who are not chosen by the Father, God is not kind, but righteously severe in His wrath and indignation. God handles the wicked, whom He curses, with a rod of iron.

However, in contrast to the unrighteous, God is gentle and marvelously kind. Even though the people of God show that they are just as unthankful and evil sinners as the wicked, and sometimes even worse, yet God delivers us from our sin, heals us from our spiritual death of evil, blesses us with new life in Jesus Christ, and works in us that glory of eternal salvation. That is the wonder of God’s sovereign, unmerited, and unconditional gentleness towards undeserving sinners. Have you experienced that gentleness of God?

We sing of His gentleness towards us in the Psalter.

Mindful of our human frailty
Is the God in Whom we trust,
He Whose years are everlasting,
He remembers we are dust.
(Psalter #281:1)

And,

Thy free salvation is my shield,
My sure defense in every strait;
Thy hand upholds me, lest I yield;
Thy gentleness hath made me great.
(Psalter #35:6)



Jesus lived this virtue of kindness and gentleness towards His people in His earthly ministry. He was not gentle towards everyone in His ministry. Jesus pronounced judgments upon the cities, including Jerusalem, that

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

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rejected Him and all the prophets that He sent to Israel. Those pronouncements of desolation, destruction, and woe were His word of harsh judgment on account of their pride, sin, and unbelief. Moreover, Jesus spoke very harsh and damning words to the unrighteous Pharisees, even calling them snakes and children of Satan. The gentle Lord will crush His enemies and deal with them in harshness.

However, unto His own He is neither harsh nor bitter. For example, when His disciples repeatedly did not understand His work as the Messiah, He did not lash out at them to destroy them and retaliate against them for their unbelief. He rebuked them in His love and grace. In kindness that seeks the salvation and true comfort of His elect sheep, Jesus called His disciples to repentance and true faith in Him.

Jesus demonstrated His kindness powerfully to the woman who had been caught in the very act of adultery and was set in all her shame publicly before Jesus and a large crowd of people. The Pharisees were brutal and selfishly harsh with that woman. They had no compassion for this sinner, and had no desire to give her any covering for her shame whatsoever. They abused that sinner for their own agenda of a public discrediting of Christ's work and person.

However, the good and kind Shepherd controls His sheep. Unwittingly, the Pharisees were a tool in the hand of the Lord to bring the woman to the right place: our merciful Savior. Christ in His mercy was kind unto her. As her merciful High Priest, He said to her, "Neither do I condemn thee" (John 8:11). Forgiven! Jesus did not flatten this wicked sinner, who stood in the shame and the guilt of her terrible sin before the Lord. He did not crush the bruised reed, nor quench the smoking flax (Is.

42:3). As her Lord, He forgave her sin.

Does that mean that in His kindness Jesus minimized the seriousness of the woman's adultery? No. Jesus could forgive her sin because He took that heinous iniquity upon Himself and willingly was determined to suffer for this woman the crushing and bruising blow of God's wrath for her and all adulterers and fornicators like her, who are of His sheep. And, in His kindness, Jesus did not tolerate her sin. He spoke to her the kind and powerful word of life by which He called her out of her sin into the way of sexual purity and of thankfulness: "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11).

There are other examples of this gentleness of Christ. Another example is how Jesus handled Peter when Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest's residence. After some time had passed since the last time that Peter yielded to the temptation to deny Jesus, Peter responded to a remark from another in the courtyard who affirmed that Peter was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter for the third time denied Christ. (Who of us would not have done the same thing?) After the echo of Peter's defiant denial and the crow of the courtyard rooster had faded, "the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter" (Luke 22:61a). Jesus did not destroy Peter, nor did He yell angrily across the courtyard at Peter. Jesus looked right into the heart and soul of Peter, so that Peter remembered that Jesus foretold that Peter would deny Christ exactly as he had just done. Jesus brought Peter to repentance with that gentle but soul-piercing look of mercy and gentleness.

Does not the Lord deal simi-

larly with us in His kindness? Do you recognize that gentle, but soul-piercing look of your Lord to bring you to repentance and faith in Him?

Think about how Jesus handled the little children of believers. Did He in cruelty send the parents and the little infants away as though He had no time for the lambs of His flock? Did Jesus tell the children that He has nothing to say to them but only to their parents? Did He tell the children that He has no blessing for them as infants and they must wait until they get older? We learn that

Jesus gathered His little lambs in His arms and blessed them with the blessings of salvation.

That same gentleness of our great Shepherd towards His lambs is taught in Isaiah 40:11: "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

When we bring our children under the means of grace, including the preaching of the word and the sacrament of baptism for our infants, we behold the wonder of Christ's gentleness towards us and towards our seed to bless us and them with His undeserved and unmerited blessings of salvation.

"Who touched Me?" Jesus said to a large crowd, including the woman who had touched the hem of His garment. She was timid and shy and thought she could obtain her healing unnoticed. But that is not the way Jesus works salvation. He brings us to stand before Him face to face and to confess our salvation with heart and mouth before Him, before His church, and even before the world. Jesus is our

"He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young."

Savior and covenant Friend, who joins us in close fellowship with Him. Thus did Jesus bring before Him the woman who touched His garment, so that she might unburden her soul. And in response, Jesus said, "Daughter, be of good comfort: thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace" (Luke 8:48).

Similarly, Jesus deals with us, who are of a weak faith and are also often reluctant to cast all our care upon Him. We must remember that He in His gentleness does care for us and remains near to us in His care through the Comforter, His Spirit.



Based on what gentleness means with respect to our heavenly Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, we may then describe the gentleness of the elect, regenerated, and sanctified children of our heavenly Father.

True gentleness for us is the virtue that is the opposite of and is also opposed to all spiritual brutality, hostility, and harshness. Gentleness is not cruel. It is never motivated by a spirit of retaliation, by which we decide that the offender must pay double for the pain that he or she has inflicted on us. Gentleness does not strike back. It is not proud. It will not hurtfully poke fun of the afflictions, disabilities, weaknesses, and acute problems of others.

Gentleness is a virtue in which the child of God, who is the covenant friend of God, shows himself to be spiritually friendly to other members of the body of Christ. It is a virtue in which the child of God deals with fellow believers, not to crush them, but to build them up and to deliver them from spiritual ruin. It is a virtue that regards covenant friendship and life in the body of Christ as very fragile and precious, and a gift of God to be handled delicately. It is a virtue of the handling of the souls of others with great care.

It is a virtue that parents must exercise towards their children, whereby the parents handle the souls of their children cautiously, without crushing them under the fist of a tyrant or under the impossible, Pharisaical burdens of endless rules. Instead, the lambs of Christ are handled with His gentleness, which guides the children by instruction and consistent discipline, out of the way of sin and unbelief and into the way of faith and a thankful life. The goal of that gentleness is that the children may grow up smiling in the fear and admonition of the Lord.



From whence comes this virtue of gentleness? Is it a natural ability that one can acquire by birth or by sufficient education? By nature we are cruel and harsh. True gentleness, gentleness that meets the standard of excellence of the Holy Spirit, cannot have its origin in us. In fact, a man might

be naturally and sincerely gentle towards another miserable and hurting individual while at the same time tolerating that other person's sin and not speaking as Christ did to the woman caught in adultery. A woman may handle her child with great gentleness and raise that child in a gentle spirit that might make the leaders of Hinduism, Buddha, or Islam proud. A man or woman's natural gentleness or sincere gentleness in bondage to a false religion does not meet the Holy Spirit's standards of quality and excellence for His fruit.

All that is of man is spiritual enmity and bitterness against God and against one another. Where

enmity and sin rule in the heart of a man, no true gentleness will result. In fact, where enmity rules in a man's heart, that becomes evident inevitably in his words and actions towards God and one another. For example, if a husband or a wife lives in the sin of bitterness and harshness towards each other, then their thoughts, words, and actions of harshness and brutality will crush, hurt, and suffocate the life and beauty of what the marriage bond ought to be in view of the gentle Christ towards His beloved bride, the church.

The gentleness that meets the Holy Spirit's standard of excellence has its source in the love of Christ. The foundation and life source of being kind to one another with a view to Christ and our heavenly Father is the love by which Christ loved us first and,

as a result, the love whereby we love Christ first above all else. With that love of Christ in our hearts, there will be the beginning of a life of true gentleness. Where there is that self-denying, thankful, faithful love of Christ and

unto Christ, there will be gentleness towards one another.

That love of Christ sees the great gentleness with which Christ has made beautiful and glorious His undeserving bride, His church. In thankfulness for that wondrous, gentle Lord and Savior, there will be present in our hearts by the grace and Spirit of Christ the beginning of that gentleness towards our neighbor, especially towards those whom we know and love in our Lord.

Therefore, clothe yourselves with His gentleness.

... to be concluded.



The gentleness that meets the Holy Spirit's standard of excellence has its source in the love of Christ.

God's Justice and Man's Sin

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 4

Question 9. Doth not God then do injustice to man, by requiring from him in His law, that which he cannot perform?

Answer. Not at all; for God made man capable of performing it; but man, by the instigation of the devil, and his own willful disobedience, deprived himself and all his posterity of those divine gifts.

Question 10. Will God suffer such disobedience and rebellion to go unpunished?

Answer. By no means; but is terribly displeased with our original as well as actual sins; and will punish them in His just judgment temporally and eternally, as He hath declared, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things, which are written in the book of the law, to do them."

Question 11. Is not God then also merciful?

Answer. God is indeed merciful, but also just; therefore His justice requires that sin which is committed against the most high majesty of God be also punished with extreme, that is, with everlasting punishment of body and soul.

Man will use every excuse he can to escape from the hands and wrath of the just God. He will argue with God's terms of salvation first by claiming that he himself is good and can do good, and then, when his depravity is clear, he will argue that God is not fair in the way He deals with sinners. Man's arguments demonstrate to us the power of the grace of God in salvation. By His grace God overpowers the sinful resistance of the will of man. In turn, we learn to see that salvation is all and only in Christ Jesus; of him-

self the sinner would never come to Christ.

A Just God

This Lord's Day teaches us that God is just in His dealings with sinners. Justice is one of the attributes of God, describing an essential aspect of who God is. Something or someone that is just or righteous conforms to a law. The law is the standard, and justice is all that agrees with the law. A just lawyer or judge, a righteous citizen or child, is one whose actions, thoughts, and desires are within the bounds of the law. God's law is the holiness and righteousness of His own being, which never changes and cannot be compromised. God does not need to go to a library or look up precedent to determine justice, but God is just, and He

Himself sets the standard for all justice. God cannot be blamed or faulted for anything.

In Deuteronomy 32:4 Moses makes a beautiful confession of the justice of God. Every phrase in the verse expresses the justice of God. "He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he." The beauty of this confession is that it comes in the context of God's dealings with Israel in the wilderness and Moses being told that he must die, losing the privilege of leading Israel into Canaan. Can you say that God is just in all His dealings with you?

From Man's Perspective

The law of God, both its external requirements summed in the Ten Commandments and the

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

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internal duty of love for God and the neighbor, is the summary of His justice, and God requires that we keep His commandments perfectly. This makes all of us want to say, "That's not fair!" With a show of logic and much irritation we rise up against the justice of God. In the questions of this Lord's Day there are three arguments the unconverted will present against God's justice. You have heard these arguments before, and you will certainly recognize them in yourself.

Argument 1: It's not fair for God to require of us what we are unable to do. This is like asking a pig to fly or a fish to walk, and then punishing them because they do not obey. How can God expect perfect obedience from us if we are born without the ability to keep His commandments or to love him?

Argument 2: God should not punish us for sin because we are not responsible for our sinful natures; we were born this way. And God must forgo punishing sinners because everybody is doing the same thing—we are all sinners and surely God can't just punish everyone.

Argument 3: God is merciful, and so, surely, He will overlook sin. He's a God of love and patience and forgiveness, so He won't give to sinners what they deserve, will He?

There seems to be some logic to these arguments. Would we require a penniless man to give a million dollars? If everyone is doing something, isn't it simply impossible to forbid it and punish for it? Isn't this the way of justice in the real world? How could chastity and Sabbath observance possibly be enforced in a world where almost everyone pays no attention to these commandments? And doesn't the Bible plainly teach that God is a God of love and mercy?

But the problem with each and all of these arguments is that they begin from man's perspective, and our theology must begin with God. Man cannot say, from his situation, "This is what I want God to be and what I want God to do." That would be idolatry. We must let God be God. Paul says, "Let God be true, and every man a liar" (Rom. 3:4). In Job's suffering, God told him to remember whom he was talking about before he complained against God (Job 38-39). "O man, who art thou that repliest against God?" (Rom. 9:20).

From God's Perspective

The catechism carefully answers these objections from God's perspective. In our theology and in all our thinking, we must begin with God.

God made man good and capable of keeping His law. That's where we begin with the answer to the first objection. When God created man, man was able to keep God's commandments. Further, it is entirely man's own fault that he is no longer able to do what he was able to do in the beginning. Adam and Eve sinned willfully. God did not force them to sin. The devil cannot be blamed for their sin. Adam himself chose sin and the devil's fellowship instead of life and friendship with God. And, like it or not, we were all there in Adam and Eve when they sinned. They were our representatives. When Adam and Eve were tested in the first temptation, the whole human race was on trial; and thus, when they fell, we all fell. We must be impressed with the unity of the human race. If you will have none of your place in Adam, you can have none of Christ (Rom. 5:18-19). For that reason, God can and may and does demand obedience of man to His law.

God's requirement is not determined by man's ability. Behind the first objection is the er-

ror that demand is determined by ability, that you can expect from a person only what that person is capable of doing. In human society, this may seem to make sense, but when we come to the gospel, it is a serious problem. This is the error of Arminian theology, which concludes that, because the gospel demands faith, therefore man must have the ability of his own free will to believe. But the gospel gives a demand that not one listener can fulfill, unless God works the willing and the doing by grace.

The answer to the second objection also begins with God. God cannot forgo His punishment of sin. Sin is an act of defiance and aggression against God, and God reacts in wrath because He is holy and jealous of His holiness. Sin is not a small thing, and God's wrath is not a small thing. Psalm 7:11 says that God is "angry with the wicked every day." God's wrath is real, thorough, personal, and extreme. The punishment God gives, ultimately, is eternal punishment in hell but, also, His judgments are revealed in the earth. A sinful lifestyle, whether of drunkenness, anger, adultery, or some other life-dominating sin, brings devastating consequences in this life.

But isn't God merciful? Yes, indeed God is merciful, but there is one thing God will never do because of His mercy. He will never compromise His justice and say, "I will just let sin go." As great and unchanging as His mercy is, so great and unchanging is His justice. Here too, we begin with God. God's love is not directed first toward the creature, but God's love is first for Himself. There is nothing God can love more than His own name and honor. If He would love something at the expense of His name or honor, then He would no longer be God.

When we say God is merciful and a God of love, we must avoid


common caricatures and misconceptions. Love is not leniency. Leniency is indicative of weakness. It is not mercy to overlook sin and leave one in it. Love is strong, sometimes stern and angry, and that is why God holds before us life and death, heaven and hell. The attributes of God are complementary. They are not to be played off against each other. The one, mercy, does not exclude the other, justice. When God is merciful, He is completely just.

From the Perspective of the Cross

God's justice is displayed nowhere so clearly as in the death of His Son. God did not spare His own Son but made Him suffer for sin. Even when it was His own child, God would not pass over sin and forfeit justice. Christ had to pay the infinite price for sin in His bitter and shameful death. In the cross we see the infinite wrath and unchangeable justice of God. If you deny the justice of God, the death of Christ means nothing and has no value.

At the same time, and to the same measure, God shows in the

cross His infinite mercy. Rather than making us suffer, God in mercy gives His Son in our place. "But God commendeth his love

toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). He is indeed a merciful God! 

Questions for Discussion

1. What do we mean by the justice of God? What is the standard for God's justice?
2. How will and does God punish sinners? Why?
3. What objections will sinners raise against the justice and wrath of God?
4. Why is it important to begin, in our theological thinking, with God and His word?
5. Is it fair for God to demand of man what he is not able to perform?
6. Is it fair for God to send sinners to hell?
7. If God is merciful, why must the full penalty for sin nevertheless be paid?
8. Do you think it's fair that God regards us as enemies right from our conception because of Adam's sin? (Psalm 51:5, Romans 5:8-10, 18-19) Can you think of other examples in life, in which a person is regarded as an enemy because of the actions of another person?
9. If God were to overlook the sin of just one person, we would have to say God is unjust. What would you think of a high court judge who let someone off just because he liked him or was related to him? Would God do such a thing?
10. How does the death of Christ show both the justice and mercy of God?

Go Ye Into All the World

Rev. Wilbur Bruinsma

The Place of Laity in Missions (4)

Rev. Bruinsma is Eastern Home Missionary of the Protestant Reformed Churches, stationed in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

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Work-groups

Visiting a mission field is beneficial both for the saints on the mission field and for those who visit the work. It gives the visitor a broader perspective of the church of Christ in this world. It also rekindles

an appreciation for the precious truths God has graciously entrusted into our care and safekeeping. If a visit to a mission work accomplishes this, then volunteer labor on a mission field does so even more. Not everyone in the instituted church has

the time or the means to be able to help in the work of missions. That is understandable. But there are those who do. These ought to be encouraged to lend a hand in matters relating to the mission work of our churches.

What we mean by helping out in matters relating to missions must not be confused with the actual mission labor itself. We have repeatedly emphasized that mission work is the official work of the church institute through its offices. Mission work is preaching the gospel. But there are times when certain practical labors become necessary in connection with mission work. These labors do not belong to the preaching the gospel. Neither do they require the work of the missionary. The Pittsburgh Protestant Reformed Fellowship where I labor is a good example of this. There were different groups who volunteered to help us work on our church building. Some cleaned; some built rooms and remodeled; some removed the onion dome from our steeple. A group of young people came to help us distribute welcome brochures in the neighborhood at the time of our open house for the church. Just recently a group of men came for a few days to repair retaining walls that had been washed away by a flash flood. These groups did necessary work that could not have been accomplished by the saints of the mission themselves.

There have always, however, been some concerns about the propriety of this kind of work on a mission field. Let's consider a couple of those concerns.

Objection 1:

Sending work-groups to a mission field is promoting a social gospel. Mission work ought only to involve preaching the good news of salvation in Christ alone. It is not the calling of the church institute

to improve the social conditions of people. People on the mission field must learn that the church is not here to improve their social status, but only to teach them the gospel in the environment in which they already live. Sending work-groups to a mission field, therefore, serves only to tempt people to look to the church for earthly, material help more than the spiritual.

There is a warning in this, of course, that ought not go unheeded. Far too many today indeed view mission work as the need for Christianity to take the lead in the struggle for a better life in this world. Many mission trips today center in general, humanitarian efforts to improve the earthly conditions of families and communities in a downtrodden place of the world. Churches have become more concerned with improving life in this world than calling men to repentance and faith. This must never be the goal of our missions. Mark 8:36: "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" Our churches must not cave in to this cry for a social gospel. Neither may the saints on a mission field begin to think that the churches supporting their work owe them any kind of financial or material assistance.

It is, however, a mistake to claim that sending a work-group to a mission field is promoting a social gospel. First of all, the intent of work-groups organized and sent out in our churches has always been to help the saints who are a part of the mission itself. It is not a broad humanitarian effort aimed at bringing people to the church by helping them in their earthly needs. In the second place, these work-groups have served an important function in assisting the saints in their needs. A mission group is most often small and without a wide variety of skills. Those with

skills in our churches are able to help out. Sometimes, too, a task requires a labor that is difficult to fulfill without a larger number of people. Work-groups have helped in this regard as well. This, as we will find, has been for the benefit of the mission work.

Objection 2:

Sending work-groups to a mission field promotes the error that everyone who works on a mission field is fulfilling the task of a missionary, and actually doing the work of missions. The idea in modern missions is that anyone who goes to work on a mission field is, in fact, a missionary. They are given a quick course on mission work and this qualifies them to be a missionary on the field. By our churches sending work-groups to a mission field, we are following in the way of modern missions.

This objection, once again, serves well as a warning to us. I was reading a website designed to attract members of a certain Presbyterian denomination to volunteer as a part of a short-term mission team. I was struck by how much this idea of modern missions has crept into the mission work of churches of Reformed persuasion. Addressing these volunteer lay members, the site reads: "The scriptures point to many qualities you as a missionary should have. Here are some that you should be encouraged to develop and (we) will labor with each team member to aid them in the development of the following characteristics." The warning needs to be sounded. Members of the church who volunteer of their time on a work team are not going to a mission field to do mission work. They are not quasi-missionaries. They are not called by the church to bring the gospel to people on a mission field. This ought not to be the function of a work-group.

Neither, however, does it have to be. The volunteers who serve in the work-groups sent out to help in our mission labors do not come to the field with the attitude that they are doing the actual work of missions. They do not view themselves as missionaries. They simply come to help in some of the practical labors relating to the mission work of our churches. This does not mean that the witness they are called to provide every day of their lives is not carried with them to a mission field. God's people are always called to give a reason for the hope that is in them. If they are called to do this while helping on a mission field, I would hope they would give it! These volunteers ought not refrain from giving witness to others just because they do not want people to think they are doing mission work. As long as we maintain a clear line between what constitutes mission work and what it is to help on a mission field, work-groups are not wrong. On the contrary they are of benefit to the work of missions.

Here are the benefits.

Sending work-groups is of benefit to the saints on the mission field. Those who become a part of a mission come from various backgrounds. Some come out of other churches and denominations. (Those who join a mission are not just from other Reformed or Presbyterian churches. There is a huge diversity of churches in the United States alone! We have believers here in our Pittsburgh Mission from Roman Catholicism, Methodism, Church of the Brethren, Pentecostal, and Baptist backgrounds.) Others join the church who come from an unchurched background. (We have these in

our Mission too.) These saints desperately need a sense of belonging. They need to experience that they are a part of a whole. They need to begin to live the communion of saints. They need to know that this communion extends beyond the little group of believers they are a part of here. They need to know they are a part of a body of churches of common confession.

How can these new saints begin to understand this if the people of the churches that sponsor the work are never there? This is why, even when members of our churches simply visit a mission field, the saints are encouraged. Can you imagine, then, what a great encouragement it is when the churches respond to a need on the mission field by sending a group of saints to help fill that need? The saints on the mission field learn firsthand of the love and care of the churches


for them. They know they are not alone, left to fend for themselves. They have others who are concerned about their welfare and respond to their needs. Wonderful! Work-groups help make denominational ties real to the

members of the mission. The body of Christ takes care of its members.

A second benefit of sending work-groups is that it leaves a godly witness to those outside of the mission group. People of the community witness the labors of those who come to the mission field and freely give of their time to help their fellow saints. I have had neighbors comment on these labors: "These people are donating their time to drive all the way out here to do this for

you? Your churches are serious about the work here!" Or, "Oh, this group belongs to a denomination of churches? It is not an independent (parachurch) organization?"

Has this produced growth in the membership in the Fellowship here? A better question would be: Are we leaving a witness in the community in which God has placed us? Yes! We have had visitors from the neighborhood who have come to worship services. We do not know in whose heart God may work by His grace through the preaching and call to repentance and faith. Work-groups have been of benefit in our overall witness to the community.

A final benefit of sending work-groups is for the members of our own churches. Mission work is real! The people we work with on the mission field are real people! The preaching of the gospel to others is a real work that has an effect on souls. Oftentimes when we live in our own little world we become trapped there. It's safe there. We are in our comfort zone! We have a hard time thinking about the fact that God is using our churches to gather His church in places far beyond our little world. I would say that those who have come to work on a mission field return home with a different perspective not only on missions, but also on the saints with whom we labor. Take a moment sometime and ask a person who has spent a number of days with believers on a mission field what it has done for his own perspective on what he believes. Ask him about the zeal of a person that is characterized by a first love of the gospel and what that zeal does for him or her as an individual. Then we can begin to understand in a small way the benefit for us, too, that such work on a mission field can impart. 

As long as we maintain a clear line between what constitutes mission work and what it is to help on a mission field, work-groups are not wrong.

Strength in Silence

"For thus saith the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength..." Isaiah 30:15.

With its noise, the world is too much with us. There is the noise of the street, the noise of people talking and calling out to one another, the noise of chatter on cell phones. There is the noise of horns honking and sirens wailing. There is the noise of the media, television with oh-so-many channels, radio, newscasts, broadcasts. There is the noise of the Internet, YouTube and Facebook and MySpace, news and information websites. There is the noise of MP3's, CD's and DVD's, of iPods and iPhones. Our latest technology has an inherent irony to it. With all its digital clarity, the end result is more noise.

With all this noise going on, I propose a few tests. First, count all the devices that you have that are capable of making any kind of noise. Second, count how much time one or more are making noise. How many of your waking hours are spent with this noise? Is it a good proportion or a bad proportion? Third, sometime when you are in the middle of noise, turn it all off. How comfortable do you feel? Do you feel

uncomfortable? Awkward? Listless? Bored?

There are two points we need to consider about noise.

The first point is about the distracting power of noise. You can try to cover up a lack of focus or attention by noise. Some kind of noise can make a task that seems boring more interesting. Do you have the kind of job that seems tolerable only because you have music playing? Can you do homework only if you have some noise in the background, whether music or a television program? Do you walk, jog, run, or bike with earbuds in your ears? Why? You must ask yourself whether that noise is distracting you from God. Is it keeping you from thinking about Him, His word, and about your heart that must be filled with Him and His word? That is why the world is interested in so much noise: the world does not want to think about its own misery and poverty. It blocks out the truth about itself and about God with its blaring, discordant cacophony.

The second point we need to consider about noise comes from God's word, "which stilleth the noise of the seas, the noise of their waves, and the tumult of the people" (Ps. 65:7). The noise of the world is the sound of rebellion against God. The nations rage in their fury against God. They shout and cry out to one another to encourage each other in their rebellion. They try, to no avail, to break their bands and cast off their cords (Ps. 2:1-3). Here we must especially under-

stand the great evil of this noise. Wishing no part of the world's rebellion against God, we must strenuously avoid its noise. Our first thought ought to be shutting it off or tuning it out. How far from losing ourselves in this noise we must be!

Having turned down our noise, we can then look at the wonderful virtue of silence. Silence is stillness and quietness. That silence begins by shutting off, turning down. That silence begins by finding a place of quiet. But that itself is not silence. Silence is also a matter of the heart. Your silence must be that deep—in your heart. Your heart must be made to desire and to anticipate silence. Therefore strive to bring silence down into your heart. Work to drive from your heart and mind distracting thoughts. Don't give in to attractions to noise, no matter how strong they can be. Instead seek silence. Find silence golden!

Make that silence last a moment, from a minute to ten, perhaps to half an hour. Psalm 4:4: "Stand in awe, and sin not: commune with your own heart upon your bed, and be still." If you begin to feel some anxiety during this time, that you need some kind of noise or stimulation, you need to work all the harder to keep your silence and appreciate it. See that your heart clings to silent times.

So far, so good. However, you may not be silent for the sake only of silence. Silence, like emptiness, never exists for its own sake. Silence is merely a means

Rev. VanderWal is pastor of Hope Protestant Reformed Church in Redlands, California.

to a most blessed end. Your silence must be directed toward God. You are quiet for the sake of His voice. In your silence you make room very specifically for His word. You are silent so that the voice of God might fill your ears. You empty your heart of all other sounds so that it might be filled with the only thing worth hearing: the great and glorious word of God to you. "Truly my soul waiteth upon God; from him cometh my salvation" (Ps. 62:1). "I will hear what God the LORD will speak: for he will speak peace unto his people, and to his saints" (Ps. 85:8).

Further, your silence must be directed toward the precious and beautiful sound of the gospel. That gospel is the gospel of peace. It is the word of reconciliation. It is a word that God has designed to fill all the silence of your heart. All the room you can possibly make in your heart—that gospel will fill it in the most blessed way. Your heart will not remain empty, but it will be filled with the presence of the triune God. It will be filled with the blessings of His fellowship and friendship. Your heart will resound and reverberate with blessed echoes of solid joy and rejoicing in God!

You will see, having your heart so filled with the word of God, that there is no longer any room for the noise of the world. The gospel's sweet harmony will make the world's noise more and more discordant, strident, and grating. The world's siren call becomes more and more only an obnoxious din.

This way of silence will form your approach to God's word. When you open the Scriptures to read them or to study them or when you prepare for catechism or Bible study, practice silence. Settle yourself down.

Put yourself in a proper frame of mind. Cast out distracting thoughts. Frame your heart in an attitude of awe and reverence before the word of God. In the same way of silence prepare yourself for worship on Sunday. You have much room to make in your heart for that word of God you plan to hear! As much as you desire to receive the word of God preached, make room for it in your heart. As you worship among God's people, you will have to maintain this silence. Where noise arises (more from yourself than the baby crying over there!), you will need to push that noise out of your consciousness. There is no room for it. You have room only for the word you are hearing.

Keeping this kind of silence will cause you to treasure this word more and more. The reading of Scripture and doctrinal materials (including the *Standard Bearer*!) will become more enjoyable and desirable. The hearing of the preaching of the word will become more and more a delight. You will get more and more out of sermons.

You will find yourself much stronger spiritually, more filled with the word of God.

This way of silence will help you find comfort in the troubles of this earthly life. The Lord will sometimes bring you trials. Persecutions, loss, sorrows, and pains will be heavy burdens. They will be troublesome noises, disturbing your peace. Sometimes their sound will fill your ears, making it difficult to hear the word of God's comfort in those trials. But you will be practiced in silence. You will be able to turn your attention from those troubles to fill your heart and soul with the strength of the word of the gospel. In the midst of such trials you will enjoy a peace that makes you strong to carry on through those trials. You

will hear in effect the same word that Daniel heard, "O man greatly beloved, fear not: peace be unto thee, be strong, yea, be strong. And when he had spoken unto me, I was strengthened, and said, Let my lord speak; for thou hast strengthened me" (Dan. 10:19).

In these trials you will also deal with temptations. Those temptations will be callings to despair of peace and to give up. They may become very loud and urgent: "Surrender! Lay down your weapons! There is no sense in trying!" In other temptations you will hear the noise of the world reveling in its earthly, fading pleasures. That noise may sound pleasant in your ears according to the flesh. But in those temptations you will be equipped to put them to silence and shut them out of your heart. You know by experience the powerful sweetness of the sound of the gospel. By the word of God you receive strength to fight against those temptations and keep them far from your heart.

This way of silence for God's word will also keep you from being pushed and pulled around by false teachings. In the world you will hear all kinds of noise about evolution and free will and so-called freedom of choice. Those sounds will fill your ears in the classroom. That noise will be great from the mouths of professors and fellow students in academic settings. That noise will become penetrating through debates with co-workers, acquaintances, or even family members. Your opponents are the majority, having many mouths. But you will be able to keep all their noise from your heart. Let them clamor: their voices are feeble and vain! For there already is a mighty word in your heart, so rich and full that there is room for none else.

In silence is your strength: the strength of the word of God!



*...strive
to bring
silence
down into
your heart.*

Created in Six Literal Days

No one seeking to exegete Genesis 1 would ever come to the conclusion that the days spoken of were symbolic references to long periods of time. This teaching does not arise out of exegesis. It arises out of the carnal mind of men who desire to make the teachings of Scripture acceptable to unbelievers.

The matter is not a confusing one. The Scriptures are very clear on the subject. All we need to do is believe those Scriptures, and our view on the subject will be correct.

A Day as a Thousand Years

Unbelieving man does not like this clear teaching of Scripture. He wants to defend a view of these days that will bring the teaching of Genesis into harmony with unbelieving science. So he tries to find a passage of Scripture that can be used to obscure the matter, and to cast doubt upon the clear teaching of Scripture.

Many, with this in mind, have made use of the following verse: "But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (II Pet. 3:8).

Citing this verse, they argue that one creation day equals a thousand human years.

However, II Peter 3:8 teaches something entirely different. The text is not saying that one day for the Lord is as a thousand years *for us*. Nor is it saying that when the Lord uses the phrase "day" we are to know that this is some kind of code for "a thousand years." If that were the case, then every time we came across the word "day" in Scripture we would have to substitute "a thousand years," and every time we came across a time length of "a thousand years" we would have to substitute "one day." Indeed it should be obvious to all that this is not what the text is saying. Rather, it is saying that *for the Lord* one day is as a

thousand years. We are creatures in time, but God is not. He is above time. So for Him a day is as a thousand years, and vice

versa. He is not constrained by time in any way.


Six Literal Days in History

The days spoken of in Genesis 1 are real days, with each one consisting of only one evening and one morning. The first time God uses the word "day" He defines for us what He means by the

term: "And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day" (Gen. 1:5). God used the term "day" to refer to what we would call a normal day, consisting of one evening and one morning. And the repetition of the phrase "and the evening and the morning" serves to place emphasis upon this as an important fact (Gen. 1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31).

That these days are real days is also brought forth in the ten commandments: "For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day" (Ex. 20:11a). We are called to work for six literal days, and this calling is patterned after God's act of creating in six literal days. If the days of creation were not to be taken literally, then neither would the six-day work-week need to be taken literally.

It is interesting to consider how man first came up with this idea of a week being seven days long. The length of a day, month, and year are determined by the earth's relation to the sun and moon. But the seven-day week has no basis in astronomy. Rather, this idea goes back to the history we have recorded for us in Genesis 1—a further indication that these days have always been taken to be real, normal days.

This truth is of great significance. A denial of it leads one into the error of maintaining that there was death in the world before the fall. But that subject will have to wait until next time. 

No one seeking to exegete Genesis 1 would ever come to the conclusion that the days spoken of were symbolic references to long periods of time. This teaching does not arise out of exegesis.

Righteous in Christ Alone

Reformed Witness Hour

A distinctively Reformed radio ministry,
proclaiming the truth of the
sovereignty of God.

The subject that we will consider is the single, most important truth of God for you to know. Absolutely everything else in your life, and every other possible concern you might have today, fades into insignificance before this subject. The subject will speak of the *only* possibility for your soul to stand before God. It will answer the most basic question of human life.

That question is this: How shall I be right with God?

If that is not the question that lies in the pit of your heart, then you are not living in reality. Your heart is deceived. You refuse to reckon with reality—God and sin.

To a believer in Christ Jesus, to one in whom the grace of God has worked, to him this is the vital question. Peace in every circumstance in life can be found only in the assurance that one is righteous before God in Christ.

How am I to be right with God? The gospel of Christ answers: in the righteousness of Christ alone. His perfect, complete, finished work upon Calvary's cross, credited to me by the grace of God and embraced by faith (also the gift of God), is all of my hope and my standing before God.

The Bible never wearies to tell us of this. In Revelation 19:8 we

have this picture of those who stand before God in glory. We are told that they are arrayed in fine linen, clean and white, for the fine linen is the righteousness of the saints. The cry and earnest desire of the apostle Paul in Philippians 3:9 was that he be found in Christ, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness that is of God by faith. We read in Romans 3:24, "Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." The believer is righteous in God's eyes on the basis of the work of another.

This is the gospel. This is the good news, the only good news. And it is sure.

Because it is the gospel and the only truth, it will always be attacked and distorted. Adam and Eve already attempted to cover their nakedness by their own works—their fig leaves. The Pharisees in Jesus' day clasped their robes around them and boasted that *they* were able to keep the law. Always the idea of man is that his standing with God is a matter of his own doing, his resourcefulness, his prayers, his deeds. And the gospel of God comes and condemns it all and says to us today, "If you hold up before God, as the basis of your being accepted by Him, anything other than Christ's finished work, you are unrighteous in His sight."

Isaiah 64:6 says, "But we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away." Galatians

5:2-4: "Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.... Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law."

You see, the words "Christ alone" are crucial. Either our acceptance with God, our righteousness before God, is in Christ alone, so that all of our standing before God is based upon His finished and perfect work, or we are not righteous before God, we cannot be righteous, and we never will be righteous before God. The cross of Jesus Christ (now hear carefully) condemns all works, all prayers, all repentance as the ground or cause of being accepted of God.

Oh, for sure, those who are saved by grace will love, will desire to do good works, will repent, will pray. But none of these, absolutely *none* of these things, makes us righteous in God's sight. *Righteousness is in Christ alone!* See Colossians 2:10: "And ye are complete in him [in Christ]."

Today comparatively few receive this gospel. But we are set for its defense, for it alone is the truth. For the glory of God, and for the only peace that a soul can ever know, we declare the gospel. We can be righteous before God *only* in the work of Christ!

Now you ask, exactly what does that mean? Well, according to the Scriptures, to be righteous in Christ alone means that, according to God's judgment, He does not see sin in you. And more, He sees you in Christ as having kept His law and be-

Rev. Haak is pastor of Georgetown Protestant Reformed Church in Hudsonville, Michigan and radio pastor for the Reformed Witness Hour, on which this message was aired.

ing exactly what you should be. Righteousness before God has to do with our standing before God, our legal position before the bar of His eternal justice. To be righteous in Christ means that God pronounces a verdict from His throne. That verdict is, "You are innocent, you are cleared from sin, you are pardoned, you are not guilty, you may go in peace." It has to do with how God sees us. We read in Numbers 23:21: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob, neither hath he seen perverseness in Israel: the LORD his God is with him, and the shout of a king is among them." To be righteous in Christ alone means that the basis for God's judgment that we are innocent is not found in any other work or merit except the work and the merit that Christ once performed upon the cross.

This is what the Bible means when it teaches us the truth of justification. "Justified" and "righteous in Christ" are the same thing. Justification is God's declaration that we are just, we are righteous, we are free of debt before Him. It is God's gift to us, to the believer, on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. Simply put, righteousness in Christ means that I have the pardon of my sin and that there has been reckoned to my account before God the obedience and the righteousness of Christ.

Read Romans 4:6, 7: "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth [the word impute means to reckon to your account, to place on your standing] righteousness without works [that is, without our own works], saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered." This is in Christ. God has given Christ from all eternity to be the Head or Representative of His children, that is, of those whom He has chosen in His eternal election. He placed upon Christ

the guilt and the penalty of their sins. God then poured upon Him the wrath that was due to them for those sins. And Christ, on the cross, not only endured that wrath, but He replaced it with His own perfect obedience, so that now Christ's merits are applied to the believer. And on the basis of what Christ has done, and *only* on the basis of what Christ has done, the believer is now declared righteous in the sight of God.

You read of this also in Romans 3:20-26. That is a very beautiful passage. It speaks there, first of all, about man. Man is guilty before God. Every mouth is stopped. Man has violated the law of God in his heart and through his deeds. And man is unable to save himself. But God has made a gracious declaration. Bursting as a sunrise over the devastation of our sins is God's declaration that there is a righteousness that is by faith in Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe. Through faith, the gift of God, we are given to know what God has done for us. And what has God done for us? He has reckoned the righteousness of His Son to our account.

Not *my* faith. That does not make me righteous. Not *my* repentance, not *my* prayers, not *my* deeds, not *my* sacrifice, not *my* love. These cannot atone for sin. They are the fruit of gratitude for salvation. But Christ's blood and His righteousness *alone* make me righteous before God.

Is that important to you?

You see, this answers to the two realities of life that we were talking about: God and sin. The great reality confronting you is the living God and your sin before Him who is holy. The great question is, how are you going to stand before Him. The great issue for you is not, "What of tomor-

row? Will I get married? Will I be happy? Will I grow up? Will I escape my present troubles? Will I be able to cope?" No, the primary (and only) question is this: How will you be right with God?

People today make all kinds of questions to be number one among those confronting mankind. Must the church take up those concerns and begin to make pronouncements upon them? Oh, no! The gospel confronts you with the most basic question: How are you going to stand before God? Not, first, how are you going to stand before men? Not, first, how shall all men come together and agree? Not, first of all, what about the husband/wife relationship, or about the parent/child relationship? Oh, yes, all of these things are important. But you cannot even see your way clear to answer those questions until the most urgent problem in your existence is answered. That

is to be found, not in your relationship to other people and to other things in the world, but in your relationship to God. *That* is the question. And if you do not answer or face that ques-

tion, you live in delusion—your own proud delusion. You ignore God.

You must face that question. All other questions and concerns, of all trials and sorrows in your life that may be breaking your heart, will pass. Everything in your life will fade away because you will go, ultimately, to the grave. Then, the Bible tells you most solemnly, you shall stand before God.

For you—old or young, married or single, distraught by concerns or carefree—that is the question: How will you stand before God? And the gospel is the only answer. Now get it straight. This is the gospel: Christ alone.

The great reality confronting you is the living God and your sin before Him who is holy.

By grace alone, Christ in His work has done *all* to obtain the salvation of His people. We stand *in Him* before God—or we will be condemned.

As I said, human nature—all the way back to Adam—has always resented and resisted this truth. Satan opposes it and does his devilish best to ensnare men in the proud thought that by their works they are going to obtain something before God. But it is not so. It is alone in Jesus Christ.

God, by grace, and in His capacity as the eternal Judge, gives to His children the complete and the perfect righteousness of Christ in an irreversible verdict from His own throne of justice.

This is the gospel. The gospel declares that salvation is only of God and that it is only of grace. The truth of righteousness in Christ alone is the truth that shatters human pride. It is not of you, but it is of God. For “of him (of God) are ye in Christ Je-

sus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: that, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Cor. 1:30, 31).

We know why the gospel of works is popular. It tells me what I want to hear. It tells me, “You can do it. You can make it.” I hear the old lie of the serpent: “Ye shall be as God.” But the gospel of Christ, the gospel of grace,

humbles men...so as to exalt God. All the world is guilty before God. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight (Rom. 3:19, 20). It is in Christ.

This glorious gospel is the truth. And it saves the vilest of sinners in God’s sight. We cling to this gospel because it is salvation.

Upon what do you rely? When you come before God and face Him in eternity, to what are you going to appeal? As God looks upon you and sees through you, what will you say? How will you justify yourself? Will you look to something you are of yourself, something you did, something somebody else on earth did for you? Will you?

There is but one plea—the plea that God places in our mouth by grace. The plea that He loves. It is a sure plea. It is eternal life. Righteous in Christ alone, by the mere grace of God alone!

There is a very beautiful poem that I like so much. It goes this way:

Not the labors of my hands
could fulfill Thy laws demands;
Could my zeal no respite
know; could my tears forever
flow;

These for sin could not atone.
Thou must save and Thou alone!

But this is peace. This is peace in every situation and circumstance of life. Listen to the

apostle Paul: “I am persuaded that neither life nor death, angels nor principalities, will be able to separate me from the love of God in Christ Jesus my Lord.” Here is a man who, in this world, had everything against him. But yet, his peace and his joy remained the same. Why? Because he knew the answer to the question: How am I righteous before God? *In Christ.*

How can we stand up today in this world? Only one way. Hear the gospel—overwhelmed of heart, burdened, guilt-ridden—hear the gospel: *Righteous in Christ alone.*

Christ, by grace, hath clothed me in His own righteousness. Out of mere mercy He promises that He shall present me without fault before the presence of God with exceeding joy. This is the way. Heaven’s gate opens to one voice. Father’s house is purchased by one price: *Christ alone!*

Let me put it urgently. If you had to stand before God *now*, or in the next moments, or tonight, what would you say? Do you feel that you could trust your own efforts or the efforts of men or the efforts of saints for you? Turn away from it! Only His blood and righteousness. Then hear the greatest words that were ever spoken, the words of the Savior to a publican who could not even look up to God but smote his breast crying, “God be merciful to me the sinner” (Luke 18): “This man went down to his house justified.” In Christ alone.



*...the gospel
of Christ,
the gospel of grace,
humbles men...
so as to exalt God.*

News From Our Churches

Mr. Benjamin Wigger

Mission Activities

Pastor Daniel Kleyn and his wife, Sharon, left on December 15 for the Philippines to begin their work in missions there. They will be joining Rev. Richard Smit, his wife, Tricia, and their

children, and together they will help the newly formed Berean PR Church in Manila, as well as develop the mission outreach into other areas in the Philippines. The calling and needs will be great, but God’s grace and

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

faithfulness will be greater. We commend them in our prayers to the word of His grace that is able to keep them and use them as instruments for the gathering of the church.

The lectures of the recent John Calvin Conference, sponsored and provided by the Protestant Reformed Theological Seminary, were viewed during the Bible Study meetings of the Berean PRC during December and January. There were seven lectures on the work, the teachings, and life of the reformer John Calvin that were studied. Ample time was given for follow-up questions and discussion after the individual lectures each night. The subject of the lecture on December 8 was "John Calvin as Model for Reformed Ministers," by Prof. B. Gritters, and December 15 was "John Calvin as Church Reformer," by Prof. R. Dykstra.

Elder John Van Baren and Rev. J. Laning arrived safely in Myanmar November 30. They had long and very profitable meetings with Rev. Titus. In addition, they gave instruction to the special officebearers, visited catechism classes, and conducted family visitation. Rev. Laning also preached both services there on December 6. The men returned home on December 8.

All the members of the Heritage PR Fellowship in Sioux Falls, SD were invited to Bethany Meadows Lutheran Home in Brandon on Sunday evening, December 13, for a brief instrumental and vocal program by the children and other members of the Fellowship, along with a time of singing Christmas carols.

Young People's Activities

The young people in our churches in west Michigan were invited to their annual Thanksgiving Day Mass Meeting on Sunday afternoon, December 6, at the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI. Rev. G. Eriks, pastor of

the Hudsonville, MI PRC, spoke on Jonah 2 under the theme, "True Thanksgiving from the Fish's Belly." Rev. Eriks looked at four lessons of true thanksgiving from this history.

The Young People's Society of Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI collected cans, bottles, and cash through the month of December to raise funds for Psalters and Bibles for Covenant of Grace PRC in Spokane, WA.

The Young People and Young Adults of First PRC in Edmonton, AB, Canada enjoyed a combined meeting on Sunday, December 6. Their discussion that evening centered on Luke 16:1-12 under the theme, "Making Friends of Unrighteous Mammon."

The Young People's Society of the Hope PRC in Walker, MI were invited to sing at the nearby Christian Rest Home on December 2. Plans called for the young people to present two programs, the first starting at 7:00 P.M.

During the month of December, many of our young people's societies also participate in a night of caroling to the elderly members of their congregation. The young people also usually extend an invitation to their congregation to join them in this act of service and also use the visit to distribute Christmas cards from the congregation to the elderly.

Congregation Activities

To make it easier and safer for the elderly, widows, and those in need of assistance, several of our churches in west Michigan are again providing valet parking. If members wish to have their cars parked for them, they can simply pull up to a designated entrance and leave the rest to a volunteer. After the church service, that volunteer will scrape/brush the snow or ice off their car and bring it back to the entrance when they are ready to leave.

The Consistory of the Kalamazoo, MI PRC approved a recom-

mendation from their Evangelism Committee to have a hymn sing every other month in 2010 after their evening worship service.

A Christmas concert performed by the combined choirs of the Peace and South Holland, IL PRC's was held Sunday evening, December 6, at Peace.

The choir of the Georgetown PRC in Hudsonville, MI presented their Christmas concert on Sunday evening, December 13, following their evening service. There were selections by the choir, audience singing, and special numbers, including a flute and piano duet, vocal duet, piano solo, and violin solo.

Also presenting choir concerts that Sunday evening were the choirs of the Hope PRC in Redlands, CA; the choir of the Loveland, CO PRC; and the choir of the Hudsonville, MI PRC. The latter program included selections from the choir as well as three vocal solos, a saxophone solo, and a couple of numbers played on a saw.

The deacons of the Southeast PRC in Grand Rapids, MI invited their congregation's widows and widowers to their annual Deacon Christmas breakfast on Saturday, December 12. This continues to be a time of enjoyable conversation and fellowship that the deacons look forward to each year.

Minister Activities

Rev. J. Slopsema declined the call extended to him to serve as pastor of the Cornerstone PRC in Dyer, IN.

Rev. G. Eriks declined the call he received from the Trinity PRC in Hudsonville, MI to become their next pastor.

Rev. S. Key declined the call from First PRC in Holland, MI to serve as their next pastor.

On Wednesday evening, December 16 the Byron Center, MI congregation extended a call to Rev. Eriks to serve as their next pastor.



Announcements

CLASSIS

Classis West of the PRC will convene at the Loveland PRC in Loveland, CO, on Wednesday, March 3, 2010 at 8:30 A.M. All material for the agenda should be in the hands of the stated clerk by Monday, February 1, 2010. Delegates or visitors who will need lodging or transportation should notify Elder August Hollema, at (970) 344-7281, or by e-mail at achollema@msn.com.

Rev. Douglas Kuiper,
Stated Clerk

NOTICE:

The New Church Building Committee of the Protestant Reformed Church of South Holland is soliciting for private, unsecured 5-year loans to fund the construction of a new church building. These notes will bear interest at a rate of 4 percent per annum, with interest to be paid semi-annually, and with principal due in full at maturity. Interested parties should contact Eric Ophoff (708-205-3568) or Steve VanDrunen (708-732-1300) for further details.

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Council and congregation of the Kalamazoo PRC express their sympathy to: Ken & Gleny Feenstra, John, Anna, Abby, and Paul & Tena Hoekstra, Isaac in the death of their mother, grandmother, and great grandmother,

TILLIE BRUMMEL

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" (Psalm 23:6).

Rev. Spriensma, President
Tom Verbeek, Clerk

ANNIVERSARY

The Georgetown PRC Council and congregation are thankful to God for the faithful labors of our beloved shepherd,

PASTOR CARL HAAK.

Rev. Haak graduated from the Protestant Reformed Seminary in June of 1979. Rev. Haak was ordained into the ministry in September of 1979 as pastor of Southeast PRC (Grand Rapids, MI). In 1986 he accepted the call to serve as pastor of Lynden PRC (Lynden, WA), and in 1994 he accepted the call to serve as pastor in Bethel PRC (Roselle, IL). In 2004, Rev. Haak accepted the call to Georgetown PRC (Hudsonville, MI), and moved there with his wife, Mary, and his daughters, Keri, Bethany, and Melanie, where he continues to serve as our pastor and shepherd. He has completed 30 years in the faithful ministry of the word. God has also used Rev. Haak for many years to serve the denomination as Radio Minister of the Reformed Witness Hour. We pray that God may continue to uphold him in his life and work.

"How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things" (Romans 10:15).

Gerald Kuiper,
Clerk of the Council

SEMINARY

All students enrolled in the Protestant Reformed Seminary who will be in need of financial assistance for the coming school year are asked to contact the Student Aid Committee secretary, Mr. Stefan Engelsma (Phone: 616-662-9363). This contact should be made before the next scheduled meeting, February 16, 2010, D.V.

Student Aid Committee
Stefan Engelsma, Secretary

RESOLUTION OF SYMPATHY

The Mary-Martha Society of Hope PRC in Redlands expresses its deepest sympathy to fellow members Jeanne Karsemeyer and Lorianne Karsemeyer and their families in the loss of their dear uncle and great-uncle,

MR. BILL KARSEMEYER.

May the family be comforted by these words found in Isaiah 49:13: "Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted."

Rev. Martin VanderWal, President
Gina Cleveland, Secretary

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.

Check out the
RFPA web page at
www.rfpa.org